EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by a new strain of coronavirus which was unknown prior to the December 2019 outbreak in Wuhan, China. Here in the Philippines, our first case was reported in January 2020. Our lives have never been the same since then.

This COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected all kinds of people, from all walks of life. It has no regard for age, sex, and social status. It has impacted all aspects of our daily lives – from the way we dress and protect ourselves up to and especially with the way we interact with one another. Going out except when necessary is discouraged if not prohibited.

These mandatory health restrictions and protocols make our conventional educational setting, where the students sit down in a classroom for the duration of the regular school hours, practically impossible. While we recognize the paramount importance of education, we cannot disregard the serious health risks, which the conventional setting imposes not only upon the students and teachers but also upon the entire community. Having these laid out, it compelled our government, chiefly the Department of Education (DepEd) to come up with a policy for the continuance of the Philippine education system bearing in mind the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the DepEd prioritizes the welfare and health of the students and teachers, the approaching opening of classes for the school year 2020-2021 will not be face-to-face. This has given birth to the alternative learning modalities. Among these alternative modes are Distance Learning through (a) Online Digital Modules, (b) Offline Digital Modules, (c)
Television, Radio, and Printed Modules, and (d) Printed Modules; Blended Learning through Television, Radio, Digital Mediums, and Printed Modules; and Homeschooling. Distance Learning Modalities are for those students who have access to laptops, desktop computers, tablets, smartphones, televisions and radios. It can also be done through printed modules. Blended Learning Modalities are for those who have laptops, desktop computers, tablets, smartphones, televisions, radios, and have access to digital mediums. Homeschooling is for those students who have someone at home who can guide them in their studies.

The alternative learning delivery modalities underline the innovative part of technology in making possible the continuation of the education system today. It takes advantage of the gadgets and devices, which the students, although not all, already have at their disposal. This is without saying that those students who have no access to laptops, computers and devices of the same kind are guaranteed not to be left behind. Learning modules will be provided by DepEd without fee.

Regardless of the modality, the parents and the guardians of the students, now more than ever, play an important role in ensuring that the students continue to learn and understand what they must do.

This framework has never been done before. Inevitably, these modes pose worry and new challenges both upon the students and their parents on one end, and upon the teachers on the other. Such are apart from the strain which the DepEd and the government in general must triumph over. The situation may seem hazy to all of us considering that this is unprecedented. As with any beginning, this may be the hardest hurdle that our education system, apart from those existing systemic problems pre-COVID 19, must hurdle.

The better choice we have with the cards we are dealt by the circumstances of this virus is to brave this storm with a strong spirit and a hopeful mind. We have no other
option but to face this new normal. It is uncertain when we can go back to how we live our lives prior to this virus or if we can really go back to that at all. At the present, we are forced to learn to co-exist with COVID-19 as the world combats with it, and a massive part of that is our public education system’s solution - the alternative learning delivery modalities.

References:
