

# Kaya Pa Ba Prend? A Collection of School Principals' Thoughts on School Governance this COVID-19 Pandemic (Can You Still Bear It Friend? A Collection of School Principals' Thoughts on School Governance this COVID-19 Pandemic)

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**Abstract:** *This article presents a collection of thoughts from the select junior high school principals of government schools in the Philippines who are friends and/or acquaintances of the author regarding their personal experiences in managing respective schools this COVID-19 pandemic. How do they cope up with the sudden changes in schooling brought by the global pandemic? Can they still handle the pressure and expectations of their stakeholders? This paper will attempt to give answers on the said queries.*

**Keywords** — *school principals, school governance; COVID-19 pandemic*

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## 1. THE BEGINNING OF THOUGHTS

Home has been a big part of my office since COVID-19 conquered the globe last March of the previous year. From the conventional reporting to duty in school through a daily 70-kilometer ride from home to my school station, and another 70-km ride back home, I am now appreciating the four corners of my house for being a good extension of my office for more than a year.

At my present age of nearly becoming a member of the *Wise Men and Women of the Society* as I called it [ahahaha], commonly known as Senior Citizens, I really need to adhere to the minimum health protocols of the government to finish this battle against COVID-19 alive and kicking. Health safety, of course, just like everyone else, should be the priority for our family and loved ones.

Spending lots of time working at home is good, or much better at first glance. You have the freedom to wear whatever you want while working, you can enjoy taking care of your pets while doing some paperwork, you can have coffee on your favorite giant mug whenever you want, and you can perform personal exercises routines whenever you want. However, no matter how much freedom you have at home while working, you will always be missing your *tete-a-tete* in the office while working. You'll be missing the noise of the learners while talking enjoyably with their classmates and the personal conversations of the teachers with their colleagues.

After each day, I am looking forward to the days that this pandemic is over. Praying hard that after all these trials, I will be able to meet all my relatives and friends, all my faculty members and fellow workers in DepEd, and all learners who always make my date beautiful prior to the quarantine restrictions. Likewise, during lean time, I keep on thinking how my friends, who are education leaders like me, are doing and thinking during the quarantine period. I believe that each of us

has a unique experience that is worth sharing to ease the uncertainties and doubts that we are experiencing as key persons in our respective schools. With this thought, I decided to use my chatting moments with them to discover how they live a normal life as school officials this pandemic time.

## 2. THE GATHERING OF THOUGHTS

Talking with friends is always fun, especially with your trusted ones, and took that opportunity to know what is on their minds these pandemic days. I am much interested to know how they cope up with the sudden changes in schools brought by COVID-19 and if can they still handle the expectations and pressure of their respective stakeholders. Informal conversations with them gave me a chance to capture their thoughts and I tried my best to document those responses to the best that I could. Of course, the anonymity of my 15 friends and acquaintances, was taken care of very well. I sought their consent afterwards if I could use their responses for my article to be written and those individuals gave me their big yes that made me feel so grateful as ever.

Any outputs of this article will just be my personal collection for self-reflection and encouragement to poster positivism in the service. But of course, I am not limiting anyone who will find time to read this paper to utilize any important thoughts from this humble work of mine. Other might find this paper an input for a better cause, and such cause might for the goodness of the greater majority. Putting it on the context of school leadership and management, as Cabigao (2019), a good friend of mine wrote in his paper: "inputs on the existing policy guidelines based on the findings of a study may be necessary to strengthen the performance indicators of quality leadership among school heads that will further improve the quality of schools we have today".

### 3. THE DIVERSITY OF THOUGHTS

Here now are the thoughts of the fifteen goods souls whom I considered friends and acquaintances in the profession. My DepEd world became bigger as I attended the School Heads Development Program (SHDP) of DepEd through the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP). For almost five weeks, we were together on the same venue and continued our quest collaboratively to become better versions of school leaders. Our connection with one another never ended after our completion ceremony. That fact made way to accomplish this task of collecting their genuine thoughts on the topic of this paper.

#### 3.1. Coping Up With The Sudden Change

Coping mechanism is defined by GoodTherapy.org (2018) as: “the strategy people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions. Coping mechanisms can help people adjust to stressful events while helping them maintain their emotional well-being.” With my friendly conversations to my 15 informants, in an informal dialogue, I have solicited the following emergent themes:

*May Bukas Pa [There Still Tomorrow].* “Leave some work for tomorrow, you cannot finish it all today.” At the first few months of the implementation of enhanced community quarantine in Luzon, March to May of 2020, the situation became so new for teachers and school principals. No one was allowed nor required to go to school due to health restrictions. DepEd people then were chatting with each other sending memes on what to do and how to finish each day while doing nothing at home. People were keep on waiting on the instructions regarding the quarantine. Generally, everyone was relieved from their tasks at work, so does with teachers and personnel.

However, as the opening of school was nearing, one by one, tasks to be done at home was coming. As days passed by, school principals received reports to be submitted, and forwarded it to the right persons in their respective schools. Teachers began their preparations through various submission of data for identification of the most appropriate distance learning delivery modalities for their learners. Days passed the same way, more and more reports had to be submitted, unending urgent paperwork became a way of life at home. To face this new way of work life, the informants’ way of coping up is prioritizing which tasks have to be done for the day. All tasks cannot be done the same day, so they said that finding ways to rest and relax amidst the voluminous works is the best way to stand positive this pandemic period.

*Magkasakit ay Di Biro [Getting Sick Is Not A Joke].* “Nobody is responsible for our own help but ourselves. Our best doctors are ourselves.” Health is wealth as a classic adage says. Informants stated that their personal health status is their main concern since the beginning of the pandemic. This concern may be related to their age since more than two third of them are in the age of late 50’s. Despite the tasks to be done

with high level of urgency from the requiring offices, school principals made sure that they were abiding with the minimum health protocols, more so with the daily intake of vitamins and intake of healthy and nutritious foods every meal. Having regular exercise came to their minds but only few of them actually did it. Most of them resorted to cooking and planting, thus the new words *plantitos* and *plantitas* came into being, as productive outlets of relieving stress brought by the work-from-home scheme. Immersing themselves in various social media platforms, notably Facebook, Tiktok, and YouTube, became part of the informants’ life at home. Regular communication with the teachers through chat and other various means played an important venue despite the distance restrictions, thus allowing teachers to get reminded each day of doing the same way with the parents of their respective learners at home to ensure that everything was well and the teaching-learning engagement worked well.

*Lahat ay May Pinagdaraan [Everyone Bears Challenges].* “Don’t be the cause of stress to others, nor add stress to your fellows.” Spreading the sense of positivism helps a lot in facing the new environment brought by this global health emergency. Being positive, not with the virus but with our thoughts and outlook in life, ease the doubts and fears within us regarding the things that are ahead of us after this pandemic. Respecting one’s sense of privacy and happiness served as a good way of building positive environment each day especially during the first months of the quarantine period. Intruding with somebody else’s life has nothing to do at all, though social media platforms were heavily used in telling one’s daily tasks, accomplishments, and feelings, respect should still be given especially on some instances that seem annoying on our end. After all, it is their posts and not ours, a reflection of their lives and of our own.

#### 3.2. Handling the Pressure and Expectations

As government employees, we work for the best interest of the public, and as DepEd people, our mandate is to ensure the delivery of quality basic education to our schoolchildren. Our services and performance are open to scrutiny by the public, so we can never discredit the importance of meetings their expectations to us as public servants, but these expectations should serve as challenges to us to do our job well each day, and not as to make ourselves pressured with that.

*Trabaho Lang, Walang Personalan [Just Working, Nothing Personal].* “We have personal lives apart from being school leaders, we need privacy of course.” A foreign references tells us that, and I quote: “The right to privacy is difficult to define but has come to include a wide range of overlapping and interrelated rights protecting the individual’s freedom as long as his/her actions do not interfere with the rights and freedoms of others. The right to privacy is the right to individual autonomy that is violated when states interfere with, penalize or prohibit actions which essentially only concern the individual.” (Icelandic Human Rights Centre, 2021)

Though the informants are expecting a sense of private life, they understand well the urgency of some reports to be submitted to the higher offices. Evenings and weekends invited school principals to communicate the tasks for completion to their respective personnel. Easing the burden with their teachers, they tried to build a friendly rapport with their people so as not to misconstrued instructions as infallible orders but a collaborative task for the service of the Filipino schoolchildren. This thought indeed manifested high level of commitment among school principals and being shared to their teachers in school.

**Maging Matatag sa Tuwina [Always Be Strong].** “Worrying will just make things worse.” Spending times on things that are undoable is considered a waste of time, so better think of possible ways to do the impossible. As Holland (2018) reminds us, from her words: “While worrying can be motivating and constructive, it is easy to overuse, draining your energy and instilling fear. Rather than use worry to drive your behavior toward a clear resolution, it can distract you, muddying up your decision-making process and prolonging suffering.”

Having positive thoughts invite success in the workplace. School principals shared that building an image of being courageous as school leaders encourage our subordinates to do the same, thus creating an environment of education soldiers who are capable of tackling the challenges of schooling on this trying times. Having the courage to do our share will never let us down in our quest for a successful school leadership. Working together will make us stronger, and will help us in making the teaching-learning engagement of our teachers and learners effective and meaningful for both parties.

**Matatapos Din Natin Ito [We Can Finish This].** “Everything comes in an end, so does with this COVID-19 Pandemic.” Treasure each day and learn from these new experiences brought by the pandemic. Time will come, hope to be so soon, that this global health emergency will end completely, leaving us lessons that we can utilize for future instances, making us smarter versions of ourselves. While we are in the middle of this battle, we should act very careful not be included in its fatalities but as victors of this fight. Once everything is over, school principals believe that improvement in the system will be felt and continuous improvement will be fostered much better that we had before.

A paper of UNESCO presented an inspiring thought of a teenage girl Stojkowska (2020) on education after the pandemic, she says: “COVID-19 has completely overhauled the world and for many of us students we were introduced to online learning and distance learning for the first time in our lives. After this crisis ends, I hope that we will be able to return to our schools. But more than anything, I hope we return to better education. Where each student thrives and achieves their best to their abilities and interests. These are some of my suggestions and ideas on how we can make that happen.”

#### 4. THE GIST OF THOUGHTS

I am so glad that generally, my friends who served as informants of this endeavor always look on the brighter side of each situation despite this COVID-19. Their passion as school leaders never fade and took the opportunity to become better servants in the new world of work. They keep on adjusting to meet the mandates of the department. As noted in a study prior to this pandemic, school leaders are aligning school practices with DepEd standards to maximize resources in delivering quality services, thus building a good image to school, and they are likewise ensuring that institutional vision, mission, and core values are properly articulated to teachers as their guides in the service (Cabigao, 2016).

Despite the distance learning delivery modality, connection between the parents and teachers did not lose, and so glad to say, has improved a lot. As stated by Cabigao (2014) in an early study, learners need constant encouragement and/or assistance from parents and/or elders in completion of their school requirements, and parents’ active involvement in monitoring the progress of the studies of their children is very essential. With this premise, being connected at home with parents despite the pandemic, will be very essential in the success of each learner.

As a parting statement, let me quote a part of an article of my friend which says: “*We should find joy among ourselves and enjoy our moments while doing all these end reports. Loving things we do will lessen the pressures of time and expectations from all the people around us. Investing our interests on what we are doing will likely produce positive and fruitful outputs. Doing things against our freewill will only lead to frustrations, thus compromising the quality of our services and/or outputs.*” (Cabigao, 2021)

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