

Old Mind-set, Values and Ethics, and Stakeholder Partnership and Accountability: Inputs to School Leadership in the New Normal

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A. Introduction

It is without a doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has surprised the world in numerous ways. The society has faced drastic shifts in its usual way of life even in the simplest form: social distancing, mask wearing, frequent hand washing, among others. The race towards the development of COVID-19 vaccine may be underway, and as of press time, we are still banking on what has been known in the past, and what we are currently experiencing in the present in visualizing the “new normal”. As Berwick (2020) puts it, the pandemic’s significance remains undefined, as “new normal” surfaces and starts to transpose ways and processes we previously held.

Cutting-edge technological breakthroughs have made our usual transactions more responsive to the need of contemporary times. The usual face to face meetings are now held through online applications, food delivery services are on the rise instead of the usual dine-in experience. To combat the transmission of COVID19, technology is used in unison with medical interventions,

along with consideration given to “local, depending on the local governance, socio-economic and cultural context” (Shaw, et al., 2020). True enough, the restrictions brought about by the pandemic have introduced innovations and opportunities, or probably giving much attention to things we used to ignore before. Chick et al. (2020) noted how the current health crisis necessitates “flexibility” in the part of students and teachers, including those learning modalities that need to be revisited.

What’s new in the “new normal”? What made us dub it as “new”?

According to Mukherjee, et al. (2020), the current health crisis brings effects that are “beyond measures”. Since the advent of the pandemic, education institutions around the world have been aggressive in response to the challenges of home quarantine, infrastructure limitations for learning, and even internet connectivity. Bayman & Fenichel (2020) as schools close, virus spread could be reduced, along with surge of new cases. Embracing digital technology in relation to teaching and learning has been the talk of the town in the early months of 2020. Schools are expected to offer provision so it becomes central to “development, learning, and achievement of the children and youth for whom they are responsible” (Crepeau-Hobson, 2020).

Whether offered as a temporary or permanent solution, virtual learning is now posed as a solution so teaching and learning will still pursue amidst lockdown and restricted physical interaction. It is also crucial to note how some institutions have struggled and faced resistance from students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders as new forms of teaching and learning are introduced. The success of organization initiatives can be greatly attributed to leadership mind-set that create,

implement, enhance, and strengthen proactive notions in relation to our experiences before, during and even after the pandemic. According to Stern (2013), “crises are poignant reminders” of the significance of critical leadership role in strengthening communities in the midst of the challenge.

This chapter argues particular inputs to school leadership in time of pandemic. It goes beyond the usual notes on online learning and remote teaching, but rather it provides an emphasis on organizational development perspectives leading to leadership reflection and analysis: how do we lead, why do we lead? According to Schoeffel & Ho (2020), the school’s game plan in time of COVID19 may pertain to a sustainable “home-supported learning”, incorporating “return to school approach”.

There is a serious need to accept and realize that a different form of leadership attributes and skills are prerequisites in the current pandemic. The current situation has called us to be critical of how we see the coming months and how we visualize the future of schooling. School leadership in time of pandemic exposes us to plan, implement, and forecast in a period that is very unpredictable. In the midst of a crisis, six divergent leadership tasks surface: “preparing, sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, terminating and learning” (Brennan & Stern, 2017).

Technology will always be a consistent part of school organization’s vocabulary, especially in the education sector. However, as things would always zero-in to computers, connectivity, and e-learning, it is also imperative to note that there are exceptions to this rule, especially in a country like the Philippines which is frequently bombarded by sky-rocketing charges for mobile data, yet being served by struggling internet

connectivity which puts snail-mail delivery service to shame. This issue has been affirmed by Pastor (2020) revealing issues about concerns on internet access in the country.

For one to assume that our 2020 academic experience is all about successfully delivering online learning and remote teaching, a serious critical reflection is needed. Esposito & Principi (2020) even identified the repercussion of closing schools, noting it could prime serious problems in the medical, economic, and social aspects. Online learning and remote teaching are just the tip of the iceberg especially when those clearly left behind are the marginalized and the poorest of the poor in our community. While the pre-pandemic narrative has already showcased a divide among social classes and rich-poor dichotomy, access to internet has heightened this divide as it echoes another struggle: access to equitable education.

B. Discussion

1. Old mind-set out, new normal in

It is important to recognize the bureaucracy of the education system in dealing with the current ordeal. The next crucial thing to examine is how our school leaders learn from past experiences and use this to facilitate ideas and processes in the midst of the pandemic. Do we stick to the old ways of deciding over a particular issue which would go through bureaucratic systems? Do we still advocate the “we used to do it like this, we should do it like this” show? If yes, then what makes it “new” if our thinking is still old? As Sakellarides. (2020) puts it: “s mindset change, from threat to ingenuity,” reminding ourselves that we are in the middle of the pandemic is one step towards acting like we are really in the middle of a pandemic.

New normal calls for aggressive and out-of-the-box leadership pathways. As Rogers & Bolinsky (2010) stated, the definition and measure of today's leadership could be weighed via global mindset. It may be true that none of us have faced this kind of pandemic before, but a proactive and future-leaning perspective will surely go a long way. Let the old mind-set be the guide in practically weighing how issues could be resolved instead of worsening and prolonging wastage because of traditional and old ways of dealing with problems and challenges. Opinions from Liguori & Winkler (2020) call for a "higher levels of preparedness" in order to accelerate fine-tuning various modalities suitable to experiences, conditions, and perspectives. The lessons of the past should ignite our passion to deliver sound, efficient, and effective education services to our stakeholders. If a traditional process would take weeks to resolve because of numerous channels that it had to go through, organizational leaders in the new normal must find ways to expedite this practice so time and effort could be diverted to similar or more pressing issues that we face.

The current pandemic reveals school leaders who are able to juggle and come up with a good balance of theory, practice, and sixth-sense. These school leaders are well-informed of the rationale behind things: how learning takes place, how teachers are motivated, how school affairs are managed. They are able to justify the occurrence of things in and out of school and why stakeholders act the way they do. Servant leadership and integrity breed beneficial returns on the principal performance (Malingkas, et al., 2018). However, these alone cannot suffice visualizing the entire school leadership spectrum: theories are as good as an ideal picture. This is where practice comes in.

Sound leadership decisions made in or about schools are grounded on firm and actual practical experience of the school leader. School leadership in practice puts theoretical know-how into test. How a school performs a particular tasks, either instructional or academic echoes the depth and breadth of one's own experience, as guided by theories. According to Cerutti, et al. (2020); *"the strategic leader knows and takes care of every talent within work teams and is responsible for helping people understand the organizational strategy and how their work contributes to business results."* Every single action is rooted on the concept of rationality, logic, and other principles he or she may be subscribed to. Practice, not grounded on theory is simply a hit or miss drill. Theory without practice is an opportunity refused to be taken.

And we are now in the middle of a pandemic. School parents are worried about the learning continuity of their children, teachers are anxious about delivering quality instruction by employing various modalities. Will a school leader's theory and practice under his belt be enough to be affirmative in the quest? This is where sixth sense comes in.

With strong theoretical foundations at hand, backed up by solid and firm practice, the school needs a leader who is able to navigate his own way in this pandemic scenario and eventually position him as a game changer will lead to beneficial results and positive gains. The school leader's sixth sense will determine how to gauge actions that provide solutions to pressing issues against actions and process that are deemed out-of-date, old fashioned and invalid given the present condition. School leaders overcome challenges by being "active problem solvers", initiative-drivers, and being bold to "do the heavy lifting" (Fiarman, 2017)

New normal does not become 'new' if we still subscribe to old mind-set and traditional way of thinking that fails to challenge our current situation. It is called new normal because school leaders are expected to offer enhanced, aggressive, and authentic solutions to seemingly new challenges that we face. The moment school leaders undress their styles with the old practices and way of thinking, he is embracing the opportunity to redress the brand of leadership with a more responsive, appropriate, and innovative lens to view the new normal.

2. School leadership towards values and ethics in teaching and learning

While the pandemic creates a niche to test previously held beliefs and ideas with uncertainty in mind, it is also without a doubt that it offers a stage to strengthen current applicable practices, even introduce innovation. Teaching and learning in these trying times obviously yields complaints, backlash, and criticism. From possible stakeholder disapproval due to flawed policy and planning in the new normal, this could be taken as a golden opportunity to harness one delicate aspect that needs retrospection whether or not the society is plague by pandemic: values and ethics.

As teachers deliver their lessons online and students focus their attention in the computer screen, the experience deviates teaching and learning from being 'humane' and 'warm'. It would literally feel working with machines, as if fulfilling a very routinary and mechanical task. Restoring moral values could happen once moral standards are advanced (Dev, 2017). In a world filled with doubt, anxiety, and fear, teaching and learning could be utilized as a weapon in empowering individuals to be agents of transformation in building resilient

communities who teach and learn as one, who heal and recover as one.

The prerequisite to setting a foot forward towards inculcating values and ethics in the teaching and learning process is the ability to match student needs and what teachers can offer, to align teachers' criterion to successful instruction and what is provided to them. Mohr & Mohr (2017) stated that to effectively address the academic needs of students, a generational understanding should be in place. A community who realizes, understands, and accepts a particular need is a community one step away from fulfilling these needs.

Why values and ethics at this very critical period?

The challenges of the new normal are won by teachers who go the extra mile beyond the call of duty. Teachers imbued with values and ethics are individuals who at the forefront who champion essential ideals that are of great importance to the society especially in the time of COVID 19 pandemic. These teachers are equipped with moral compass that directs them to harness their craft despite the challenges that they face. A school leader should be someone who can demonstrate how values and ethics are reflected in daily tasks in and out of school.

As school leader performs the prime duty of protecting and advancing the welfare of students in school (Buckmaster, 2016), he is transformed into the archetype of an individual who sets an example to realize organizational goals by being futuristic, competitive, and results-oriented. If we want our teachers to deliver their best performance in terms of instruction, lesson planning, and commitment, the school leader should be the first one to emulate these characteristics. One cannot just go and expect teachers to work harder and take serious challenges just because we are in the middle of a

pandemic: school leaders need to do it first, they need to show how to do it first. School leaders lead by example first, then teachers will follow.

The advent of online learning can also serve as a platform not just for academic discourse but also for revitalizing values, ethics, and moral character. As students spend time at the comforts of their home following distance learning protocols, the curriculum could facilitate campaigns to advance values education and ethical conduct. According to Almanthari, et al., (2020), as students learn online, they tend to acquire lessons that could provide them with the skills they need in life.

Teachers could design lessons that highlight learning outcomes facilitated through authentic life applications. As technology gets in its way in the streams of teaching and learning, it is crucial to note that this fact poses challenges in the context of education and technology in the contemporary times. Education central to values and ethics must first recognize that students and teachers make up a globalized community as the population sees connection and engagement via online means. According to Yoon (2020), the COVID19 pandemic can serve an opportunity to “deepening their understanding about the interconnected world as global citizens.”

The concept of respect of oneself and of others could be streamlined as students attend to their online and offline duties. Online and social media etiquette could be tapped for every online learning session so teachers and students alike could have a responsible and respectful online learning experience. These rules and protocol could help transform engagement less of issues and fun (Wiederhold, 2020). Teaching digital citizenship and being vigilant amidst the spread of fake news and the challenges of the presence of online communities. Once these are

integrated in the instructional practice and learning habits, schools in the form of online classrooms could be a safe and secured space.

3. Genuine stakeholder partnership and accountability

When was the last time our community leaders have entered our school premises? Probably during a school-based program when the presence local or community officials was required, especially for documentation purposes. Or during the preparation for school opening when schools literally partner with communities and stakeholders for logistics and support. During pre-pandemic era, stakeholder partnership has been an on-off relationship that requires activation each time there is a need that should be fulfilled.

As part of the ecosystem, the individuals of the local community are hidden treasures waiting to be found. Our community peace-keepers, small-scale business people, and those that surround our school fences are waiting to be tapped and would be glad to be of help, simply because their child, or any family member is a member of the school community and they see it as one way of contributing to the school that educates their children. Wang, et al. (2020) noted that with the currently implemented quarantine, parents are the “closest and best resource” for students. However, the challenge still remains are previous notion of teaching and learning is limited to students, teachers, and school staff or officials alone. As opined by Burgess & Sieversten (2020), a child learning mathematics could be aided by a parent through counting or linking mathematics in daily life. Engagement with the community is limited only to what the community can provide to school, outside academics.

School leadership in time of pandemic is an opportunity for leaders to maximize this occurrence in forging legitimate, long-term, and fruitful relationship to those outside the school gates. As schools brace for the opening of the new academic year, we have seen calls for donations and volunteer individuals who could help in facilitating processes in the new normal in education. We gradually realize how stakeholders could elevate the discourse in addressing the challenges of the pandemic.

COVID19 has posed school leaders a challenge: forge genuine stakeholder partnership and accountability. Involving local officials in the community to deliver modules to students could cement their role as significant members not just of the school community, but of the society as a whole. Teachers and students will also find it as a viewpoint in weighing how each other has contributed to make teaching and learning possible in the middle of a health crisis. Local and small scale business people have also done their fair share in terms of their monetary donations and this surely goes a long way. The school leader needs to see it as a welcoming act to pave way for continuity and deepening of a meaningful partnership. Above all, solid communication lines define partnership and synchronization among stakeholders (WHO, 2019).

The school leader must facilitate the transition from the stakeholder's commitment to partner and work with the school system, to assuming accountability. Breeding a culture of responsible and able individuals who can create an equitable school system is what we need in the contemporary time. It goes beyond looking what is lacking and criticizing what is missing; these committed individuals are becoming part of a school ecosystem that is solution-driven, proactive, and result-focused. In a study by Faherty, et al. (2019), effective stakeholder

communication is one key aspect towards implementing precautionary measures in schools during a pandemic. Now, more than ever, is the most appropriate timing to develop and nourish a linkage that would sustain mutual gains of the school and its stakeholders. Once the local community is involved, school-to-school collaboration may also be eventually initiated; public-private partnership may be sparked during these trying times. This pandemic is an opportunity to share and polish practices as we learn from each other's ways in terms of gains and lessons achieved.

C. Conclusions

The catastrophe of the pandemic has created an effect on our respective lives as it worsens pressing problems that we have been facing even before the COVID19 era. As expected, we embrace huge losses in terms of economic, social, and even education aspects. Various sectors considered to be at risk face struggle to survive in the hope of appropriate, efficient, and result-driven measures in the midst of collapse and demise.

School leaders play a pivotal role in advancing academic achievement of students while promoting teacher support and professional development. Our classrooms may have been transformed depending on physical set-up and modality, but the challenge still remains: learning never stops in the midst of a pandemic.

It is crucial to challenge old mind-set to position temporal demands in terms of planning, decision-making, and implementing school programs and policies. A school leader banks on his previous beliefs and old mind-set as his moral compass, bringing together previously learned lessons. He lets his past experiences to guide him in navigating present-day challenges of the pandemic, while

creating a vision for the future of the school. School leaders also look at the pandemic as a prime time to highlight values and ethics, especially when teaching and learning processes are now held in various modalities. Students and teachers may encounter issues related to interfacing, behaviour, mind-set, and outlook. A school leader brings the best in this biggest challenge: a humane teaching and learning experience primarily employing digital technology. Lastly, a proactive and genuine partnership between schools, stakeholders, and linkages could spark initiatives in taking steps towards success in the academic experiences of the students. Stakeholders and linkages working hand in hand in the light of the pandemic cements crucial path that contributes to efforts to make teaching and learning a reality despite the health crisis. Together, these stakeholders will succeed as one.

Nobody knows what the school year 2020 – 2021 will bring. Things are filled with uncertainties and the education system is faced with gigantic tasks that need to be resolved in terms of teaching and learning. School leaders are at the forefront of this scenario: prepared, competent, and futuristic. The new normal needs school leaders who are ready to undress old mind-set while upholding values and ethics rooted on stakeholders' genuine participation and partnership.

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