

# Liwanag at Dilim: Mga Kwento ng Pagbabago Capability Approach through the Lens of Education

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**Abstract** - *This paper tackles the non-monetary benefits of education, which as described in the works of Nussbaum, contribute to the expansion of human capabilities. Through key informant interview, the following key findings were drawn: (1) potentials of education to develop and expand the students' central capabilities, specifically in the aspects of (a) senses, imagination, and thought; (b) emotions; (c) affiliation; (d) practical reason, and the (2) power of education to unleash the students' drive to succeed in the midst of everyday challenges brought about by social, economic, and cultural challenges. Moreover, the study findings present the strengths of the state university as well as aspects that need improvement in order to further pursue its role in transforming students' lives.*

**Keywords:** *capability approach, education, non-monetary benefits, state university*

## INTRODUCTION

Time and again, education is hailed as one of the significant bridges to fighting poverty. Education is seen as a ray of hope for a better future for the majority of Filipino families [1]. Poverty statistics imply that more education leads to better opportunities for higher levels of income [2]. More than half of the families whose head have no schooling are poor while poverty incidence among college graduates is just 1.6%. The focus, therefore, is to ensure children's access to college education because the expected wage income of college graduates is way higher than that of high school graduates [3].

The economic benefits of education is only one side of the coin. There is a consensus that education brings a range of returns which also include non-monetary benefits [4]. Sen [5] argues that the benefits of education include broadening of *human capabilities* – the individual's capacity to comprehend, communicate, and choose wisely translates to freedom to lead a meaningful life [6].

## Capability Approach

This paper adopts Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. Nussbaum's valuable contribution to the understanding of capability approach is her specification of central human capabilities, which for her are basic rights of each individual in every nation. Nussbaum's list of central capabilities include a. the ability to live a full life (life); b. having good health which encompasses being nourished and having access to adequate shelter (bodily health); c. ability to safely

move from one place to another (bodily integrity); d. the ability to imagine, think, and understand (senses, imagination, and thought); e. the capacity to feel varied emotions such as love, grief, gratitude, and anger (emotions); f. ability to reflect and plan for the one's good (practical reason); g. ability to interact with and show concern for others (affiliation); h. ability to play, laugh, and enjoy life's moments (play); i. ability to live with animals and take care of nature (other species); j. capacity to voice one's opinion and participate in community activities, (control over one's environment). [7], [8].

## Capability Approach and Education

This paper aims to explore the potentials of education, college education in particular, in developing/expanding capabilities of PUP students, particularly their central capabilities as defined by Nussbaum [8]. The study also intends to draw the aspects of education the students deem as valuable in propelling change and transformation.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Drawing inspiration from Nussbaum, [8], this paper aims to "give a face" to the potentials of education to transform human capabilities. Through the college life journeys of four (4) graduating Marketing students of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) College of Business Administration, the study answers the following objectives: to determine the changes occurred in the lives of the students over four years of college; ways the education support these changes; the

strengths and limitations when they started out in college; the limitations addressed along the way; and the subjective perceptions of progress and prospects for the future.

## **METHODS**

This paper primarily draws its findings from a series of interviews with four key informants<sup>ii</sup>. These four students were selected through the help of the officers of the Junior Marketing Executives. <sup>iii</sup> Before the series of interviews, the key informants were formally briefed about the study – its nature and objectives, and most importantly to seek their consent that their narratives will be presented as key findings. A semi-structured interview guide was used to draw pertinent information from the key informants. The interview guide was initially pre-tested to a group of 4th year students through a focus group discussion (FGD). Then, the pattern of responses during the FGD were compared with the findings of a study with the same theme [9] to ensure validity of the interview guide.

The researcher likewise reviewed secondary documents such as PUP and College of Business profiles accessed through the Guidance Office, yearbooks, and strategic plans.

## **STUDY FINDINGS**

### **PUP College of Business Administration (CBA) and “Mga Kwento ng Pagbabago”**

The PUP College of Business Administration is the setting of the study. The college, whose beginnings of PUP<sup>iv</sup> can be traced, has the biggest share<sup>v</sup> of freshman entrants every school year and offers four major degrees.<sup>vi</sup> In June 2010, four lives were weaved into the tapestry of the Department of Marketing Management, CBA and here are the stories of change (mga Kwento ng Pagbabago):

#### **Jinky Joy Noble - “The Journey to Self-Worth”**

Jinky’s father wished her daughter would take up Education and become a public-school teacher – a surefire route, he believed, to stability and a better life for the family. But Jinky decided to pursue Marketing. She shared that the shift in her attitude and perspective of the future as the major contributions of college education in her life. She believed that college education helped her hone her social intelligence, which she defined as, “one’s ability to discern when to talk and listen. “Jinky thought that through her everyday interactions with professors and classmates, she was able to develop her confidence – as a student

and as a person. She was able to share her ideas in class discussions and group activities. Moreover, through her marketing practicum, she discovered her interests were in food and service business and that she intended to pursue these fields after graduation from college.

#### **Carlos Arenas – “Product of Experiential Learning at its Best”**

Carlos Arenas was awarded “Agora Youth Awards<sup>vii</sup> Batch Valedictorian” in 2014 besting nominees from other business schools nationwide. To be on top of the competition, with San Beda and UP Diliman on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> positions, was a journey of hard work and patience. Carlos’ parents provided for his tuition and daily allowance but for the rest of his financial needs (expenses for school projects, class contributions, clothing allowance, among others), he has to fend for himself. To make ends meet, he sold candies and pastries in school, borrowed money from his classmates and asked money from his aunts.

He considered his “development as a leader,<sup>viii</sup> as one of the major personal changes brought about by college education. His exposure to marketing competitions (within and outside PUP) sponsored by Simply She, Pilipinas Star, Banana Peel, and the Agora, strengthened his self-confidence and developed his drive for success. He owed his transformation to former JME officers, PUP CBA professors and alumni who have given him valuable insights on organizational leadership.

#### **Leoni Laqui - “Riches to Rags to Positive Possibilities”**

The twenty one (21) year old Leoni was determined to finish college. His family life, as he described was “comfortable and stable,” till his father’s death in 1995 and turned around for the worst in the years that came. His six siblings stopped schooling and worked for menial jobs. But Leoni did not give up. He volunteered to work for his uncle’s bakery to be able to stay in Manila, earn money, and study. Through his uncle’s encouragement, he found his way to PUP CBA. College life exposed him to events marketing and successful young entrepreneurs he wanted to emulate.

Leoni’s narrative exemplified the power of human agency to rise above life difficulties. From riches to rags, and to possibilities which opened up to him through education.

### Michelle Ramos - “Resilience Personified”

At 21 years old in 2010 and without any encouragement from her family, Michelle went back to school. She believed that it was not enough to be “street smart” to survive in life but a college degree would pave the way for opportunities. Juggling work<sup>ix</sup> and studies was a tough act, but Michelle persisted. For Michelle, her college education was instrumental in shaping her dreams to be a Medical Representative in the future, buy a condominium unit, and send her eldest niece to college.

### Tales of Strengths and Limitations

Coming to PUP CBA in 2010, the students have different sets of expectations, fears, skills and talents, shaped by their distinct life experiences, family backgrounds, and economic resources. When asked about what they considered as their *strengths* when they first came to the university, they mentioned about “*mayroong kapal ng mukha*” (being thick faced or shameless) or “being strong on the outside but actually scared on the inside.” For someone who was poor and unprepared for what was to come, one has to have “kapal ng mukha” to survive the rigors of everyday life in the College. “Kapal ng mukha” was translated as “having the guts to recite in class even when one is unsure of his/her ideas,” recounted Jinky, or “being present in class even when you feel inferior of your intellectual capabilities,” said Michelle. Jinky mentioned about having a *creative and imaginative mind* while Carlos and Leoni noted that they have *determination, strong motivation to learn, and a risk-taking attitude*.

In the aspect of limitations, they all agreed that even if they have “*kapal ng mukha*,” they admitted that they also *lacked self-confidence*. In the words of Jinky, the lack of confidence emanated from her weak personality (*Kulang sa personalidad*) For Michelle, the lack of self-confidence rooted on her entry to the University at a later age the students likewise pointed their *lack of money and other resources* (lap top, cell phone) essential to surviving college life.

Michelle and Leoni mentioned the *lack of encouragement and moral support* from family members which could have been an important source of strength during difficult or challenging times in college such as examinations, adjustment periods during practicum/on-the-job trainings, or simply surviving the everyday grind.

### Tales of Transformation (Liwanag at Dilim)

Four major themes emerged to describe transformations/changes in the lives of the students during their four-year stay in the university:

#### Shift in Personality Traits

Coming to PUP in 2010, the students described themselves as “*highly individualistic* (Michelle and Jinky), “*loner, introvert*” (Leoni, Jinky and Carlos) and “*insecure, with low self-esteem*” (Leoni, Jinky, Carlos, and Michelle). After four years in college, they described themselves as “*being team players and self-confident*.” Carlos shared how he considered himself as “*a leader with influence skills*.”

Change in perspective about the future and realization of what it takes to succeed

When they started the journey, they thought of their future as “*madilim, malabo, and in Jinky’s words, wala talaga*.” (dark/dim, vague, and empty). With their college education, the students described themselves as having positive outlook for their future.

#### Building up of the Capacity to Aspire

From being confused and tentative at the beginning of their journey, the students not only looked forward to the future with optimism, but they have concrete plans in mind. The capacity to aspire is a navigational capacity [10]. Their college education equipped them with a road map, provided them a sense of direction and exposed them to the possibilities of life.

#### Improved Knowledge and Skills Levels

The students agreed that they have broadened knowledge of marketing and an understanding of the real world (how business companies operate, why some entrepreneurs succeed despite limited capital and what the employers are looking for). ‘

### We’ve come this far: Students’ Perceptions of Progress

“Where do you think are you now compared to where you have started? How would your ladder of progress look like?” The students equated the idea of relating each step of the ladder to their four years of College. Each step corresponded to their state and was matched with the inputs provided by the University (within and outside the classroom). By second year, students started their on-the-job trainings (fast food chains) and were required to join Department-wide competitions (e.g. Sales Promotion and Marketing Plan Development). By the third year, students were encouraged to join inter-school Marketing

competitions and were qualified to be officers of the JME. By fourth year, the students experienced actual marketing-related work since their subjects were practicum, strategic and organizing seminars.

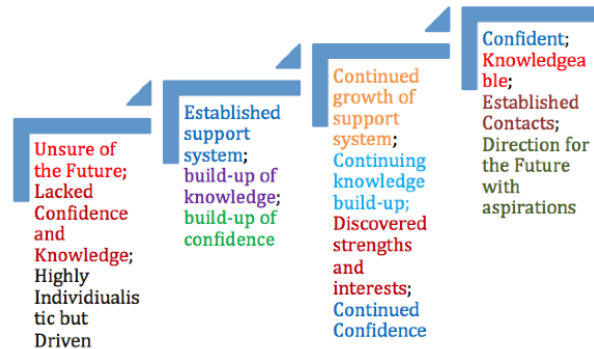


Figure 1. Progress of Ladder Conceptualized by the Students

Carlos, Michelle and Leoni considered themselves to be at the fourth step, though in varying ways. Carlos believed that his active involvement in JME, exposure to business via practicum and competitions have made him confident, self-assured and somehow well-connected.

According to Michelle, her work experiences coupled with classroom lectures and strong support system from classmates and JME qualified her to be at step 4. For Leoni, he thought he possessed the descriptions provided in the last step – confident, knowledgeable, with a system of support (though predominantly within the campus), and a plan for his future. Jinky thought differently. Her notion of fourth step (level 4) was the phase wherein the students are already working and are able to apply what they have learned in school. She pointed out that she was still at the third step.

**Role of Education in the Students’ Transformations**

The study findings reveal that education, through its different avenues, have contributed in varying ways to the transformation of the students. When asked *where they attribute their transformation*, the students ranked *practicum and on-the job trainings* as first. “*Mas natututo ako, kapag ginagawa,*” explained Jinky (“I learn when I actually do it). They ranked as second their *participation in marketing competitions and attendance to seminars*. For Carlos, his internship at Havas Media Ortega opened his eyes to the dynamics and challenges of business world.

The students also point the strong contribution of a support system in facilitating sharing of knowledge (through group study) and more importantly in personal development. Through the system (classmates, peers, organization mates, parents of classmates, mentors), the students learned the value of being integrated in a community, the importance of “taking in and giving back.” The recognition of the power of support system is particularly true for Leoni. Without steady emotional support from his family, he relied on his classmates, professors and JME to be able to stay afloat when the going gets tough.

Classroom instruction was ranked last in terms of its contribution. Students were able to point the importance of lectures (theoretical inputs) and how they translate to actual practice through their practicum and on-the-job trainings.

**SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND REFLECTIONS**

This study which is guided by the Capability/Capabilities Approach of Nussbaum aims to unravel the role of education, particularly college education in discovering, developing, or expanding the central capabilities of students representing the poor in our society. The study tackles, through the students’ narratives, the potentials of education to transform lives and expand central capabilities. Narratives particularly pointed to the enhancement of the students’ senses, imagination, and thought, emotions, practical reason, and affiliation. They were now able to imagine their future, which before they considered as “vague, dark, and directionless.” They now have the facility to think and visualize in an informed way what their opportunities are and identify the knowledge, skills, and social networks, required to make these dreams and aspirations a reality. Education has likewise awakened the students’ “capacity to aspire” which is the capacity to be forward-looking [11]. Everyday experiences of students within and outside the university have allowed them to strengthen their *capacity to aspire* – a shift from wishful thinking to thoughtful wishing [10].

The study likewise revealed that the poor have varying perspectives on the value of college education. Parents of Jinky and Carlos have positive, though linear notions of education – “*aral, trabaho, magpamilya*” (study, work, and get married). Family members of Michelle and Leoni have discouraged them to pursue college. This attitude, as described by Sadovnik [12], is shaped by the person’s educational background, life experiences, and occupational conditions. Moreover,

agency of student is stronger when there is limited or no support, whether financial or moral, from family as in the case of Leoni, Jinky and Michelle. As pointed out by Giddens (as cited in Castro-Guevarra [13] each individual is believed to have some source of power and possess the ability to make a difference in a social world.

The narratives likewise highlighted the reality that students, though poor, did not come to school “empty-handed.” They have agency, they have strengths to begin with. They have resilience to overcome their limitations, mostly by themselves. They are indeed survivors.

On the students’ perception of progress, they matched each step of the progress ladder to the learning opportunities offered by each year level in college, and then translated them to qualities or characteristics.

Finally, expanding human capabilities entails an enabling environment such as State Universities and Colleges. It is imperative, therefore, for PUP education to constantly evolve and be responsive to the educational needs of the poor.

### **Capability Approach through the Lens of Education: Some Research Implications**

This paper articulated the potentials of college education to develop and expand the capabilities of students, specifically those coming from the poor sector of the Philippine society. However, the paper’s findings, though insightful need more cases, perhaps even a follow-up survey to involve other Departments and Colleges (of PUP), to find out if the study findings hold true, or if there are variations or nuances. More cases will provide new details, like, what really are the strengths of PUP students (“kapal ng mukha” maybe a natural trait of business-inclined students), how does transformation look like and what are the perceptions of progress (would Engineering students have different views) and to whom the students attribute their transformation (would classroom instruction still rank lowest for Engineering or Accounting students where lecture is critical and professor factor may come into play)

### **Epilogue: 2018 (Four years after graduation)**

The four students who graduated in 2014 continued on with their journeys. Carlos Arenas is currently connected with a leading global building products and solutions company as a Regional Trade Marketing and Sales Activation Officer. He has undergone leadership development trainings, notably under the Clifton

Strengths and Certification. Carlos is a certified John Maxwell Coach. Jinky Noble is a Customer Sales Representative for a leading Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) company with the additional task of designing team-building activities for her unit. Leony Laqui is a marketing manager of a retail store in Manila while Michelle Ramos is a medical representative, based in Central Luzon, for a leading pharmaceutical company. ‘

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**END NOTES**

<sup>i</sup> PUP, a government educational institution governed by Republic Act 8292 (Higher Education Modernization Act of 1997), is the biggest state university in the country in terms of student population. With more than 20 campuses all over Luzon, PUP caters to around 70,000 students, majority of whom come from the economically-challenged sector of the society. PUP is mandated to provide affordable, responsive, and quality education to students who are talented and deserving but may not have the economic means to finance college education.

<sup>ii</sup> Key informants have the following characteristics (1) knowledge of topics of events that the researcher is interested in; (2) willingness to talk to the researcher about what he/she knows; and (3) no reason to mislead the researcher (Arce, 1998).

<sup>iii</sup> Junior Marketing Executives (JME) is the only student organization of Marketing students of the PUP College of Business.

<sup>iv</sup> The Manila Business School (the seed of PUP) initially offered business courses (typing, stenography, basic accounting) which later on evolved into Philippine School Commerce, later Philippine College of Commerce, and finally PUP (pp. 2-14, PUP through the years: College of Business, Volume 21)

<sup>v</sup> Based on PUP/College profiles drawn from the records of the Guidance and Counseling Office of the University

- Jinky Rose Noble, January 22, 2014, JME Office, CBA; November 2018, French Baker, SM Marikina
- Leoni Lacqui, January 25 and 28, 2014, Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Gateway and JME Office, CBA
- Michelle Ramos, February 1, 2014, Starbucks Coffee, Mezza C, Sta. Mesa

<sup>vi</sup> Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) major in Marketing Management; BSBA major in Human Resource Development Management; BSBA major in Office Administration; and BSBA Major in Entrepreneurship.

<sup>vii</sup> The Agora Youth Awards for students and marketing associations is sponsored by the Philippine Marketing Association. The aim of this yearly competition is to promote excellence of the marketing profession. For the students' category, the goal of the competition is to encourage outstanding marketing students, encourage them to be more innovative, and make them role models.

<sup>viii</sup> Carlos is currently the Executive Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer of the JME PUP Main.

<sup>ix</sup> Michelle continuous to work (part-time, whichever opportunity arises) as brand ambassador (e.g. Cobra Drink, Purefoods), events coordinator, and Sales Director for Fil-Estate (El Pueblo).

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