HOW DO EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS ARE BEING AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC IN THE NEW NORMAL?

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It is the start of another school year. Customers are lining up in school supply stores. The working groups of commuters are joined by the crowd of students who are patiently waiting for a jeepney, bus, or train ride. The gigantic school banners welcome old and new faces. The buzzing sound from the endless chitchats of the students is reverberating along the hallways and rooms. High school and college students could be seen laughing, teasing, and shouting as they excitedly greeted and welcomed one another. Most are wearing their sparkling eyes and contagious smiles because of newly met friends while some new students nervously enter the class, some are shy, and others are quiet. At the same time, teachers are smiling warmly in the four-cornered rooms, ready to face the school year despite its challenging nature as it is a fulfilling vocation.

The typical scene we would see in the opening of classes would always be filled with smiles and excitement. However, these familiar scenes we would see every time the school year begins are not today's reality because of the unforeseen enemy, the COVID 19. Early in 2020 when it plagued the Philippines and abruptly put the whole country in total lockdown, the Filipinos and the rest of the world were left aghast and dumbfounded by the sudden changes it brought in the entirety of life, causing anxiety and depression to many. The old normal that we were used to became too odd. The usual became unusual. It is visibly seen at the facemasks, social distancing, jam-packed hospitals, closed stores, recreational places, limited gatherings, travel restrictions, and remotely operated school institutions.

Hence, the education sector is not an exception to the drastic effects of the pandemic. Schools and classrooms became empty spaces as the gathering of large crowds is
prohibited. However, despite these challenges, the Department of Education and other educational institutions worldwide stand by the principle that learning must not stop, leading to the transition from the old normal to the new normal education. The traditional setup where teachers and students are physically present in the classroom is modified into distance learning. Learners are now studying at home while constantly communicating with their teachers virtually.

In connection with this, teachers continued their pledge to serve and teach minds even in times of uncertainty. Though it was never easy to adapt to changes that one is not prepared for, teachers showed how versatile and resilient they were in handling the setbacks of the pandemic. The piled-up tasks from the creation and distribution of modules, submission of reports, learning of new skills and teaching strategies, and the conduct of classes online while ensuring the holistic development of the students were handled by the teachers professionally. They prepared themselves by attending different webinars to equip and nurture themselves with the needed skills and knowledge in handling the new normal, such as undergoing training in navigating applications and digital technologies and others who enrolled in post-graduate studies.

Similarly, the pandemic also challenged students. Some students cannot engage with their classmates and teachers virtually due to the absence of gadgets or lack of available internet connection, while some do not have a conducive learning environment at home, to begin with. This transition from classroom to home and physical discussions to online discussions lead to worries of some students and parents who cannot afford to study remotely during these times. However, because of the continuous support of the parents, teachers, and the government, these burdens were lessened. There are schools that have partnered up with the local government to ask for assistance for gadgets, internet, and financial aid. There are also donations from concerned citizens that have helped the struggling students. Also, since the students went beyond their comfort zones, they were able to face this new system. And despite their vulnerability during these challenging
times, they still continued to attend their classes and strive to defy the odds along the way.

Hence, teachers and students played a significant role in the success of teaching and learning in the new normal. They were able to adapt to all the facets of the new system. They were able to grow despite the hardships. With the help of their families, the government, and other institutions, the new normal education became an avenue of unity and camaraderie among the citizenry. This proves that dedication, passion, action, and unity are the springboard to success. With this, we earnestly hope and pray that everyone will be able to fight until such time that the pandemic is over and we will be in a better normal.

References:


