

Commitment to Community: Exploring Teachers Responsibility and Challenges

Rommel D. As-il

University of the Cordilleras – College of Teacher Education, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore and identify the Commitment to Community of the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School. The study aims to investigate the teacher's involvement in their communities, the challenges they encounter during their involvement and how they address these challenges. Through the use of data collection from the respondents, the findings revealed that the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School actively practice and execute their Social Responsibilities within their community. The research implies the importance of Community Participation of Teachers towards improving educational outcomes.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Challenges, Management, Teachers, Students, Education.

INTRODUCTION

It is the teachers' core job to teach his/her students. According to [1] "You (teacher) responded to the call and so your mission in the world is to teach, the task entrusted to you in this world". However, a teacher's profession does not end with our students or within the four walls of the classroom. We are bound to render our services to the community. Article III of the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers talks about "The Teacher and the Community". In Section 2 it mandates that "Every teacher shall provide leadership and initiative to actively participate in community movements for moral, social, educational, economic and civic betterment". On the other hand, Section 6 promotes that "Every teacher is intellectual leader in the community, especially in the barangay, and shall welcome the opportunity to provide such leadership when needed, to extend counselling services, as appropriate, and to actively be involved in matters affecting the welfare of the people". Lastly, Section 7 instruct "Every teacher shall maintain harmonious and pleasant personal and official relations with other professionals, with government officials, and with the people, individually or collectively". These Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers covers all public and private school teachers in all educational institutions at the preschool, primary, elementary, and secondary levels whether academic, vocational, special, technical, or non-formal (Article I: Section 2). The above mentioned highlights the importance of teachers, not only in schools but to the community as a whole. Teachers, being a professional and having the skill set and experience can make a great input into various community initiatives and endeavor to advance community's moral, social, education, economic and civic betterment through leadership and active participation. This may encourage and motivate community members to become more involve which can result to a greater sense of responsibility and positive social transformation for all.

Furthermore, Domain 6: Community Linkages and Professional Engagement of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) affirms "the role of teachers in establishing school-community partnerships aimed at enriching the learning environment, as well as the community's engagement in the educative process. This Domain expects teachers to identify and respond to opportunities that link teaching and learning in the classroom to the experiences, interests and aspirations of the wider school community and other key stakeholders. It concerns the importance of teachers' understanding and fulfilling their obligations in upholding professional ethics, accountability and transparency to promote professional and harmonious relationships with learners, parents, schools and the wider community".

School-community partnership offers benefits between the two parties. Reference [11] concluded in their School

Community Journal that “school–community partnerships can be a strong and needed support for local schools while also providing a reciprocal benefit to the community partners. Schools have a variety of partners and partnerships, ranging from local small businesses and nonprofits to large universities and corporations. Each community partner provided unique and individualized support to his or her local school, while also receiving social, emotional, and tangible benefits in return.”

This study supports the research of [10] wherein it is stated in the research that "A teacher sees firsthand how economic situations can affect a student's well-being and performance. A student from a low-income family may be less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, and may have poorer grades than a fellow student from a higher-income family. As an advocate of student success, it is a teacher's responsibility to do what he can to improve conditions, whether by raising concerns to the principal, speaking to parents, coordinating school programs, or participating in social activism in his community". This review underscores that teachers also serve as life mentors of the students at the same time to the community. It is a reminder that teachers are often the first agent within the community in recognizing and responding to students emotional, mental and spiritual needs. In which we can involve the community in addressing these kinds of students' developmental issues. Becoming a good leader means being also a good follower, which means being an effective team member. According to [1] “The Professional Teacher is not an island. He/she works with other professional teachers, some more or less experienced than he/she is. Colleagues are teachers, partners and collaborations. How teacher relates to his/her colleagues in the teaching profession determines if they become one's greatest allies and supporters or one's greatest enemies”. Building a positive relationship with the people around the teachers' profession can result to a more positive and effective learning environment which is beneficial for both parties. One of the benefits of building a positive relationship is it “Hone teacher's social skills – Community immersion as a process opens opportunities for you to learn how to relate to all people with stakes in education. This is important for the teaching profession that considerably involves relating to people – pupil/s students, teachers, administrators, parents, local officials, non-government organizations, and other members of the community. Your effectiveness in teaching is not attributed only to your IQ (Intelligence Quotient) and your expertise. It is also a function, in fact more of a function, of your EQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient)” [2]. A good teacher is someone who can level with the ability of his/her students. By recognizing and addressing the type of intelligence the students possess, the teacher can create more conducive learning environment. The teachers' ability to recognize and address the different skills the students hold is enhanced by engaging in the community where they belong. Community engagement does not only bring benefit between the teacher and the community but also to the educational institution where the teacher is affiliated to. Reference [3] mentioned “To develop additional sources of funding, many local school districts have established partnerships with community groups interested in improving educational opportunities in the schools. Some groups raise money for schools. The American Jewish Committee and the Urban League raised money for schools in Pittsburgh, for example. Other partners adopt or sponsor schools and enrich their educational programs by providing funding, resources or services”. Teachers' community engagement is not a one-sided attempt rather it is a process of give-and-take.

Teachers' willingness to actively participate in community activities also comes with challenges. Reference [13] listed the barriers to involvement in community activities which are 1) teacher's work load 2) community activities viewed as an extra burden 3) Age, depending on the nature of activity 4) time and financial constraints 5) distance between the school and the community and 6) parents lack of cooperation and interest in working with teachers. These are common problems that the Filipino teachers are also facing. With this study, it aims to identify other challenges that the teachers encounter when engaging in community activities and how they address the challenges.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the experiences of the teachers towards commitment to community engagement. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the teacher's experiences/ involvement in community engagement?
2. What are the challenges that the teachers encounter in terms of community engagement and how they address these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative-phenomenological design approach. The researcher used phenomenological approach because the study seeks to analyze the community involvement and the challenges encountered by the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School. Phenomenology is the qualitative research inquiry that explores the lived experiences of the individual, participants truly share the lived experiences which they witnessed [14]. The respondents of the study were ten (10) teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School. The researcher employed Convenience sampling and conducted the research through a one-on-one interview with the respondents.

RESULTS

The following were the data gathered from the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School that was thematized/ categorized to provide a more structured presentation of the findings.

A. Community Engagement

1) *Educational Outreach and Support*: are programs on providing resources, information and community engagement opportunities for teachers to better serve their students.

Outreach Program: Providing school supplies to the community through donations, teachers generously dedicate their time to these initiatives and actively seek sponsors. As stated by one of the teachers, she invites partners to participate in their 'Adopt a School Project', a mechanism which allows private entities to assist public schools in particular aspect of educational program within an agreed period of time [18] and strives to maintain a strong relationship with them.

Community Mapping: An example of community mapping is the literacy mapping conducted by the teachers. They meet with barangay officials to discuss their data on the number of out-of-school youth and adult (OSYA) within the community, followed by visiting different households to gather additional data. This is to have the OSYAs enroll in Alternative Learning System (ALS) a parallel learning system in the Philippines that provides opportunities for out-of-school youth and adult (OSYA) learners to develop basic and functional literacy skills and to access equivalent pathways to complete basic education [19]. One teacher described another form of community mapping involving the tracing of mother tongue: "We conduct house-to-house interviews to gather information on the mother tongue of each household, providing evidence of each child's first language."

Feeding Program: With the objective of raising awareness among children about the benefits of eating vegetables, the teachers have established a partnership with parents, who collaboratively take on the role as cooks. The teachers also seek sponsors and donations from stakeholders. Proper health plays an important role in a student's education. Reference [5] highlighted that food is the chief source of essential materials which the body needs for its well-being. These essential materials are called nutrients. Good food is indispensable for health of all ages of life and for satisfactory growth during infancy, childhood and adolescence.

Brigada Eskwela: a nationwide school maintenance program that engages all education stakeholders to contribute their time, efforts and resources in ensuring that public schools are all set in time for class opening [20]. It typically commences one week prior to the start of classes in public schools. According to a teacher who served as Chairwoman for four years, they send communication letter to the barangays, including various local businesses and government offices, to request donations in cash or kind. The teachers express gratitude for the active participation of some of the community businesses, which offer assistance through financial contributions and in-kind support by providing manpower. Reference [7] highlighted that this yearly activity can foster the spirit of camaraderie among the school stakeholders.

2) *Environmental Stewardship*: this involves educating the community about the environment and leading initiatives that promote the protection and preservation of nature.

Tree Planting and Clean and Green Activities: Contributing to the maintenance and beautification of community

spaces to create a healthier living environment. One of the community-wide cleanup programs the teachers engage to is "Oplan Taob," a campaign initiated by the Department of Health aimed at preventing the spread of dengue fever. They encourage community members to eliminate and clean potential mosquito breeding grounds. Tree planting activities are a frequent community engagement initiative undertaken by the teachers. One of the teachers participated in the "Adopt a Forest Project" at one of the city's watersheds.

3) *Faith-Based Engagement*: Collaboration with the local churches enhances teachers' efforts in community engagement initiatives. According to [15], Churches provide valuable contributions to communities in the areas of direct economic contributions, social services and community volunteering, education and civic skills training, and reduced levels of deviance.

Church Activities: One of the teachers actively participates in church-related events and programs by recruiting community children to join learning sessions and music lessons sponsored by the church. She shared that "it gives her great joy to see that a lot of children are joining."

These community engagement of teachers underscores their role as community leaders and agent of positive change. By active participation in a multitude of different projects, ranging from educational outreach and environmental protection to health and collaboration with different stakeholders, teachers play a crucial role in fostering the overall growth and well-being of the community.

B. Challenges and Management Employed to Address these Challenges.

1) *Financial Constraints*: Utilizing financial resources wisely has been one of the education policy objectives to achieve quality education. However, school leaders in their respective school size faced financial management issues that inspired them to utilize financial management strategies [16].

Due to limited or delayed funding for community projects and initiatives, teachers often face financial strain from having to cover expenses for community-related activities out of their own pockets. This is a prevalent challenge among the teachers. It is a widespread issue that affects the entire country. Similarly, [16] mentioned that in the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) Region III experienced problems with financial management. These challenges involved delayed release of school monthly cash advances, fund insufficiency, lack of adequate experiences and trainings, numerous bookkeeping tasks, unorganized recordkeeping, frequent changing of policies, absence of permanently stationed bookkeeper, and adherence to complex laws and policies. For the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School to address this issue, they frequently seek sponsorship and support from stakeholders. While this is a widespread concern, some teachers have adapted to personally funding these expenses. One teacher expressed that she views these financial contributions as a minor issue and is happily doing it to support her community.

2) *Non-collaborative community members*:

Uncooperative and non-supportive community members present another common challenge for teachers. They often find themselves needing to repeatedly follow up on communications, as many parents tend to forget, and attendance at scheduled meetings is sometimes low. One teacher, who conducted a survey on the use of Mother Tongue within the community, shared that some households are not cooperative, often reluctant to welcome visitors and not taking interviews seriously. Despite the community's negative attitude, the teachers remain committed to engaging with them. Many teachers emphasize the importance of maintaining patience and a positive demeanor, as one teacher advised, "Just smile in response to the community's attitude, and do not take it personally." A comparable study conducted by [17] determined that two of the Obstacles to Citizenship and Social Responsibility are 1) parents and community members who think a schools' primary function is to get students to memorize facts and score well on tests so they can get into college and 2) parents and community members who may protest student involvement in controversial public issues. Sihem Li pointed out that to foster and renew bonds of trust in the community: i.e., "social capital" and to use the neutrality of the campus to provide a common ground where differences of opinion and advocacy for particular points of view can be addressed in an open and constructive ways and where people with similar goals can come together and create ways to work

together. Reference [7] provided one reason for non-participation of parents which can be attributed to the nature of work of the parents. Most of the parents/guardians are in the business sector and housework. These works require much time hence the parents do not have enough time to go to school and attend to the activities.

3) *Environmental Challenge*: various environmental factors can act as impediments to teachers' community involvement.

Despite the city's effort against animal welfare such as approving Ordinance 19, s. 2021 or the "Responsible Dog ownership Ordinance of Baguio City", which consolidates national laws and local enactments on the rules in the care, maintenance and disposition of dogs and the responsibilities of their owners under Republic Act 8485, or the Animal Welfare Act of 1998, RA 9482 or the Anti-Rabies Act of 2007, and various city resolutions and ordinances. The measure is not a mere collection of rules on dogs for nuisance prevention and rabies eradication, but for the welfare of dogs and for the benefit of owners and the community (Baguio Midland Courier, 2021), the **prevalence of stray dogs** remains a pervasive issue not only within the city but across the entire country, posing significant safety concerns for teachers. This situation restricts their ability to conduct community mapping, such as literacy mapping and the tracing of mother tongue, by visiting households. Nevertheless, despite the challenges posed by stray dogs, teachers remain determined to fulfill their duties. One teacher mentioned that she uses her umbrella as a precautionary measure (as a shield) against stray dogs during her visits. To mitigate this concern, reference [6] developed "Paws R Us" an Android-based application where a user can claim and adopt a lost dog or sheltered dog, donate for Paws where a user can donate for pet shelters, frequently asked questions about pet care where the application offers resources and tips for various aspects of pet ownership, search to navigate a specific pet shelter, post or report a paw for verified users and profile navigation. A study that is when fully implemented, can reduce the number of stray dogs on the streets.

Another environmental challenge is the weather in the Philippines which is difficult to predict. There can be stretches of sunny days, only for it to be unexpectedly interrupted by rain and vice versa. Such unpredictability can impede community events. For instance, the start of the school's Brigada Eskwela initiative this year was not completed due to a typhoon. Nevertheless, the teachers make every possible effort to adapt to the prevailing weather conditions. Reference [4] cited recommendations that can be done to address this issue 1) weather forecasts need to be improved and modified to reflect the needs of the community 2) new prediction indices need to be developed to forecast the onset and severity of monsoons and El Ninos in advance and 3) at the local level, climate and weather information should be expressed according to local knowledge and perceptions.

4) *Time Constraints*: Work-life balance (WLB) interests almost everyone with professional career, the widespread interest is partly due to its reflections in all aspects of life. For those people who think the main objective in life is to work, their career becomes the core of life. However, people have limited time and therefore have to perform many other activities other than their job. Without a balance between the two, many mishaps can be experienced in both [9].

Balancing teaching responsibilities with community involvement is a common challenge faced by the teachers, given the limited time available to dedicate to projects outside of school hours. One teacher highlighted the issue, noting a 'heavy daily workload, with weekends dedicated to lesson planning.' Although teachers express a desire to be more involved in community activities, the demanding nature of their profession often restricts their participation. When asked how they manage time constraints, the most common response was to complete paperwork in advance, allowing them sufficient time for community engagement. A similar study by [8] found out that time and rescheduling of the programs is the most common problem encountered. This is because schedules among extension coordinator, volunteer and the beneficiaries were always in conflict. For the providers, early announcement to solve the problems has been possible. Rescheduling of the activity is always seen as the most acceptable to both beneficiaries and providers, which has been the norm.

The challenges faced by the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School in their community involvement are not isolated incidents but are shared by educators across various regions and countries. These common challenges illustrate that teachers globally face challenges in balancing their professional duties with community involvement, emphasizing the need for better support and cooperation worldwide.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the teachers of Manuel L. Quezon Elementary School have demonstrated a commendable commitment to community participation. They have shared various approaches to engaging with the community. Despite encountering numerous challenges, they have employed different ways to manage and overcome these obstacles. As one teacher remarked “There are a lot of challenges, but there are also a lot of ways for a teacher to overcome and address the problems”. This resilience underscores the teachers’ commitment to their social responsibilities, highlighting their significant role in the school and the community.

RECOMMENDATION

Educators should engage actively in community activities to foster closer connections with students and establish a strong school-community partnership that is beneficial for both parties.

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