

THE MAMBUNONG AND THE SCHOOL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS: PARALLEL AND INTERCONNECTED

MARIA MERCEDES E. ARZADON

The Cordillera Review: Journal of Philippine Culture and Society 6 (2): 67–95.
<https://doi.org/10.64743/VOTQ4601>

ABSTRACT

This paper examines two knowledge systems found in Sitio Lamut of La Trinidad, Benguet. One is the knowledge system held by the Kankana-ey *mambunong* (village priest-elders) and the other is that which is found in formal schooling. In “Anthropology of Knowledge,” Barth (2002) critiqued the academic prototype of “knowledge” that is detached from its context, history, and knowers. He wrote that the task is to examine how knowledge is configured, variously reproduced and changed. This study responds to that challenge by examining the nature and context of changes in the two knowledge systems in terms of the dimensions proposed by Barth—content, mediation and social relations. The study traces the establishment of the local public school, which was facilitated by the elders and the first professional teacher, Mrs. Beatriz Baguio. It also looks into the changes in the public school brought about by the K-12 Curriculum. The study finds that in the mambunong knowledge system, transmission is mediated by apprenticeship between the senior mambunong (led by Mr. Tolentino Wacnisen and later by Mr. Lucio Apolonio) and a group of novices (*sumarsaruno*). Storage and retrieval of knowledge has been facilitated by the introduction of literacy and recently, the cellphone. Socio-economic factors like the shift from vegetable to flower farming has also brought about modifications in the system. The author finds that though the schooling and the mambunong system diverge in many ways, they are parallel and complementary in the ways in which they provide meaning, health and wellness, and prestige to their knowers. Both systems are strongly mediated by unseen powers and teachers who are considered the most knowledgeable. The knowers of Lamut do not strictly adhere to a single knowledge system but freely “change lanes,” depending on perceived cost and benefits and possible compromises afforded by a given system.

Keywords: Knowledge systems, mambunong, ritual, indigenous peoples’ education, formal schooling

Educationists and educational anthropologists have always considered indigenous education as a major area of interest. As they in-

investigate the educational experiences of learners from indigenous cultural communities (ICC), they conceptualize education as more than mere schooling but as a total learning experience that takes place at home, in schools, workplaces and the wider community (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti 2005; Abaya 2014).

One persistent critique of formal educational systems emanating from these studies is the disconnect between the home and the school. Learners from indigenous cultural communities that enter the formal educational system do not often experience affirmation of their identity. Their indigenous knowledge, language and ways of living and learning are viewed as obsolete, inferior and limited when compared to the western and scientific canon taught in school curricula (Bennagen 1987; Cardenas 2002; Rovillos 2002; Enkiwe-Abayao 2002; Francisco 2005; Abejuela 2006; Enkiwe-Abayao 2014; Calis 2015). Such disregard for the indigenous is said to be the cause for the disappearance of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), and the discrimination and marginalization of indigenous learners that result in low learning outcomes (Rovillos 2002; ECIP 2008; Donato-Kinomis 2016).

Starting in 2009, however, the Philippine government instituted radical educational reforms for Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd). Before then, IPEd was often categorized as nonformal education, or the work of missions schools or unaccredited NGO-supported learning centers (Abejuela 2006). The new pedagogical reforms mainstreamed IPEd in the formal school system. In fact, the new Enhanced Basic Education policy (Republic Act 10533) demands contextualization, localization and indigenization of the K-12 curriculum and the use of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) all over the Philippines. Instructional materials are to be developed at the local level involving elders and other knowledge bearers. Department of Education Order 32, series of 2015 conceptualizes IPEd as one "which guarantees the meaningful participation of indigenous communities in the inclusion of their Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) and Indigenous Learning Systems (ILS) in the Basic Education Curriculum."

At the international level, UNESCO sees that indigenous knowledge can help address climate change. UNESCO's (2017) recent conceptualization of local and indigenous knowledge highlights its complexity and breadth. It includes

the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that also encompasses language, systems

of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality (ibid).

UNESCO's recent primer re-assesses the links between indigenous and local knowledge and sustainable development. It highlights how such knowledge "contributes to understanding, mitigating and adapting to climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss" (UNESCO 2017). The primer, however, delves more deeply into the politics of knowledge, exposing misrepresentations made on indigenous knowledge and proposing alternatives. It admits that western science has long imposed its rationality on indigenous knowledge by 1) decontextualizing indigenous knowledge from its cultural and spiritual foundations, resulting in fragmentation and misinterpretation and 2) validating indigenous knowledge using western, scientific criteria and methods, and ignoring the former's own cultural systems of logic. The alternative is the inclusion of various disciplines from the natural and social sciences in the process of dialogue and co-production of knowledge with indigenous knowledge holders. It is to view and respect various knowledge systems as complementary and be able to synergize and thereby generate new knowledge and solutions.

The primer also critiques the frequent misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge as a fixed, constant, immutable and inflexible body of wisdom that is passed down in its supposed intact form from generation to generation. In contrast, science as defined through scientific method is not a static body of data but one that is constantly updated by new findings. In reality, indigenous knowledge is hardly static at all because each generation re-assesses and reinterprets the knowledge they receive from their elders. They blend new ways with the old so that they can effectively address the emerging challenges and opportunities of a changing world. The adoption of new technologies, which is misinterpreted as abandonment of their distinct life-ways is in fact evidence of the dynamism of their cultures.

This critique about notions of culture and indigenous knowledge in education is a major concern among scholars of educational anthropology. As I participated as a resource person in teachers' trainings and materials development for MTB-MLE and IPed, I found a tendency among teachers and material developers to present a reified, bounded and immutable concept of indigenous languages and knowledge systems which they would usually represent through a typical listing of dress, songs, dances, and stories. Some insisted on using dated mother tongue words that sound foreign and incomprehensible to small children. If the same trend should persist, the remarkable opportunity to contextualize and indigenize the curriculum may lead to unpleasant results. For example, stereotypical portray-

al may aggravate the othering and marginalization of learners from indigenous communities. Furthermore, it promotes a shallow and surface view of culture that does not delve into its more substantial aspects like values, meanings, and capacities (ECIP 2008; Abaya 2014).

Teachers and material developers cannot be blamed for such predispositions because many examples of local literature about indigenous knowledge systems and practices are merely listings and descriptions of rituals, practices, deities, people, and materials. These texts compare how various rituals, for example, are represented and enacted in various places in the Cordillera. Discourses on culture change tend to be limited to the dilution and disappearance of indigenous culture. What seems to be lacking is an analysis of how culture change is happening, under what conditions, for what purposes, and through whose mediation. This study attempts to address the foregoing concerns. It frames indigenous knowledge and its transmission as a social practice and a process of cultural production (Levinson and Holland 1996; Levinson 2000). It rests on the dynamic and productive view of culture as whole yet non-constant, ideal as well as real, tacit as well as explicit, and highly influenced but not determined by the environment (Whitehead 2004). It also attempts to build on previous studies on indigenous learning systems but gives greater attention to educational actors.

This study analyzes and compares mambunong and school knowledge systems in Benguet, including their histories and emerging forms based on conditions and processes in which they are produced and reproduced. It also describes their knowers, their means and purposes as participants of these knowledge systems. The author hopes that the study will generate insights useful for the contextualization, localization, and indigenization of the basic education curriculum.

Key Concepts and Related Literature

In the “Anthropology of Knowledge,” Barth (2002) critiqued the academic prototype of “knowledge” in a textbook as detached from its context, history, and knowers. He said that the task is to examine how knowledge is configured, variously reproduced and changed. Knowledge, whether it is found in indigenous communities or universities, has three aspects that are distinguishable but interconnected and interdependent. These are the following: 1) A corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world; 2) media by which knowledge is instantiated and communicated as a series of partial representations in the form of words, concrete symbols, pointing gestures, actions; and 3) social relations through which knowledge is distributed, communicated, employed, and transmitted. This per-

spective of knowledge provides a space for agency where the knowers and their acts of knowing (as they hold, learn, produce and apply knowledge in various activities) can be examined.

In response to Barth's assertions, Robb (2002) proposed that agency or actorship should also be highlighted. He wrote about the need to investigate exactly how actors in specific circumstances decide to reproduce, tinker with, invent, forget, or suppress a given substantive proposition. An actor-centered view of a knowledge system takes intentions and capabilities for action as its starting point.

The core structure of knowledge can be the same for all forms of knowledge, but their differences lie in their context and history. It is interesting that Barth critiqued an ahistorical view of knowledge, yet in his attempt to clarify the comparability of all knowledge forms he had to set aside their social history. UNESCO (2017) highlighted the unequal treatment given to indigenous knowledge and western science. Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are viewed as specific and unique to a certain locale. It is transmitted purposely for posterity through the use of oral tradition and practices like rituals and rites (Mawere 2010).

There are few local texts on indigenous learning systems (ILS). Bennagen's (1987) ethnographic work in a Kankana-ey community described how learning happens in three phases from childhood to adulthood, and is mediated by people (family members, peers, elders), rituals (like the *dawak*) and convivial places like the *dap-ay* (male dormitory). At the final phase, the adult Kankana-ey is expected to acquire skills pertaining to livelihood, ritual performance, and political participation.

Rovillos (2002) wrote that socio-economic institutions also function as loci for indigenous learning. He provided examples like the *gunglo* or *innaluyon* (Ilokano) or *bayanihan* (Tagalog). Among the Tingguians of Abra *gunglo* is practiced through a reciprocal labor exchange. The young members of the community join the older ones in almost every aspect of agricultural work. The practice instills values such as unity, hard work, and discipline in the young. It is also through this practice that folk stories and other oral literature are told to the young. Learning also happens through dance, songs, and the wearing of traditional clothes.

Francisco's (2005) article on indigenous learning systems identified at least three types of mechanisms. These are found in the life cycle complex, social control dynamics, and ritual as embodied in the belief systems of indigenous peoples. The life cycle includes the stages birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, and death. Each stage is accompanied by rituals and prescriptions for proper behavior. Social control mechanisms include the curse or *gaba* (Binisaya), ridicule and criticism, threats of sorcery and ostracism.

Data Collection

The bulk of data for this study was initially collected in 2013 as part of a graduate class in Anthropology at the University of the Philippines. Follow-up interviews and collection of other related data were carried out in the years that followed. My fieldsite was Lamut, a sitio of Barangay Beckel, which is located at the southernmost part of the municipality of La Trinidad, Benguet Province. Cut flower farming is the main livelihood in the area. Most of the families residing in Lamut belong to the Igorot-Kankana-ey ethnic group of the Cordillera region. Other sitios in Beckel are populated by other Benguet ethnolinguistic groups specifically the Ibaloi and the Kalanguya. The Lamut residents speak Kankana-ey most of the time but shift to Ilokano, Tagalog or English as needed.

The research team of which I was a member was immersed in the community during the length of the summer class to observe and document daily life and special events. Each member of the team chose a particular topic to study. Being a graduate student of Educational Anthropology, I chose to focus on the education practices of the community. Bennagen (1987) wrote that a researcher could grasp the complexity and nuances of a people's knowledge and learning systems better if he/she knew the local language. However, since Ilokano is my mother tongue and my Lamut interlocutors could speak it well, I used this language to converse with them. I lived in some parts of Northern Benguet for 10 years and that provided me with various encounters with the Kankana-ey people.

The initial set of data revealed a number of knowledge systems in the community. One of which can be called the mambunong knowledge system, associated with the community's ritual specialists, elders, and the ritual feast (*cañao* or *sida*). The second is the public school knowledge system represented by the school building, professional teachers, students and graduates. Other knowledge systems that I found in Lamut were associated with the administrative sphere or local politics and the technical-economic sphere of cut flower farming. My data comes from my observation notes and interviews with 20 participants or interlocutors—11 men and 9 women (see Table 1). We asked for their permission to use the data they shared and their real names (only one asked for a pseudonym) in our final report. This paper will refer to informants as participants or interlocutors to depart from the implied uneven relationship between the researcher and the "informants." Towards the end of the data collection period, a validation meeting was held with our interlocutors to present and discuss initial findings and interpretations.

The profile of the interlocutors shows that more participants belong to the 40 to 80 year old bracket. Most of the participants had

attended a ritual feast led by a mambunong. There were eight of them who hosted their own ritual feasts. Six of them were considered a “mambunong”-- three of whom were elder, full-fledged mambunong, while the other three were *sumarsaruno nga panglakayen* (apprentice or incoming elder mambunong). All of my research participants had varying length of schooling experience. Ten of them reached the college level. Four were school teachers at the Lamut Elementary School. Data about the mambunong knowledge system was generated mainly by the elder and apprentice mambunong, their kin and some participants of ritual feasts. The information about the school system came from the school teachers and some of the other participants since most of them had experience with the public school system.

Total number of interlocutors from Lamut, Beckel	20
BREAKDOWN	Number
• Male	11
• Female	9
• Elementary level as highest educational attainment	11
• College level as highest educational attainment	9
• 20-40 years old	6
• 41 years old and above	14
• Hosted a canao (grade 3 up)	8
• Never hosted canao	12
• Participated in a ritual feast	18
• Public school teacher	4

Table 1. Profile of Interlocutors/Participants

The Research Site

From the boundary of Barangay Pacdal of Baguio City, you will drive into the ascending, winding Ambuklao Road, which eventually leads to the municipality of Itogon. After a two kilometer drive, one negotiates a blind corner and sees a flat area lined on both sides with eateries, small groceries, a water refilling station, a bakery and an internet shop. This signals that one has reached Barangay Beckel. Any Beckel bound jeepney will now turn left from the major highway to an ascending concrete narrow road. At the corner of the road is a small signboard with an arrow pointing to St. Padre Pio Parish Church. In the middle are two other major structures, the Roman Catholic Church and a spacious school compound where the elementary and high school buildings were erected. The barangay chairman at the time of fieldwork described the main road as *pagsasabatan*, literally “a place

for face to face encounters.” Living in their respective sitios, the three major Igorot ethnic groups in Beckel are known by the place of their origin (in Benguet and Mountain Province) and the languages they speak—Kankana-ey, Ibaloi and Kalanguya. The school provides formal educational services to all the sitios and ethnic groups of Beckel.

At the tip of the main road of Beckel is the barangay hall. It is a small concrete structure housing the offices and meeting area of the barangay council. An anteroom serves as the office of the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) and on its wall are enlarged copies of checks received by the Barangay for winning the search for the best BCPC in the municipality.

Outside the barangay hall, visible to any passersby was a 4 x 3 feet tarpaulin featuring the photo of a female cadet of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) with the announcement that Maryam Dinamling Balais graduated as the PMA Class 2013 salutatorian. The local newspaper reported two months earlier that Balais was commended in a resolution filed by La Trinidad Councilor Roderick Awingan saying that her “uncontested devotion to academic excellence had brought tremendous pride, honor and inspiration to the people of La Trinidad...” The paper also reported that Balais’ brother topped the 2006 Class of the Philippine National Police Academy (PNPA) (Catajan 2013).



Photo of Mr. Lucio Apolinio

When Mr. Lucio Apolinio, the elder mambunong was first asked about the school in Lamut, he immediately replied that their school produced many types of professionals like dentists, teachers, nurses, midwives, lawyers, engineers. He said that a medical doctor and a priest were the only professions not represented among them. In the same breath he boasted about the Lamut graduates who topped the PMA and the PNPA graduations. Becoming a professional was rec-

ognized and valued among most people in Lamut. I noticed that evidences about one's college education like that tarpaulin at the barangay hall and graduation photos were displayed openly. Professionals were also carefully identified by certain titles like madam, attorney, fiscal, superintendent, supervisor or doctor.



Figure 1. Sitio Lamut in the Baguio-La Trinidad Map

The Public School Knowledge System

The Beginnings of Lamut Elementary School

Across the road facing Beckel barangay hall are two more narrow roads, one of which is a concrete road circling the hill and leading to the highest place of La Trinidad, which is called Lamut. In the past, when the concrete road was not yet built, it would take a pupil from Lamut some 30 to 40 minutes to traverse the hill going to Beckel Elementary School. The daily trek from Lamut to Beckel Elementary School was precarious during the rainy season because the mountain trail became slippery and pools of water would form along the way. Because of the long and difficult walk, it was reported that at some point children would not go to school anymore. Later, the Lamut residents decided to hold classes in a wooden house of Lizardo Cayatoc, with Mrs. Julia Wagayen as the first teacher. It was reported that the class had both children and adults. Mayor Cipriano Abalos, then La Trinidad Mayor, suggested to the residents to build a school building in a particular vacant lot. In the early 70s, the Lamut residents started pooling their resources and built the first school building with their own hands. Later, there was a notice from the local government that a team would come and dismantle the school building because it was built in a forest reservation. The elders approached several govern-

ment officials for help. Since no teacher would want to go and teach in the school for fear of punitive action from the government, a superintendent of the Department of Education suggested to the residents to find a teacher from their own people.

Beatriz Baguio was the first Lamut resident to graduate from college in the mid 60s. St. Louis University chose Beatriz (or Betty for short) along with four other students from Lamut to stay in the dormitory while they were studying in college. Betty was the only one to graduate among the SLU scholars. In 1966, Betty was fresh from college and went to the mountains of Dupax Nueva Vizcaya to start a school among the Ilongots. Nobody among the lowlanders wanted to go and teach in that area because the Ilongots were still known to be headhunters at the time. Her father was known and respected by the Ilongots and he promised them that once Betty finished her studies she would be sent to them. Betty's husband had to leave his job to join her along with their two children (one was a newborn).

She narrated her adventures teaching in a *cogon* building (where deer would sometimes forcefully barge in), handling both old and young students. She eventually managed to have a standard school building erected by the government and to recruit an additional teacher. After four years of serving the Ilongots, the Department of Education granted her request for reassignment to another school at Kalasipan, kilometer 63 at the mountain trail of Halsema Highway of Benguet. For a short time, she enjoyed a comfortable life living near the major highway (that led to Baguio City) teaching in an established school and enjoying a continuous supply of hot water. Then one day she learned that she needed to leave again.

The (school) supervisors told me, whether you like it or not they are getting you to go back to Lamut...they are coming tomorrow to pick you up. The next day all the Lamut elders like Mr. Doclisen, Mr. Apolonio, Mr. Omaging, Mr. Tagtag came with a jeep and they all said that I had to pack, that I had to leave...

She could not refuse the request of the elders and she dutifully took the role of teacher in her community. She was actually the only teacher in Lamut at the time and she started teaching a grade one class in 1973. Eventually she had to handle grades one and two in the morning and grades three and four in the afternoon, preparing a lesson plan for every subject. The threats for demolition of the school became more serious. Mayor Abalos said that the residents should keep watch over the school every day and if the demolition team would come, they should raise the Philippine flag. One Saturday in 1975, upon seeing that a truckload of soldiers was coming, the flag was hoisted up. And indeed, the demolition team stopped in their tracks and drove away. Betty facilitated fundraising activities for a new building. Peo-

ple recognized her efforts and one prominent lawyer began to call her “Super Teacher.” Later, the government started sending additional teachers to Lamut School and additional buildings were erected. In 1986, Betty filed for an early retirement, so she could go to Hongkong to earn money to support her children’s college education. There were already seven teachers when she left the school and classes were now open up to grade six.

Lamut Elementary School today

It was four days before the national elections and Lamut Elementary School was being prepared as a voting precinct. People from nearby sitios like Golon and Guetley would go there to cast their votes. The voting machine was already delivered to the area and a police officer was stationed at the door of the room where the machine was kept. There were three teachers there and they were talking about the orientation meeting conducted by the Commission on Elections. They commented that it was not as organized as the previous elections. I conducted my interview with two teachers in a meeting room which they said was actually the office of the school principal. On the wall was the school’s organizational chart showing the photo of the principal at the top and the pictures of the teachers below him.

Another document posted on the wall was a drawing of the prescribed uniforms for teachers. They have a uniform prescribed by the national office of the Department of Education, another uniform for the regional level, and another uniform for the division level. There were more than 200 students enrolled in Lamut Elementary School with a teacher-student ratio of 1:27. The teachers boasted that the school had a zero dropout rate. They had also just won a division level award for their vegetable garden and another award for their library.

I later conducted another interview with three more teachers. They emphasized that they strictly follow the standards set by the Department of Education. They spoke about many changes that were abruptly introduced by the new K-12 Curriculum such as the compulsory kindergarten class and the new time allotment for each subject. There is a matrix that compares the old and new curriculum. Such changes and directives are also posted in the website of the Department of Education to be downloaded by schools or districts concerned.

The other impact of K-12 that they grappled with was the new subject called Mother Tongue and which they referred to as MTB-MLE (Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education). A grade one teacher who underwent MTB-MLE training said that her pupils became more confident during recitation because they could use Kankana-ey, the children’s mother tongue. She was supposed to demonstrate how to implement MTB-MLE in Lamut but she was transferred to another school.

Another teacher who was scheduled to attend MTB-MLE training after the elections said that she was “*negang-nega*” (very negative)

about MTB-MLE because using Kankana-ey as a medium of instruction was like slipping backward. She blamed the school officials for not consulting them regarding what language to use for MTB-MLE. She said that the school submitted a report to Department of Education indicating that they would use Kankana-ey while the Beckel School would use Ilokano.

She said, “Changes, changes, DepEd would always introduce changes... when things are already established they would change it again, before we were using RBEC (Revised Basic Education Curriculum), now they are changing it again.”

The teacher beside her added: “It is good if the government should provide materials. When we were using only English and Filipino, we lacked materials. Now that they added mother tongue and changed the curriculum, the situation becomes worse because there are no books.”

The Mambunong Knowledge System

When a teacher was asked what she thought about the mambunong, she responded “what do you mean yung *alay-alay*?” The word “alay” is a Tagalog word for offerings or sacrifices. Repeating the word to say “alay-alay” would mean either the system is marked strongly by many acts of offering or sacrifices or it is not an established one. There are numerous ritual feasts that require the presence of a mambunong. There are 28 rituals for healing alone (Oblas 2003).

The rituals practiced by indigenous communities in Benguet are always facilitated by a mambunong. The root word of mambunong is “*bunong*” which means prayer. Hence, mambunong means a maker of prayer. The ethnologist Moss (1920) described the mambunong as the priest in the village who would lead various rituals. He cited at least 40 ceremonies that he identified in various parts of Benguet. In each ceremony, the mambunong performed distinct roles. The most common task was to recite a prayer directed to deities or souls of the dead or malevolent spirits, give directions to ceremonial participants on what to do or say, narrate a story such as the origin of a certain sickness or a story that instructs people on what to do, interpret signs and give words of fortune to the host or participants. The prayers vary in length and content and are intended to offer a sacrifice, ask for healing, seek for good harvest or fortune, and seek blessings for betrothals, weddings, divorces, deaths, and burials. At times, reciting a prayer would include other actions such as offering a cup of rice wine and/or holding a chicken. When praying or narrating the origin of a sickness, the mambunong would hold an object that symbolizes the cause or the cure of the sickness. Moss’ (ibid) accounts portray the Kankana-ey mambunong as one possessing vast amounts of knowledge about deities and spirits, sicknesses, rituals, and things that are yet to come. The mambunong would pass on his duties by appointing a successor. No explanation was given to show how succession hap-

pens and how the mambunong gains his knowledge.

The major prestige ritual that requires sacrificing several animals is popularly known among outsiders as the *cañao* but it has different names and purposes among the Cordillera groups. Pungayan (2007) wrote that prestige rituals are practiced throughout the Philippine Cordillera and is known by many names: *Bayas* in Mt. Province; *Uya-uya* or *Ulp* in Ifugao, *Pedit* in the Kankana-ey areas; and *Peshit* in the Ibaloi (and Iuwak) towns.

My Lamut interlocutors said that tourists or outsiders would call “*cañao*” any gathering among Igorots involving butchering an animal. However, when they talk among themselves, they never use the word *cañao* to refer to ritual feasts that happens in their community. The more common term they use to describe ritual feasts is *sida*.

The animals were offered to the spirits of dead relatives to intercede for certain needs. A ritual feast would usually last three days and the second day was the main event. The people of Lamut have increasing levels of *sida* which they call grade 3, 5, 9 and so on. The description of the ritual feast with grade levels is not common in the literature. The system used by my interlocutors in Lamut may be viewed as colloquial. However, Picpican (2008) writes that the Ibaloy ritual feast or *peshit* is performed to symbolize the social status of a family and has various stages—three, five, seven, nine, eleven, and so on, “until the family graduates the *peshit* with the 25 pig sacrifice” (125).

The grade numbers used by my interlocutors correspond to the number of pigs, always an odd number, to be simultaneously slaughtered during the main event. Prescribed numbers of pigs are also butchered before and after the main event. The ritual feast in Lamut is performed for various reasons, such as thanksgiving and healing, or to appease spirits, gather kin from various places, and to formalize one’s status. After the ritual feast, the host family goes through a stage known as “*ngilin*,” during which they must abstain from bathing or going out of the house.

When asked why the number of pigs to be butchered is an odd number, Mr. Lucio Apolonio said, “*Tapno adda pag-ayusan da*” which means that one serves as a mediator to achieve peace. I found his explanation quite puzzling. The choice of an odd number for pigs is something that is not strictly followed among the Ibalois. A resource person conjectured that an even number might be interpreted as bad luck. Oblas (2013, 5) wrote that the knowledge held by the mambunong is secret and sacred. This might explain why my interlocutors did not easily offer a full explanation of certain phenomena.

As far as my interlocutors could remember, the highest-grade level achieved in Lamut was 13. The performance of the ritual feast for a certain grade level also requires particular materials such as a type, color, and design of head band, dress, and blanket. For example at grade five, the female host would wear a *kwabaw* (blue with some

stripes) and the male host would wear a *dilli* (red with certain stripes and other design). At grade five, the area where the pigs will be butchered is enclosed with a fence. The people in Lamut can identify the families that have reached a prestigious level of the ritual feast. Physical evidence of a family's having "graduated" or completed a certain level of the ritual feast is the display of the skulls of butchered pigs strewn together side by side on a long bamboo pole, along with skulls of carabaos that were slain during the rituals. This display of animal skulls collected from various grade levels is usually placed near the entrance of one's home. Along with the skulls are the wooden spikes called "*iwik*" that were used during the ritual feast (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Animal skulls from a Grade 5 *Ritual Feast*

There are other rituals which require the butchering of an animal. One was called *daw-es*, a means to cleanse oneself after seeing a corpse along the way (soldiers used to do this when they came home from battle). Another was *teteg*, done by young couples before moving in to their new house. Another ritual was described as *sangbo* which happens after receiving a message from a dead relative through a dream or a medium. Performing a *sangbo* would enable the family to receive the blessing or good fortune.

The Lamut residents said that *mambunong* would mean a village priest to some Igorots. For the Kankana-ey however, the term *mambunong* refers not just to the village priest but extends to anyone who was hosting the offering ritual. Moss (1920) observed that compared to their neighbor Ibaloi, the Kankana-ey had more flexibility about the role of the *mambunong* and there were circumstances when they were not the main actor in a ceremony.

Performing the Ritual Feast

One Friday morning, I joined my research team on their hike to Lamut. It took us 30 minutes to reach the place. Compared to the houses along the main road of Beckel, many houses in Lamut were much bigger.

We saw several newly built three-storey concrete houses. We stopped by a clearing where a huge tent was erected. At the entrance, hanging on a pine tree was a tarpaulin announcing “Balucas, Loloy, Cadmali, Avelina Clan Reunion.” Engr. Ben Balucas, the host of the reunion was there to meet us. A registration table was positioned at the entrance where two women were seated. They were distributing name tags to participants some of whom were giving cash contributions. Ben explained that the amount being collected from kin was meant to pay for prizes. A stage was set up at one end of the clearing. Several flower arrangements decorated the stage. At the middle was a larger tarpaulin announcing the theme of the reunion: *Timpuyog di Pamilya, Tulbek di Ragsak, Kapyay ya Asenso* (a family coming together, a key to happiness, peace and prosperity).

Ben explained that this was the third clan reunion and this was the second time that it was held in Beckel. Ben was described by another Lamut resident as one of the most successful residents of Lamut because he earned an engineering degree and many of his children were also college graduates. As I passed by his backyard, I saw several men roasting some pork chunks and cooking food in large vats. I was introduced to one of the cooks, a town fiscal in his late 30’s. He was jovial and he asked me about my presence in Lamut. Upon learning our intention to study about folklore, he directed us to a home down the hill where a young married couple was hosting a ritual feast.

As our group was descending the hill, we saw a bungalow with a crowd of guests at its front yard. The *sida* was hosted by a young couple who had just built their own house. The event was a combination of *teteg* and grade 3 ritual feast. We came to witness the third day of the event. People said that we should have come when they butchered three pigs and danced to the beat of the *gangsa* (handheld gongs). It was around 11:00 in the morning when we reached the place and the crowd was already eating. The seats at the open space were arranged in an almost circular manner. A small bonfire was at the middle that was used earlier to cook the meat of the butchered pig. The elder mambunong that was performing the rituals was Mr. Lucio Apolonio. When we arrived at the place, he acknowledged our presence and welcomed us to the occasion. He was in his late 70s and had a stately stance. His voice was loud, resonant and authoritative, speaking in both Kankana-ey and Ilokano.

After being offered seats, we were also handed paper plates wrapped in small cellophane bags. Each plate had a heap of cooked red rice and three large chunks of boiled pork. We were also offered a cup of broth each, and a bowl of salt in case we wanted to add flavor to the meat. People ate the food with their fingers and the remaining food was wrapped using the paper plate and the cellophane bag. Additional food portions called *watwat* were distributed to be brought home. After some time, at around 2:30 pm, the guests prepared for another pig offering.

As a whole, the ritual participants seemed to be familiar with the general flow of the ritual. The three men who went up the hill to get the pig from a truck had to wash themselves first using the water in a blue drum positioned at the entrance of the house. The act of washing was meant to symbolize cleansing, a requirement before slaughtering the pigs. The three men came down carrying the pig and held it firmly at the center near the firewood. The young host couple came with a blanket around their shoulder and sat behind the pig. They quietly recited the prayer written on a notebook and left right after. It was a prayer directed to the spirits of their dead relatives. Then one man grasping a sharp wooden spike forcefully stabbed the pig's neck. Blood spurted from the wound and the pig squealed for a few minutes. The animal's body jerked a few times and then became still. One of the butchers cut off its tail and gave it to a small girl who was pleased to receive a plaything. The whole pig was carried on top of the fire and an LPG-powered blow torch was used to burn off the hair on the top layer of the pig's skin. Some men cut off some long runo leaves nearby and laid them on the ground. They slit open the pig's stomach, letting the internal organs come out. They sliced off the liver and the bile sac and placed them on a plate. The plate was brought to Mr. Lucio Apolonio and he examined the liver and the bile sac closely, gesturing as though he were counting certain parts. He seemed pleased with what he saw and proceeded to recite words of good fortune that would come to the young couple. I learned that in the event that the bile and the liver did not look good or healthy, the family would have to butcher another pig. After the reading of the bile and the liver, the butchers cut up the pig quite methodically and tossed the pork slices into a large vat of water placed on top of a stove with some burning firewood underneath. While the meat was cooking, one of us stood up and motioned to leave. Mr. Apolonio firmly commanded that person to stay and wait until the meal was over.

Mr. Apolonio asked the men to lay on the ground 12 plates of rice with chunks of cooked meat. Somebody came with a bottle of *tapuy* (rice wine). Somebody near me whispered that it was a special brew. A glass of *tapuy* was placed at one end of the 12 plates and a glass of gin was placed at the other end. Mr. Apolonio sat down at one end and his assistant, Mr. Cusili, sat at the other end. After uttering a prayer for a few minutes, they drank the glass of wine and ate some food from the plate. When they stood up, plates with a heap of rice and chunks of meat were passed around again. Mr. Apolonio later explained that eating the food and drinking the *tapuy* was a gesture made before the host family's dead kin, to let them know that the food being offered to them was safe and without any poison. The ritual was a special event providing the family with an opportunity to connect with the spirits of their dead relatives. Nobody should leave in the middle of the ritual because such would be an act of disrespect to the spirits.

The Lamut "Village Chieftain"

I sat beside Mr. Apolonio to ask some questions about the history of Lamut and their practices. He was introduced to our group as the "village chieftain." He would look at me straight in the eye, carefully pondering every question I asked. When he replied to my questions, he would speak as if he were addressing the whole crowd. He would explain events vividly, reciting the names of people involved and the exact month, day and year that things took place. When he saw our amazement about the amount spent by our host for the ritual feast, which they estimated to be more than 200,000 pesos, Mr. Apolonio emphatically said that such ritual was necessary and every Igorot was born to do these rituals. He said that the young couple who hosted the ritual feast would be able to receive back what they spent if they work hard. He said this repeatedly.

Mr. Apolonio was the one who wrote the prayer that the young couple read from a notebook. As the participants performed their part during the ritual feast, he spoke and gave specific orders that were followed immediately and quietly. He was like a director of a performance. He apparently made some revisions to the ritual; for instance, he asked for a bottle of gin, instead of tapuy. Some giggled to hear this directive but somebody said, *amom ti pagsiyaatan* (Ilokano: you know what is best). We asked for a copy of the prayer from some elderly women who were relatives of the host but they gravely said no. Mr. Apolonio said we could not understand the prayer because it was in Kanakana-ey and he tried to translate it to Ilokano. Later, when we were about to leave, he motioned someone to give us a copy of the prayer and it was handed to us without any question. Prayers uttered during such rituals invoke the spirits of the ancestors to come and help the *umili*, the whole village, to provide for their needs and to protect them from disaster or misfortune.

The Best and the Brightest

Mr. Apolonio embodies the professional elder mambunong described earlier. He is one who becomes the community's repository of knowledge, the village priest, teacher, community leader or elder, mediator, personal and family counsellor, and healer. Mambunong are described as the most knowledgeable, the most gifted and the wisest in the community. The most commonly used descriptor was *addu ti amo na* (knows many things). One family refused to call a village priest a mambunong and preferred to refer to him as a *manursuro* (teacher). They explained that during a ritual, the host recites the prayer while he/she is coached by the manursuro. A grade school boy who was watching the ritual feast said that a mambunong must be somebody who has the capacity to teach and direct people what to do.

The many things a mambunong knows consist of stories and information about the most supreme god, Kabunian; other lesser spirits represented by celestial bodies such as the moon, stars, and comets; and the spirits of departed kin and unseen and harmful spirits. He looks at the sky and he can tell the best schedule for certain rituals. He also knows the kinds of prayers offered to particular spiritual beings and what prayers to recite for certain rituals. A mambunong has committed to memory all the songs and the chants of the rituals. However, the depth and range of knowledge and mastery of rituals, prayers, songs, and chants may differ from mambunong to mambunong.

During rituals, the mambunong directs not only the actual performance of the ritual but also coordinates with the other participants and addresses logistical concerns. Junior Sab-it described how complicated the task can be:

Ritual for the dead is the hardest to facilitate because you have to discuss and reach a consensus with the family members concerning what animal to offer for sacrifice. It becomes complicated when the dead has many children. There will be negotiations and you have to consider what they can afford. I also need to coordinate with the schedule of other elder / mambunong so that there will be one in each home (where a ritual is to be done). Since a mambunong has to observe *ngilin* (fasting) after a ritual, he cannot just hop from one home to another.

The mambunong's giftedness is demonstrated in the ability to interpret dreams and unusual signs or situations such as the intrusion of an unusual type of insect, or when family members die one after another. A mambunong can look at the bile sac and liver of an animal and tell the fortune of the ritual host.

To be recognized as a credible elder mambunong one has to live an exemplary life. He should not be a drunkard and instead, be a hardworking man with one wife. It is crucial that he is able to keep himself from getting drunk during a ritual otherwise he will not be able to perform his duties. Another indicator of one's authenticity as an elder mambunong is when *isuna ti kamangan ti tao* (Ilokano: people would naturally go to him for help and advice).

The case of Lamut shows that the elder mambunong like Tolentino Wacnisen, Lucio Apolonio, Antonio Doclisen, Leonardo Liwan were the ones who represented the interest of Lamut. They were the signatories of the document asserting their ancestral claim for their land. One interlocutor described them as the "council of elders." The leader of the group, Tolentino Wacnisen did not receive formal education and could not sign his name so he appended his thumbmark. In

a local newspaper, he is described as “war veteran and village patriarch” (Dacawi 2012).

The Making of a Mambunong

A crucial aspect of the continuity of the presence of mambunong in communities is the formation and training of younger mambunong. The learning system has stages and utilizes a form of apprenticeship. The elder mambunong is deliberate in passing on his knowledge to the younger ones.

Mr. Apolonio described how Tolentino Wacnisen trained him and other young men about the ways of a mambunong.

Each time he performed his duty as a mambunong, he would call us and say, “You come here, you come here.” There were many of us, Antonio, Cusili, Benito, Leonardo, Tomas, Junior. He would gather us together and tell us, “You come here and you listen carefully and watch what I do as I pray and perform rituals. Do you think you have control over my life? What if God, the Creator, would call me to himself, would you know what to do when you are left behind? You do not know what happens to people in the future. When Kabunian (the Supreme God) needs the person he created, he will call that person back to him.

The apprenticeship system for an elder mambunong has three stages. It requires that the person is genuinely interested in learning the practices. The first stage involves observation and careful listening as an elder mambunong performs his duties during a ritual. Originally, the prayers uttered during ceremonies were committed to memory through repetition. However, when reading and writing was introduced, mambunong apprentices began writing down the prayers so they could easily review and memorize the words. Lately, people have been recording the event using a camera or a video recorder. During the first stage, the interested learner helps by gathering wood, setting up the ritual space, butchering the animals, distributing food, and performing other odd jobs involved in the ritual.

The second phase starts when the learner begins to be identified as the assistant of the mambunong and he is called *sumarsaruno* which means “one who comes after,” or successor. Most of the *sumarsaruno* in Lamut were above 40 years of age. All of them reached at least grade 5 of the ritual feast level. The tasks exclusively assigned to them by the elder mambunong consist of praying over the *tapuy*, which is done before drinking and sharing the brew. They are also summoned to do work of service by performing evening rituals like offering a dog or a duck. Apprentices in the first and second stage are not allowed to

speak on their own. They simply listen and do as they are told by the elder-mambunong. A mambunong has reached the third phase when he can lead a ritual by himself, without an elder mambunong to direct him. He is also recognized by people as qualified through his knowledge, the example he sets in the community, and the ritual feast grade level he has achieved. Leonardo Liwan was just as young as another apprentice, but he reached the elder mambunong status ahead by reaching grade 9, a higher level of the ritual feast system.

Reinterpretations of the mambunong system

Traditionally, Kankana-ey elder mambunong were men but in Lamut there was a woman whom the people considered as an elder mambunong. Lolita Way-as, oftentimes called Tony, was the only woman who signed the document on Lamut's ancestral domain claim. Mr. Apolonio described her as the most knowledgeable and wisest woman around and was considered a member of the *panglakayen*, or council of elders. (Its root word, "*lakay*" means old male individual.) Mr. Apolonio went as far as to say that Lolita or Tony knew more than he did. She could do better as an elder mambunong because she does not drink the alcohol served in a feast and therefore can "do her obligations and say the proper script of an elder mambunong." She was also described by several interlocutors as "*kalalaingan nga ag day-eng, abak na pay ti lalaki*." "The best person who can do a funeral chant/song. She can outdo the men." However, her influence as an elder mambunong can be felt only among her kin and neighbors. In addition, she was not allowed to perform *daw-es* or any of the evening rituals. No explanation was offered as to why a female mambunong could not perform the *daw-es* or evening rituals. A resource person suggested that a *daw-es* is generally performed by male elders as it involves the *paliwat*, or boasting session.

Somebody described the position of Lolita/Tony as a sign of change in the mambunong system. It was considered uncommon among the Kankana-ey.¹ There were other recent changes that were explained to us. Before, there were enough *lalakay* (elders) to butcher the pig and distribute the food but now the task is carried out by young men who are available to help. They learn how to calculate the size of the crowd and make sure that there will be enough pork chunks for everybody. In the past, the *ngilin* (abstinence) would last for 15 days, but now three days will suffice. The decrease in the number of days for *ngilin* happened ten years ago, at about the time the community shifted to cut flower farming. One farmer explained that they used to plant only camote (sweet potato) and vegetables. Work was seasonal and not so demanding. Now, with the nature of cut flower farming, one has to work at the greenhouse day and night, the whole year round.

The use of an LPG blowtorch is also new, though someone remarked that it makes the pork less flavourful and can hasten spoilage. They explained that the prohibitions brought about by the anti-logging laws made it necessary to use a blowtorch instead of firewood. In the past, camote or sweet potato was served along with pork chunks. Back then, only the rich could afford to serve rice but now rice is served at all times.

Another change is that the ritual feast is not held as often as before. My interlocutor in his early twenties mentioned that when he was young, he would hear pigs squealing every few weeks, now it happens less frequently. Watwat used to include raw meat but now only cooked chunks of pork would be taken home. Traditionally, if the reading of the bile and liver was not good, another black pig had to be butchered. Now a smaller pig is allowed or in some situations, a chicken. People attributed this “cost-cutting” phenomenon to the increasing price of black pigs. They also reported that pig raisers realized that Igorots would choose only black pigs for rituals and so they jacked up the price.

As was mentioned earlier, today’s economic realities have changed some practices within the mambunong system. Mr. Liwan delivered the usual spiel about working hard so you can afford to host a ritual feast. Then suddenly he changed gear and said:

I guess nobody can afford to host “cañao” nowadays. Before one pig would cost a few thousand pesos and a carabao would cost you 10,000 or 15,000 pesos. The biggest carabao I bought cost me 18,000. Now, a carabao would cost 35,000 or 40,000 or even 50,000 pesos!

He reflected and said that hosting a ritual feast is possibly the same as hosting a reunion. Actually, he described his most recent ritual feast as such. His relatives, especially his siblings were scattered all over the province and he felt like he did not know them anymore. He concluded that a ritual feast is meant to gather your kin for a face to face meeting.

Ben said that people have been pressuring him to imitate his grandfather who reached grade 13 of the ritual feast, the highest so far in Lamut. People said that since Ben has good communication skills and knows a lot of things about the mambunong system he would qualify to be an elder mambunong. He countered such suggestions by explaining that his priority was sending his children to college. He got married late and his children were still young. However, in the future if he had extra money and did not need to borrow money, he would start hosting his own prestige ritual feasts. For now, the amount of 300,000 pesos needed to host a feast could send several children to

school. He claimed that he knew some families who spent a lot of money hosting feasts and as a result did not have enough money left to pay for their children's college education. He dispelled the common impression that he was not a believer of rituals by referring to the time in the past that he actually hosted a grade three ritual feast level. He said that he also contributed to the needs of his siblings who hosted their own feast. He further reasoned that there were many other ways to serve people and to gather kin for a reunion. The family reunion he organized that summer was meant to replace one function of the ritual feast. He also said that the oral tradition of recounting the practices and belief system that occur in a feast can be replaced by documenting such practices in a book.

Myrna (not her real name) and her husband were both college graduates and they were managing several farms in Lamut and elsewhere. She said that they hosted *teteg* more than 10 years ago. Lately, her family hosted a grade three ritual feast. The decision to host a ritual feast stemmed from a business loss. A strong typhoon wiped out her flower garden and they lost 100,000 pesos. Through a medium, a dead ancestor spoke to her claiming that she caused the destruction of the garden and that if they would not give the offering she requested, something worse would happen. Myrna discussed the issue with a mambunong and he prescribed what ceremony should be done. Upon learning how much it would cost her, she consulted two more mambunong for another opinion. The three mambunong discussed her concern and finally they reached a consensus on the number of animals to be butchered. She said that the discussions and negotiations involved a series of computations. One of the three mambunong said, "*Sige tapno malpas pagbigyan tayo*" (Okay, let us give in so we will be done with this). The spirits of dead relatives usually request offerings that will provide for their needs in the afterlife. They reveal in a dream that they need a new set of clothes because the clothes they are wearing are now old and tattered.

Finally, with the help of some relatives, Myrna hosted the desired ritual feast and butchered pigs as an offering for an ancestor who was murdered and another relative who was stabbed to death. She claimed that it turned out that it was easy to pay back the money she borrowed for the rites.

The Mambunong System as an Alternative Route

Mr. Apolonio related that when he was young he never imagined becoming a mambunong "because he was serious about going to school." Teacher Betty Baguio narrated what it was like growing up with Mr. Apolonio.

Lucio Apolonio was a bit older than us. Since we were children we used to play on our way to school and when he came he had this long stick with him which he used to drive us to move and run to school so we would not be late... *isu ti manong manong mi* (he was like an older brother to us)... and he made sure we would go to school.

Mr. Apolonio said that after finishing grade school he went to his grandfather's place in Kibungan hoping to finish his studies. However, after doing all sorts of odd jobs for the baknang (rich man) he was not able to fulfill his dreams.

Rosa Duclisen, who was a bit older than Mr. Apolonio, said that she barely finished grade one because she did not have enough school supplies. "Our teacher would suddenly yell at us and ask why we did not have any paper or pencil." Rosa aspired to go to school so she would learn how to write and compute and not be cheated by anyone. Antonio Doclisen, her husband and the oldest mambunong in Lamut today, finished grade one only because he had nothing to wear to school except one pair of pants. Likewise, Mr. Apolonio said that he had nothing to wear to school except his G-string. His classmate, a child of a baknang, would sit behind him and bully him by tying one end of his G-string to a chair.

Lolita/Tony related that when she realized she could not advance in her studies beyond grade one, she decided to go to the elder mambunong, Tolentino Wacnisen, as an alternative means to gain knowledge. She narrated how she took time to go to Mr. Wacnisen to learn about the mambunong knowledge system. It was her learning sessions with her mentor which enabled her to get out of her miserable situation. Her first husband died, and her second husband had an affair and so she drove him out of their home. Through time, toiling as a flower trader, she was able to host a ritual feast up to the level of grade five. She explained that due to her mother's ignorance and lack of schooling she was given a boy's name, "Tony." Later, she thought that having a male name enabled her to do the functions of a man.

Lolita's/Tony's eldest daughter, Gloria, also narrated about her painful experience in school. Her classmates would tease her for bringing nothing but camote for lunch. She only finished up to grade six and had to stay home to do household work and to look after her younger siblings. She got married to Tito, a cut flower farmer. Later, she worked in Hongkong as a caregiver for eight years. Eventually her family was able to host grade three and grade five prestige ritual feasts. When I first met Gloria, she immediately brought me to her house to show me the skulls of animals displayed on top of her window. Later, she brought out albums of photos from the ritual feasts she hosted. The pictures showed large crowds of friends and relatives

who came to join the feasting and dancing. Prominent people such as the parish priest came to witness the event. She said those events were important to her because they enabled her family to gain prestige and recognition. She said, "If somebody insults me or puts me down, I will remind him of what I have achieved and dare him to level up with me."

The foregoing stories reveal that when the schooling system was introduced, people chose it by default as a means to gain knowledge and achieve prestige and recognition. However due to the inaccessibility of higher levels of schooling, many had to drop out. Eventually these individuals sought another route available to them, which also gave them a chance to fulfil their aspirations. After interviewing mambunong and visiting their homes, I found that most of those who achieved a high-grade level of the prestige ritual feast did not receive education beyond grade six. They also did not live in concrete three-storey houses. However, displayed at the entrance of their houses were the numerous skulls and *iwik*, relics associated with the baknang status of the past.

Conclusion and Implications

The following section provides perspectives on the dynamic nature of the mambunong and public school knowledge systems, including the way they interact with each other. It provides insights into the agency of their knowers, and returns to the challenges of indigenization and localization of curricula in public schools.

The corpus or body of knowledge of schooling and the mambunong systems both contain information about the environment and the world, except that the mambunong system provides explanations beyond the material world. They provide skills and capabilities that enable knowers to participate meaningfully in society, to serve others and to gain prominence and recognition. They equip people with means to address concerns around them such as illness, conflict, and connecting with one's kin. Both knowledge systems subscribe to a hierarchy which provides rites of passage for each level—the graduation and the ritual feast—and symbolic capital or material evidence of the completion of each level: the diploma, graduation pictures, and the display of animal skulls. Both are strongly mediated by narratives about higher beings. The mambunong system has Kabunian and other spirits or *anitos*, while the schooling system has the faceless Department of Education policymakers who are represented at the local level by department orders, memos, and advisories. The teacher's or mambunong's mediation is strongly felt in both systems. He or she is the one who embodies the knowledge system and at the same time instructs people in what to believe in and how to live with each other.

Both have a process and system of succession so that knowledge is effectively transferred from master to pupil.

As learning pathways, they lead to similar outcomes such as prestige and recognition, knowledge and understanding about the world, opportunities for meaningful service, and the promise of prosperity. Significantly, along the learning pathways are openings that allow knowers to switch from one path to another. This represents the reality that learners might not follow and stay in one track but may experience a degree of freedom that enables them to switch from one track to another. They traverse the pathways guided by their own values, needs, and aspirations.

One major difference between the two knowledge systems is the extent of recognition afforded to their knowers. A mambunong apprentice expressed that the skulls he earned would not be recognized among the people in the municipal hall of La Trinidad. Indeed, the prestige and recognition accorded to a mambunong is limited to his kin, his community, and to those who might adhere to the mambunong knowledge system. The diploma one receives from a college education is recognized in many places outside Lamut. It also provides more options for livelihood and advancement. However, a college diploma also has its limitations as it does not give its holder the respect that an elder mambunong receives in Lamut.

Indigenous learning systems and formal schooling are often presented in binary and oppositional terms, giving the impression that their knowers and adherents are separate and distinct from each other. However, this study reveals that both indigenous knowledge and formal schooling are part of the whole educational system of Lamut.

The history of Lamut Elementary School reveals the Lamut community's initiative and sense of ownership of the school and by extension of education itself. Their people, especially the professional teachers in their midst started the school, protected it from closure, and made it grow into a formal and legitimate public school. However, their educational agency in the public school knowledge system is limited since the latter is largely influenced by external forces.

The school knowledge system might provide its knowers with a sense of stability and a broader space for recognition and influence. However, due to the standardized nature of schooling, changes are made by unseen powers from a distance, and these are imposed on local schools without adequate discussion or consultation. This system hardly provides agency for school stakeholders in a locality like Lamut. The mambunong knowledge system, on the other hand, may have limited reach for recognition and influence, but its actors are given a wider space for maneuvering, customization, and consensus building.

The agency of the mambunong is revealed in their continuing attempts to make the system respond to ongoing changes in the environment. When new laws or economic demands place constraints on their knowledge system, they initiate a corresponding customization of rituals or practices. Affordances provided by literacy and technologies are utilized. They frame the mambunong system in a manner that is comparable to the school system, through the use of grade levels (grade 3, 5, 7 etc.) to name the various stages of prestige ritual feasts. Another means is by constantly describing the mambunong as *addu ti ammo na* (Ilokano: knowledgeable) and *manursuro* (teacher); highlighting their cognitive abilities as manifested through their ability to recite from memory so many prayers, chants and songs, and also to provide insights and solutions to problems presented to them. There is also an implicit suggestion that the mambunong is more ascendant than the professional teacher because he has to earn his position through an arduous apprenticeship system and community affirmation of his good reputation, leadership, and ability to interpret and explain dreams and other spiritual matters.

These insights can inform the current concerns on contextualization, localization and indigenization of the basic education curriculum. One implication is that teachers need to be trained to read and interpret the processual dimension of culture. This requires them to learn what it means to be a teacher-ethnographer (Abaya 2014). This paper also presents possible cultural curriculum content on indigenous knowledge that transcend the usual listing and description of indigenous dress, song, and dances as though they were frozen in time. Other cultural matters worth considering as content are concepts and stories about community leadership, schooling experiences, and the ritual feasts. A lesson on the mambunong in the community would enhance the discussion about community helpers. Discussions on the schooling experiences of adult members of the indigenous community may provide opportunities to examine more thoughtfully the indigenous peoples' issues such as discrimination and bullying in schools, including dropping out of school. And finally, a lesson about ritual feasts could bring about a discussion of their current meanings and generate insights into the issue of culture change and adaptation.

ADDENDUM

Before this article was published, I was informed that my key interlocutor and the most senior mambunong of Lamut, Lucio Apolonio, passed away. I feel sadness and regret realizing that the community has lost another irreplaceable cultural treasure (the other was Tolentino Wacnisen, Lucio's mentor). May their lives and examples, along

with Teacher Betty Baguio's, be remembered as part of the local educational history of Lamut.

NOTE

In contrast to this, Moss (1920) and other sources state that the Ibalois have female mambunongs.

REFERENCES

- Abaya, Eufracio. 2014. *Teachers as Ethnographers: A Handbook*. Department of Education.
- Abejuela, Ricarte III. 2006. "Indigenous Education in the Philippines: A Case Study of the Sagu-Ilaw School of Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions." *The 10th UNESCO-APEID International Conference*. Bangkok: UNESCO. http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/apcid/Conference/papers/ABEJUELA_7d.pdf.
- Arzadon, Maria Mercedes. 2015. "Mainstreaming Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in the Philippines." In *Language Issues Special Interest Group Quarterly Newsletter*, September 03: 6-7.
- Barth, Fredrik. 2002. "An Anthropology of Knowledge." *Sidney W. Mintz Lecture. Current Anthropology* (The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research) 43 (1): 1-18.
- Bennagen, Ponciano. 1987. "Indigenous Learning System Among the Kankanaey: A Pilot Case Study." *Innotech Journal*: 2-36.
- Bitog, Rubyloida. 2011. "Survey of Feature Articles on Cordillera Indigenous Knowledge." *Campus Publications of Metro-Baguio*. La Trinidad, Benguet: Benguet State University.
- Calis, Manybel. 2015. "Ethnomathematics among Ibaloi children: considerations for the K-3 curriculum." Undergraduate Thesis, University of the Philippines.
- Cardenas, Marilu. 2002. "Research as Praxis: Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge." In *Towards Understanding Peoples of the Cordillera*, edited by, 118-125. Baguio City: Cordillera Studies Center.
- Dacawi, Ramon. 2012. "Gratitude for Kids' Work." *Baguio Midland Courier*, May 6. <http://www.baguiomidlandcourier.com.ph/mail.asp?mode=archives/2012/may/5-6-2012/mail9.txt>.

- Donato-Kinomis, Xylene Grail. 2016. "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPS) in the Teaching Of Science" (presentation, *13th National Convention on Statistics (NCS)*). October 3-4, Mandaluyong City.
- ECIP. 2008. "Indigenous Peoples Education: "From Alienation To Rootedness" Consolidated report by the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous People." *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools* (Asia-Pacific Human rights Information Center). <https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v11/13IndigenousPeoplesEducationPhilippines.pdf>.
- Enkiwe-Abayao, Leah. 2002. "Indigenous peoples' learning systems: A discourse on indigenous emancipatory pedagogy." *Indigenous Perspectives* 5 (2): 55-62.
- . 2014. "The Philippines Indigenous Peoples' Core Curriculum." *UP Forum*. Manila, July 22. <http://web-old.up.edu.ph/the-philippines-indigenous-peoples-core-curriculum/>.
- Francisco, Juan. 2005. "Indigenous Learning Systems: The Philippines." *MINDAyan Journal of Culture and Society* 2 (1): 94-110.
- Gonzalez, N, Moll, L & Amanti, C. 2005. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms*. Routledge.
- Levinson, Bradley and Holland, Dorothy. 1996. "The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: Introduction." In *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*, edited by Douglas Foley and Dorothy Holland 1-56. State University of New York Press.
- Levinson, Bradley. 2000. "Introduction: Whiter the Symbolic Animal? Society, Culture, and Education at the Millenium." In *Schooling the Symbolic Animal: Social and Culture*, edited by Bradley Levinson, Kathryn Levinson and Bradley Borman, 1-12. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Mawere, Munyaradzi. 2010. "Indigenous Knowledge Systems' (IKSS) Potential for Establishing a Moral, Virtuous Society: Lessons from Selected IKSS in Zimbabwe and Mozambique." *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12 (7).
- Moss, CR. 1920. "Nabaloi law and ritual." *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 15 (3): 207-342.
- Oblas, Severino. 2013. "The Beliefs and Home Rituals of Benguet" last modified June 7, 2013. <http://www.icbe.eu/categories-listings/21-2nd-icbe-consultation/70-the-beliefs-and-home-rituals-of-benguet>.

- Picpican, Isikias. 2008. "Some Popular Rituals and Festivities in the Cordilleras." In *Various Religious Beliefs and Practices in the Philippines*, edited by Teodora T. Battad, Teresita Burgos-Gutierrez; Victoria S. Lamucho, Isikias T. Picpican and Ligaya Tiamson Rubin, 115-28. Metro Manila: Rex Bookstore.
- Pungayan, Morr. 2007. "Three 'enduring' S. Cordillera Practices." *Baguio Midland Courier*. http://www.baguiomidlandcourier.com.ph/anniv12_article.asp?mode=anniv12/supplements/pungayan.txt.
- Robb, John. 2002. "Comment to an Anthropology of Knowledge." Sidney W. Mintz Lecture. *Current Anthropology*.
- Rovillos, Raymundo. 2002. "Mainstreaming Indigenous Education." *Indigenous Perspectives* 5 (2): 45-54.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2017. "Local Knowledge, Global Goals." *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. Accessed January 30, 2018. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/ILK_ex_publication_E.pdf.
- Whitehead, Tony. 2004. "What is Ethnography? *Methodological, Ontological, and Epistemological Attributes*" Working Paper Series, Ethnographically Informed Community and Cultural Assessment Research Systems (EICCARS).