

## ALERT LEVEL 1: END OF HIATUS, BACK ON THE CAMPUS

by:

**Maylyn F. Manalo**

*Master Teacher I, Justice Emilio Angeles Gancayco Memorial High School*

“Open up the schools” has been one of the battle cries of students during this global health crisis. In early March of 2020, more than two years ago, the pandemic pushes the education sector to shut down the physical schools’ gates and open new modes of learning: online, modular, and digital. However, the attempt to embrace this new normal exacerbates the effects on the students’ and teachers’ mental health and affects the quality of teaching and learning.

The amount of mental exhaustion among the teachers and students has been evident and alarming; students keep yearning for academic breaks, which is a result of a strenuous system of the new face of education. Now, after long days of relentless plea and waiting for a safe return to the physical classroom, there came a light that gives both students and teachers their most anticipated comeback to their second home, finally, a #LigtasBalikEskuwela.

Looking back, I can say that, indeed, I am now living in one of the prayers I used to pour my heart into every night; and I never knew that stepping my feet on the campus ground once again will touch my heart in its deepest core and will leave joyous tears in my eyes. And this I can bravely say, that amongst all my favorite artists who had their comebacks, this by far is my most awaited one.

However, returning to onsite learning does not only give blissful feelings but also feelings of “what ifs”, “could haves” and missed opportunities for the years we stayed at home. At some point, those years might be good years for some, but for me, a teacher, those are somehow unsustainable teaching and learning process. What if this pandemic

did not happen, what kind of students am I going to have? What if I got the chance to spend normal school days with them, and not just days of facing them through the screen of my laptop? I could have acquired more memories; I could have built stronger ties with them and provided more authentic knowledge and skill, and I could have been teaching happier if this situation did not occur. I have missed more than two years of my teaching life inside the school. We had been consistently living in vibrant uncertainties for almost two years: there are weeks wherein we can limitedly move outside, and months of being isolated once again at home. And I owe myself an apology because I am fully aware that I am not being at my best at state those times, and maybe, it is the choice that I made.

Now that we are back, and the hiatus has finally come to an end, I can say that this is a blatant attempt of fixing the road going back to the normal wherein teachers and students are physically present inside the classroom. It feels so euphoric to hear again actual noises that give life to the campus: the sounds of contagious laughter, spontaneous stories, and the warm presence of the students.

Here, on the campus, is where authentic and meaningful learning is highly experienced, not on laptop screens and frigid pages of learning activity sheets. Here, on the campus, is where the students truly belong. And here, on campus, although exhausted, I know that I am teaching what I am supposed to teach, and students are learning what they must learn, while our hearts are at their happiest state. Only here, on the campus.

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