

THE NEW NORMAL OF EDUCATION: BRIDGING GAPS BY EFFECTIVE TRANSITION AND ADAPTATION

by:

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The World Health Organization (2010) basically defines a ‘Pandemic’ as the worldwide spread of a new disease. In our current situation, that is the Corona Virus Disease or COVID-19 that continuously re-model our present and thoroughly [in extreme ways] shapes our future. This situation of worldwide health emergency paved the rise for a ‘New Normal’ for almost every aspect of human scheme with major impact on education. From social distancing, work from home set-ups, lockdowns and quarantines, virtual and/ or digital learning, name it; most of the population involved in carrying out our educational systems from the global to the smallest community level, were affected by this pandemic one way or another.

As stated by UNESCO (2020), most governments around the globe have temporarily closed educational institutions at the peak of this health emergency, in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic with a total of 177 country-wide closures. These worldwide closures impacted over 72% of the world’s student population which is 1,268,164,088 since May 7, 2020. In the Philippines alone 28,451,212 enrolled students from pre-primary up to tertiary level were affected.

When asked about any precedent in the history of massive school closure in the United States [or any country] that could be compared to the effect of COVID-19 to the educational system and the lessons we should’ve learned from those; A professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at Harvard Graduate School of Education explained that we have certainly experienced school closures in particular jurisdictions after widespread natural disasters such as in New Orleans after the

hurricane in 2005; But on that global scale? No, certainly not in our generation. We are all in uncharted territory.

As an educator in the Philippines, as part of the Department of Education, I believe that the most important lesson that we should have learned is that; It is always in our best interest [especially for school districts: the grassroots] to have a backup system. The government and the stakeholders should invest in these back - up plans because most of our established systems such as the traditional face-to-face educational pedagogy don't have this sort of alternative at the initial onset of the pandemic. However, we're not only going to construct alternative modifications to get through this crisis, but we should have to develop new, permanent systems, (modular distance learning is amongst the first we have implemented through DepEd's Learning Continuity Plan) redesigned to meet the needs which have been so glaringly exposed in this health emergency.

Amidst all the uncertainties, the pros, and cons that the new normal brought, the educational system took a great beating that forced academic leaders, ministries of education, teachers/ professors, learners, parents and stakeholders alike around the world to actively adapt with this pandemic to 'still make education work' for the benefit of all. Locally the Philippines' Department of Education [DepEd] implemented the blueprint of basic education's transition towards the new normal through its Learning Continuity Plan [LCP] back in SY: 2020 - 2021.

Transitions have been defined as phases of life changes connected with developmental demands that require intensified and accelerated learning and that are socially regulated (Griebel & Niesel, 2004). Transitions are also characterized as phases of heightened vulnerability (Wustmann, 2004). Examples in adult life are marriage, birth of the first child, graduate schooling, or divorce; practically any event that are built from fresh or novel experiences of a person such as this new normal in the educational system that frontliners of education [mainly our teachers] began to address since the beginning of the pandemic. Transitions can stimulate further development, but under adverse

conditions lasting difficulties can occur, leading to problematic behavior with disadvantageous consequences. An advanced theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987) suggests that the individual appraisal of critical life events [such as this COVID-19 pandemic] has to be considered. If a demand is regarded as a challenge, it motivates additional effort to cope (Griebel & Niesel, 2005).

From the perspective of transition, coping and development are a key focus; that is why this simple article is of high value. This short anecdote of mine is a reminder that we are still in this situation of pandemic. The global emergency subsided but the effects of COVID - 19 are prevalent in all levels of formal education and schooling. We should move forward with resiliency with the aid of DepEd's policy making plus our commitment to our work as teachers and educators in the classroom, the online set-up, asynchronous communication, modular/ digital and all other alternative modes that will bridge the teaching - learning gap leading us all towards the achievement of that goal: The 21st century teachers with our 21st century learners; trained, equipped, and active partakers for the betterment of our communities and our country.

References:

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