

## DEVELOPING MATH COMPETENCIES AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

*by:*  
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It was in March 12, 2020 when I read from CNN Philippines that Luzon will be in lockdown starting March 15, 2020. Since the official announcement about the quarantine, my Facebook homescreen and group chats were flooded with teacher-related concerns and a lot of steps were taken in order to minimize the effect of COVID-19 on students. One solution was the issuance of MELC by the Department of Education to address the challenges brought about by the pandemic. The limited competencies listed in MELC could be developed by the learners through remote learning strategies.

Jaime Saavedra discussed some of the remote learning strategies in his article entitled "Educational challenges and opportunities of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic". First, he mentioned online learning strategies. In addition, he wrote that radio and TV are powerful tools in learning. And he ended his discussion on learning with "Remote learning is not only about online learning, but about mixed media learning, with the objective of reaching as many students as possible, today."

Here in the Philippines, being a developing country, switching to remote learning strategies would be very challenging specially to public schools. Most students could not even afford to eat three times a day how much more the additional expenses of purchasing gadgets and buying data load. As much as we would like to engage parents to actively participate in their child's learning, other students do not have the privilege of having a parent or guardian monitor their everyday school-related activities. The good thing is, aside from developing modules to be given to students, Dep. Ed. also developed DepEd TV channel. In using this medium, the learners should be given timelines on when to switch on their TV.

For Mathematics, grade 1 to grade 4 students would really need adult supervision in order to achieve the most essential learning competencies like visualizes, represents and counts numbers from 0 to 100 using a variety of materials and methods; adds mentally; constructs squares, rectangles, triangles, circles, half-circles, and quarter circles using cut-outs and square grids; identifies and describes the different kinds of quadrilaterals: square, rectangle, parallelogram, trapezoid, and rhombus; etc. Most of the learning competencies are quite hard to gauge without seeing how the students are doing things and it's really hard to monitor each student if you will be given 150 students or more (full load for a Math public school teacher). Teachers will be needing a lot of help from someone able from the students' home. Furthermore, it will help the learner a lot if the supervising adult could give regular feedbacks to the teachers in order to timely address problems and challenges along the way.

As for the more advanced grades, like in grade 9 for example, where learning competency such as proves theorems might be hard to achieve. It could be best taught with a handout/book/ebook and a video that can be downloaded. Moreover, the teacher should allot time for consultation. It can be via sms, email, zoom meeting or even through notes left in pigeon holes. Since most students would be enlisted in schools that were near their home, group activities could be encouraged with proper health care precaution. That way, students could share their resources and ask help from other students who are more adept in the subject.

With every resource being tapped for the learners to achieve the most essential learning competencies while we respond to the pandemic, teachers are working much harder in assuring the students that they have an equal chance to quality education. The gap in the opportunities given to learners might be wide when we compared public schools from private schools, but I believe that in our current situation more teachers are being more resourceful.

We are all affected by the pandemic but we can't let COVID-19 stop us from continuing to learn through formal or informal education. I agree with Education Secretary Leonor Briones when she said that "We don't know when this thing will blow over so, in the meantime, you cannot have nine months of idle children being restrained in their homes and having no classes or no learning at all because we are afraid – we have to move,". But from the students' point of view, I do not know which is more scary, will it be fighting the pandemic effect with no education to distract them or facing Math for 9 months?

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