TEACHERS THE UNSUNG HEROES OF 2020

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It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a good educator to truly teach one.

As much as the previous months have completely challenged everyone’s outlook in life, be it in its brevity or vastness, there is no doubt that the time spent in isolation has also been a witness to countless acts of bravery, kindness, and selfless sacrifice. From the medical frontliners, who face the battle inside hospitals head-on, to family breadwinners braving the daily bustle of commute in order to put food on the table, we see modern acts of heroism left and right that we tend to overlook a number of them; works interspersed with everyday lives that they become hidden in plain sight.

Belonging to the group of those left under the radar are the very people who spend considerable time nurturing the minds of our youth. As academic institutions welcomed the reality of online distance learning, the traditional educational system was subjected to a deep overhaul, dragging the entirety of the Filipino teacher populace at such breakneck speed. Within the four months given to prepare the requirements of a new learning modality, faculty members were expected to flawlessly bridge the gap between the new and traditional. Teachers in both higher and lower academic institutions are forced to create virtual setups in their own homes, including veterans that have limited understanding of computers and today’s digital software.

Unfortunately, talking to a screen for hours on end is not the only change that teachers from all over the world are meant to overcome. With students as the first priority, their work does not end in ensuring that knowledge is efficiently delivered. Educators are also tasked to confirm that every student is faring well during an ongoing
crisis for they play a highly crucial role in providing psychosocial support to learners (Aperribai, Cortabaria, Aguirre, et. al.). This rush of new responsibilities as students brace for the new normal brings an onslaught of problems ranging from technical, economical, and at times, even psychological.

With all of these considered, it is imperative to remember that teachers have a role outside lessons and modules too. They are also parents, providers, or siblings who juggle professional responsibilities with personal ones, and like the rest of us, may also be vulnerable to serious declines in mental health and well-being. A study centered on teachers’ physical activity and mental health during the pandemic lockdown has shown higher levels of distress due to workload generated during isolation (Aperribai, Cortabaria, Aguirre, et. al.), further stating that loss of contact from interpersonal relationships negatively impacted the way they deal with emotional stress. During the months succeeding the implementation of online distance learning, unions formed by students and faculty members have emerged, aiming to demand government accountability and petitioning a nationwide academic break, saying that, “one student left behind is still a student left behind” and questioning the country’s readiness for its sudden, unprepared switch for a new learning modality.

The situation instigated by the pandemic has posed a magnanimous challenge to the human race, and it goes to show that even educators, one of the pillars of our society, can also be prone to countless tolls on mental and physical health. Before this year comes to an end, let us pass the kindness forward and salute the efforts of teachers by campaigning for the just compensation they rightfully deserve. However, there is only so much that the faculty can do to educate. Parents should provide a safe space for a child to learn in the confines of his home. The government should ensure that the vision to equal access to education still lives by taking measures toward digitization even to remote areas in our country. The assumed responsibility of teachers will only be
absolute if parents and leaders of this nation would go hand in hand in securing the future of the youth.

References:
