

Educators' bridging opportunities during the new normal

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Abstract: The Corona Virus, or COVID-19, created massive changes to what we used to do in our daily lives. The disruption of this pandemic was felt and experienced by many countries, by many families, many individuals, even at work and in school. This article aims to show how dedicated and passionate teachers are in their profession, particularly today. As you progress, you will learn about the experiences, suffering, and hardships that we go through, which will be an unforgettable experience for the future educator. This pandemic created new challenges as well as solutions. This crisis brings us another opportunity to develop our skills, explore new learning styles, and enhance our behavior by being resilient, cooperative, and helpful towards other people. This will convey the path we go through to finish this school year and at the same time show how teachers manage students to stay motivated and continue to learn.

Keywords: Challenges, COVID-19, Education, Quarantine experiences, Self-paced learning

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. "CO" stands for corona, "VI" for virus, and "D" for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold (Bender, 2020). COVID-19 is a disease that may be transmitted through direct contact like hand shaking, talking at a distance, coughing, sneezing, touching the object that was touched by the positive person.

The COVID-19 outbreak affects our lives; the way we live; and even going to school, which we used to do, is prohibited. There are also new modalities of learning arising, such as modular distance learning. This refers to allowing learners to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format/electronic copy, whichever is applicable in the context of the learner, and other learning resources like Learners Materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials (DepEd, 2020).

Another approach is online distance learning, which features the teacher as facilitator, engaging learners' active participation through the use of various technologies accessed through the internet while they are geographically remote from each other during instructions (DepEd, 2020). The last one is that blended learning will enable schools to limit face-to-face learning, ensure social distancing, and decrease the volume of people outside the home at any given time (DepEd, 2020).

These new modalities are the way teachers work together with the government to make sure learners are still achieving quality education and that they are fostering a meaningful learning process (Toquero, 2021). The modalities are different, but they have the same goal, which is to achieve the intended outcome even though it's limited to paper and pencil activities. However, there are solutions that are being applied to continue education amidst this pandemic. As students and members of a community, we experienced a lot in this pandemic, and through this essay, we document our reflections (Toquero, et al., 2021).

2. Academic shift

Because of this pandemic, there are a lot of activities that are being canceled, especially in the education field, and it affects a lot of our academic endeavors. Many people suffered and many people lost their family, friends, jobs and many more because of COVID-19. Even the school year 2020–2021 was postponed many

times, with the usual opening of classes starting in the month of June, but now it starts in the month of October. Instead of buying new bags, notebooks, shoes, and uniforms, parents are forced to buy gadgets so that their children will not be left behind.

2.1. Quarantine learning experiences

This pandemic required us to go the extra mile and exert a lot of effort which is more stressful than face-to-face. We miss going to school every day. 2020 has been the toughest year for us. There is a lot of discouragement we encounter. Most of the activities are virtual, even the graduation and moving-up ceremonies, which is heartbreaking because they miss the chance to walk in the hallway together with their parents and a bright smile on their faces while wearing the toga of their respective school. But this year also taught us lessons and we discovered ourselves as people that push us to our limit and bring out the best in us. Many of us go out of our comfort zones in order to cope with others. The unity inside the class also improves, especially in our section, where each of us is doing our very best to contribute and extend our hands to help others. This school year also flips everything in just the blink of an eye. It changes our priorities and the way we view things.

This pandemic changed our daily routine. Before the pandemic, we used to wake up early in the morning to go to school, but now we wake up late and stay in the house for the whole day doing household chores and other stuff. Our community is also affected. Before, the children could play outside, but now they are locked up in their houses. Due to this pandemic, we developed other skills in planting, playing Kalimba, and taking care of animals, which are the hamsters, mice, fish, and a rabbit. Also, we used the quarantine as a bonding opportunity for our families, as if we had more time for each other. Instead of focusing on the negativity, why not use the time to develop our skills?



Figure 1: Real-life learning activities during home quarantine

2.2. Educators' extra miles

School Year 2020–2021 is hard on children, particularly those who were orphans and those whose parents are illiterate and can't afford tutors because no one will guide them at home. Many people opposed implementing online classes before the school year began, and the hashtag # AcademicFreeze became trending on all social media platforms; however, DepEd and government officials continued the school year. As we all know, aside from the students and parents, teachers are also suffering because it adds new workloads for them and their health is at risk, but despite this, they're trying their best to bridge the gap and lessen the burden of the students. They are going extra miles just to make sure that no student will be left behind and to ensure students will feel secure and motivated.

During this pandemic, many of us cross our minds to not enroll, or some of us want to stop along the way because of the challenges we encounter, like lack of internet connection, lack of gadgets or tools, etc. But here we are still continuing, hoping that we can all survive up to the end of this crisis. Aside from the moral support we get from our families, the motivation we get from our teachers is also a big help to us. For example, when we are bombarded with the modules and the teacher's motivational message pops up on our screen for us, it's so heart-warming for the fact that they are also struggling, but they still give time just to check on their students. Their simple sending of emojis means a lot to us, students. The patience and dedication they have are unconditional. As we have observed, teachers and the educational system are striving hard to create modules and plans of lessons that are easy for us to digest and understand. This implies that they are putting so much effort just to provide academic continuity during the pandemic.

2.3. Contextualized teaching approach

Teaching is not an easy profession that plays a vital role in society. For now, it is very important for us to listen, accept feedback, and make sure that we always have that room for improvement. In order for us to become effective teachers, we should be flexible. In this new normal way of learning, teachers should make sure the modules are appealing and attractive to the students, especially in elementary. As we all know, students are more into colorful pictures, stories, and songs than just plain text. Therefore, in order to address the students' needs, they should integrate stories, songs, and pictures into their lessons to encourage them. Aside from that, teachers should also make sure the examples they provide in the modules are contextualized, like by creating scenarios related to COVID-19 so that students can relate. In addition, they should also create modules that cater to the multiple intelligences and different learning styles of students. The phenomena of today challenge educational systems to create not so hard activities but ones that have a big impact on children's lives and that will stay for a long time.

3. Conclusion

COVID-19 brings massive negativity to all of us in all aspects. It brings us to a new normal that we are not familiar with; it changes our daily routines and our behavior and mindset. This phenomenon is an eye opener, especially for us future educators. It made me realize how big the role of a teacher is in our society and how important communication and connection are to our learners. This pandemic emphasized the importance of unity in the community to ensure that we establish the goals and objectives we want. This phenomenon should serve as a lesson to our government that we should invest more in our educational systems and improve the internet connection we have in our country (Toquero, Calago & Pormento, 2021). As a future educator, we should always aim to create an impact on our society. As I have observed, the main reason for the rapid spread of the deadly and contagious disease is a lack of discipline among the people; therefore, as future educators, we must always ensure that our students have that self-discipline, even if no one is watching. This pandemic caused agony for a lot of people who lost loved ones, jobs, and changed the way they live. But the silver lining of this is that we learn to not depend on others because everyone has their own priorities. Aside from that, we also learn to manage our time and activities because no one is watching. We also discovered new things about ourselves and due to this pandemic, we encounter challenges in different fields. However, we have solutions to those problems, like despite those challenges, we have to remain brave, resilient, cooperative, and develop collaboration to fight this pandemic and challenges. We should take these new discoveries to heart and memorize them. So, when given the opportunity in the future, we know better (Orendain & Djalante, 2020).

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Acknowledgment

For every success, there are always people behind it. Therefore, the authors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the following people who supported and helped with the completion of this paper: To our parents, Jacinto G. dela Peña, Racquel G. dela Peña, Joselyn B. Enad, Jesus M. Enad, Ernielyn V. Areglo, and Zosimo M. Areglo, for supporting us morally, emotionally, and financially and helping us without any hesitation. Above all, we would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to God Almighty for showering us with wisdom, knowledge, and strength to finish this essay.

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