Telling Individual Engagement Stories (TIES): Initial Action Towards Family Engagement Program

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Abstract

Parent–school partnership is an essential component to ensure positive students' academic performance. Parents' active involvement in their children's education helps the school for its students to achieve their academic goals. As soon as parents enroll their children and once they enter the physical school, the child's academic success heavily depends on the teachers' role inside the classroom. COVID-19 however, forced schools to bring education at home thus necessitating unparalleled parents' involvement. Parents, unprepared, had to hurdle the challenges, while the school at an instant exhausted all means to reach –out to them. This action research primarily aimed to discover parents' motivation to continue to opt for full online education for their children amidst the rigors. It also attempted to closely evaluate the engagements of both the parents and school during a full online modality. Through TIES, the rich stories, and lives of parents as they traverse the uncharted online schooling with their children, common themes can become a wellspring of information to better the existing school programs. Phenomenology was employed as a research design where dialogue with parents who volunteered to join in–depth interviews and thematic analysis uncovered the strong and weak points of the parents' engagements with the school. Practices which worked well during the online set-up were identified. The study provided a deeper understanding of the complex nature of parent-school partnerships and their impact on students' academic achievement and total well-being. A sustained engagement and a system of parent – school collaboration can be explored which becomes part of the Family Engagement Program.

Keywords: Parent–School Partnership, Initial Action, Student Academic Performance, Phenomenology, Family Engagement Program

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Introduction

Academic development starts at home, having parents and guardians as the child's "first teachers". Several educational research studies (Epstein, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001) state that parents play a vital role in shaping a child's physical, psychological, and academic growth, which would then predict certain outcomes for their child's future. Parents and their participation in their children's education are essential in creating a secure parent-school-child relationship (Sapungan, 2014). Moreover, specific types of parental involvement in children's studies have been proven to generate a better academic outcome through the creation of a healthy learning environment and providing support and interest. Not only that, with proactive participation of parents and guardians, these children are to grow with better behavior towards themselves, increasing their morale and the formation of a positive self-concept; and they also are to grow with better behavior towards others, being well-adjusted socially and environmentally (Hitchinson, 2020).

As any parent would want, children's academic achievement is heavily reliant on their direct effort to aid their children's learning as effectively and possible (Castro et al., 2015). According to Avvisati et al. (2010), an economist's perspective on effective parenting is that the earlier the involvement, the greater the chance of higher academic achievement. Several present literatures highlight several "parenting theories", and some can only provide concrete evidence on how parents should relate to the child and the institutions housing their children to learn. This in turn reveals thorny issues as some research also presents little to no relation or positive effects at all (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Thus, it can be opined that effective academic parenting is something to be considered multidimensional and has different factors affecting such a parenting style and their relation to their children's respective academic institutions. Shute et al. (2011) defines parental involvement into several variables as to what they have perceived in reviewing several databases on prominent aspects of parental participation in school and its implications to a child's learning.

Conceptual Framework

Parent-school partnerships play a crucial role in promoting student success and well-being. When parents and schools collaborate effectively, they create a supportive environment that enhances children's academic achievements, social development, and overall growth. This conceptual framework aims to outline key elements and principles for building strong parent-school partnerships, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, communication, and shared responsibility.

Parents, guardians, family members' roles are investigated and the pivotal contribution to the students' overall performance. Other than its academic program, the school on the other hand, designs programs to ensure that parents are in the loop and that they are both on the same page in accompanying the children.

Fostering a mutual symbiosis between parents and school can possibly lead to a harmonious positive learning environment for students thus yielding an improved academic performance. The following are the engagements that were investigated.

Parent Involvement

Encouraging and enabling parent involvement in various aspects of school life is vital. Schools should provide opportunities for parents to contribute their skills, knowledge, and perspectives through volunteer programs, parent-teacher associations, advisory committees, and workshops. By actively engaging parents, schools can tap into valuable resources and create a more inclusive educational environment.

Collaborative Decision-Making

Inclusive decision-making processes that involve parents, teachers, and administrators are essential. Schools should create platforms for parents to contribute to policy development, curriculum planning, and school improvement initiatives. Collaboration in decision-making fosters shared ownership, strengthens relationships, and improves the overall quality of education.

Research Questions

To fully understand and appreciate parents' involvement in LSGH, this action research aims to answer the following questions:

Pre – Action
- What are the current school activities to ensure parents' active involvement in online modality?
- How were the parents involved as learning partners in these activities?
- What were the challenges encountered as parents/guardians of going online?
- What other parental activities are necessary which will yield positive students' academic performance?

During Action
- How does intervention help parents as learning companions/partners?
- How were the issues/concerns raised during the intervention addressed?
- What aspect of the intervention do parents find most helpful?

Post Action
- How did the intervention or program help parents in guiding their children?
- How can the intervention be sustained?
- What are other school programs needed to intensify parent-school collaboration?

Proposed Innovation, Intervention and Strategy

Name of the Strategy: TIES (Telling Individual Engagement Stories)

The Office of the Learning Community 5 (LC5) organized Project TIES, a genuine, deliberate, and purposive dialogue with individual parents who opted to go online till the end of the school year. With interview guides, the LC5 Coordinator asked parent-participants of their experience in accompanying their children during the online modality. The parents were assured that the conversation would be an occasion for the school to listen to their unique stories.

An important aspect of the dialogue was for the school to discover the reasons why parents, despite the challenges, opt to go for an online modality for their children. As part of the conversation, they were made to expound on the challenges they have encountered for the

whole duration of online class modality. An important part of the conversation would be to listen to parents' experience of their engagement in the various sessions the school programs organized and find out the most effective and helpful engagement.

Methodology

Research Design, Participants, Instruments, Data Gathering Procedure, Data Analysis, Ethical Issues

Research Design

This action research is highly qualitative in nature and as such utilizes dialogue to gather the data. As Buber explains extensively, genuine dialogue is a living mutual relationship between participants, (Kramer, 2003). The whole process involved a flexible and iterative process that adapts to the research context and emergent findings. To collect data, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document analysis were fully utilized.

Participants

The study only involved parents or guardians of students of La Salle Green Hills whose children have been on online modality for the entire three years. A circular to these parents was released to inquire on the reason why they opted for online modality. From those who responded, one parent per grade level was chosen and was invited for an in-depth one on one interview.

Data Gathering Procedure

A set of questions was used as an instrument. Please see appended interview protocols and questions for this purpose. While guided by questions, adhering to the principles of phenomenology, parents were at liberty to freely share their lived experiences.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the researcher will adopt the Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This involves: Thematic analysis that is widely used as an approach in qualitative research for analyzing data and identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within the collected information. It involves a systematic process of organizing, interpreting, and making sense of qualitative data. The following steps were undertaken in the whole process of analyzing the data using thematic analysis.

Familiarization with the data: The researcher started by becoming immersed in the data to develop a deep understanding of its content. She read and reread the data, such as interview transcripts or field notes, to become familiar with the information and gain a sense of its overall meaning.

Generating initial codes: This was followed by coding the data, which involves identifying and labeling segments of the data that are relevant to the research question. These codes were both descriptive and interpretive, capturing the essence of the information.

Searching for themes: From the codes, the researcher searched for patterns. She looked for recurring ideas, concepts, or topics that emerge across different segments of the data. This process involves comparing codes, clustering similar codes together, and identifying overarching themes that capture the essence of the data.

Reviewing and refining themes: The identified themes were reviewed and assessed if they fit with the entire data set. They examine whether the themes accurately represent the content and context of the data. Themes were revised, combined, split, or discarded during this iterative process to ensure they capture the complexity and diversity of the data.

Defining and naming themes: The final themes were refined and defined by clarifying their meaning and significance. They develop clear definitions and descriptions for each theme, ensuring they are representative of the data and capture the participants' perspectives. Themes are often given concise and meaningful names that reflect their content.

Creating a thematic map: The researcher created a thematic map or framework that visually represents the relationships and connections between different themes. This map provides an overview of the main themes and their subthemes, illustrating how they relate to one another and contribute to the overall understanding of the research topic.

Writing the analysis: Finally, a narrative report is written which presents the findings of the thematic analysis. This involves describing each theme, supporting them with illustrative quotes or examples from the data, and providing an overall interpretation of the findings. The analysis highlights the insights gained from the data and how they relate to the research question or objectives.

Throughout the process, researchers maintain transparency and rigor by documenting their decisions, justifying their interpretations, and seeking input from colleagues or experts to ensure the credibility and validity of the analysis:

- Rope: This symbolizes the actual research interview wherein the answers given by the participants will shed a light on their lived experiences, the actual manifestation of parent-school partnerships and any recommendations and suggestions for the betterment of students' performance.
- Loop: The Crossing Point of Ideas wherein the interviewees and the researcher come to the analysis of how school to parent partnerships work during a time of isolation for the improvement of the students under their guidance.
- Working End: The Recommendations and Implications of the study to the parents, to the institution and of TIES.
- The Knot: The End Product wherein both the learning institution and the parents realize the significance of a symbiotic relationship through the symbolization of an Archer.

Working With Quirkos

Easing the process of analyzing data through thematic analysis, the researcher used Quirkos, a software application for qualitative data analysis which enabled to easily code the data after transcribing the recorded Zoom meeting interviews held with the participant. Moreover, the app visualized the qualitative data and assisted grouping them into color-coded themes called 'quirks' which consequentially, also makes reviewing them and redefining them with ease.

These quirks can further be combined together to create the themes that are essential to the creation of the foundation of the proposed program.
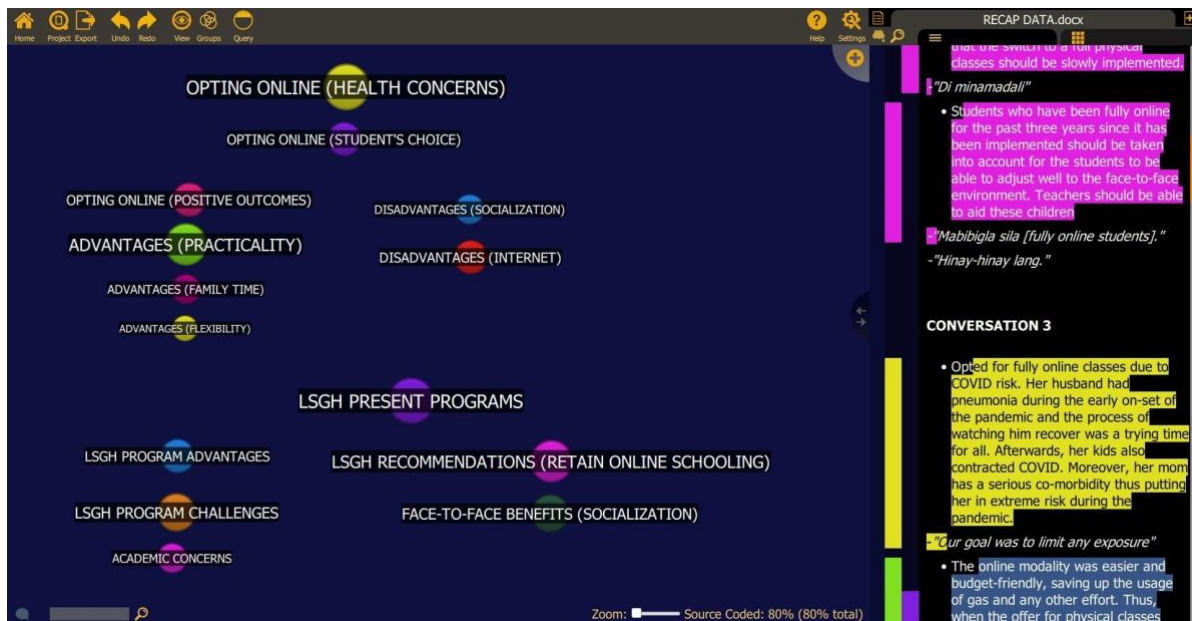

Figure 1: Sample Quirkos Software Interface

Ethical Issues

To ensure parents' participation in the study being conducted, the researcher got the nod and support of the gatekeepers. In qualitative research, gatekeepers are important intermediaries which can be of help in accessing the setting and the participant within the study is conducted, (Ghana, 2019).

STUDY (Results and Discussion)

The Rope: Parent Participants Sharing Their Lived Experiences

Like what was mentioned, the rope is the compiled life stories of parents from grades 5 to 12; varying from mothers and fathers with the desire to simply participate in the study. They have expressed their reasons for participation; the belief that the research and the proposed program will help in evaluating and improving the school's programs for the sake of other parents and other children who may be going through similar circumstances.

The Loop: Thematic Analysis Using Quirkos

Theme 1 – Grappling With Fear

The parents interviewed held their stance, even with the fear of the unknown during the beginning of the pandemic as a way to be able to try and adjust into the new modality however they see fit for their family and their children to be able to fully assume the roles and face whatever obstacle there is inf front of them. With the fear of the virus and the after-effects of the vaccine was not a risk the parents were willing to take when it comes to their children's safety.

Due to Health Concerns

Most of the parents interviewed expressed their concern about being able to send their kids to physical school because of the fear of the Covid-19 virus. With the government's guidelines on availing the vaccine, some parents also express their concerns about the adverse effects of the vaccine thus not feeling overly confident in allowing their children to be exposed by attending classes online. Moreover, some of the parents expressed certain personal health concerns such as family members having comorbidities, which when other people inside the house are exposed outside, they may return home with things that can place their family members more at risk.

Due to Personal Choices

A parent communicated her desire for the child to be able to have the skills and the capacity to be able to make decisions on his own when it comes to academics and in school. She wants her children to be independent. Thus, she is not hands-on with them in terms of academics and school. Thus, it was her son's choice to remain online this year.
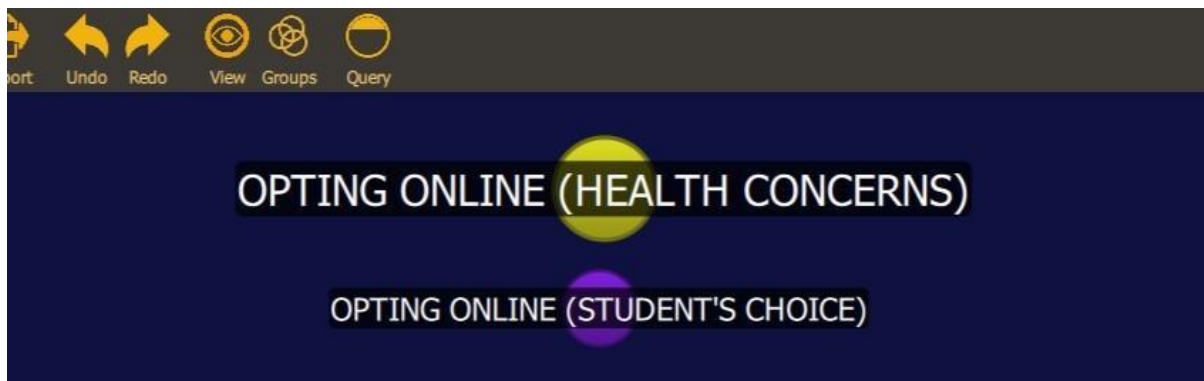

Figure 2: Opting Online Theme

Theme 2 – Lights and Shadows of Online Modality

Like any other, choices have their own repercussions and consequences. For the parents interviewed, they and their children also have experienced the advantages and disadvantages of choosing to pursue learning through the online modality.

Positive Outcomes

Based on the gathered interview data, most parents appreciate the many benefits of the online modality offered by the school because of several factors namely: health-wise, practical reasons, family time and flexibility). Most parents believe that the advantages of online schooling outweigh whatever disadvantages might be present. Health-wise, most parents expressed that they see their children gaining more time to sleep and rest and they do not worry about the hustle and bustle of traffic and the morning routine.

A parent experienced that the online modality was easier and budget-friendly, saving up the usage of gas and any other effort. Thus, when the offer for physical classes were raised, she asked her son what his preference was and the child wanted whatever was easiest for the family.

Family Time

For some of the parents interviewed they made mention that with the online modality, opportunities that were deprived of them during physical classes such as family time were granted to them.

Flexibility Case 1:
Parent reasons that the online modality enables the students to learn in the comforts of their own home or when they aren't at home. There are instances where students and their families go on vacation so even at the beach they don't miss-out.

Negative Outcomes

Along with the advantages the online modality presents, the isolation that comes with the modality also has its fair share of disadvantages that may or may not have affected the students and the parents quite much.

Socialization

Parent conveyed that the online modality deprived the children of the chance to be able to hone their skills in communicating and practicing social graces.

Internet Connection

Some parents made mention of the occurrences wherein they experience bouts of disconnection from the internet, but this was an occurrence that was countable by fingers.
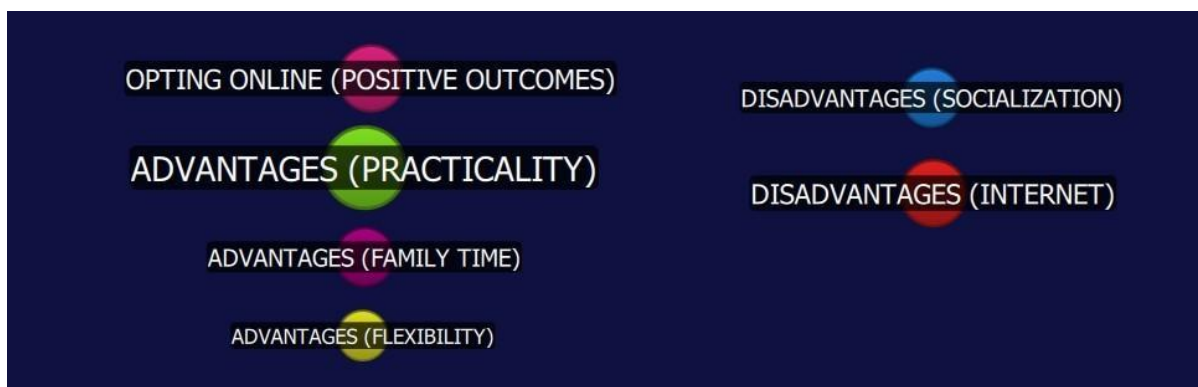

Figure 3: Lights and Shadows

Theme 3 – Ray of Hope

Since the announcement of the isolation guidelines the government has set forth during the start of the propagation of the Covid-19 virus, La Salle Green Hills as a learning institution was made to adhere to these rules and formulate solutions and aim certain plans to fulfill its duties to its students and to the parents: to be able to provide quality education amidst isolation.

Ranger 360

With that said, the school came up with programs to cater to the students in learning online such as the learning management system called Ranger 360 where they can access their tasks and view. These apps can also be viewed by their parents to be able to monitor their child's grades and have the ease to be able to schedule any appointments with their child's teachers.

Nexus App

Through this app, parents can view their child's grades as a whole and with every breakdown to be able to see the justifications of the grade their child received. Also, this app shows the awards their children receive, if any, to replace the certificates they receive physically.

Town Hall Meetings

Town Hall meetings are conducted once every _ for the administration to be able to introduce a certain program, concern or announcement to the parent-body. After every town hall meeting, the floor is open for the parents to be able to ask their questions on their various affairs the parents wish to discuss.

ACT (Summary, Conclusion or Implications, Recommendations, Plans for the Next Cycle/Dissemination, Reflection - Professional and Personal)

Assuming the Shooting Position: A Reflection on the Switch to the Online Modality

> *In the sport, the stance of the archer is as significant as merely releasing the string to the arrow. The stance gauges the result of whether or not the archer will aim at the target or at something different entirely.*

At the behest of the COVID-19 Pandemic, most educational institutions who hold their classes and offices in physical settings were urged to switch to online classes which was a safer modality at that time. As expected, this switch was most difficult to handle and deal with in every aspect: physically, mentally, and emotionally. It was draining for several different factors which varied for several different people.

La Salle Green Hills, during the Pandemic, has tried its best to be able to provide a conducive online learning environment through granting its students a free-range access to a wide variety of learning software and applications to aid them in whatever academic tasks they wish to fulfill. Moreso, the presence and open communication between guidance counselors and the students are most appreciated and well-utilized to be able to voice out any concerns with their emotional and mental well-being.

For the students of the said institution, the switch to the online modality was challenging for it prevented them the enjoyment of socializing and learning alongside their peers. This was also accompanied by the several obstacles that arose during online classes which were stated as having intermittent internet connections, difficulty in balancing several school tasks and projects, personal and familial concerns which made their school year more rigorous and challenging. It is safe to say that the interviewed parent-participants are aware of this. They in turn wish the best of experiences for their children even at a time of restrictions and several

physical limitations and threats thus seeking partnership from La Salle Green Hills, their children's school.

Parents are well-involved with their children's tasks and status at school especially through the ease of access to the online learning management system, Ranger360. Here they can actively monitor tasks, seek an audience with their child's educators and adviser, be up to date with any announcements through the circulars released by the school, and attend the online parent Townhall meetings which enabled them to freely voice out any concerns about the current set-up, announcements and methods of learning being given to their child. These town hall meetings and parent-teacher conferences and close parent-school partnerships are the knots that tie and secure a better and much more effective online learning environment for the student learners to ensure that these children are performing their very best.

Nocking the Arrow and Drawing the Bow: A Reflection on Parent-School Partnership for the Students

Nocking the arrow and drawing the bow is all about precision and accuracy in terms of the sport. This will be a backbone of how the arrow will be released. Granted, there are times when one does not simply get the outcome they are expecting.
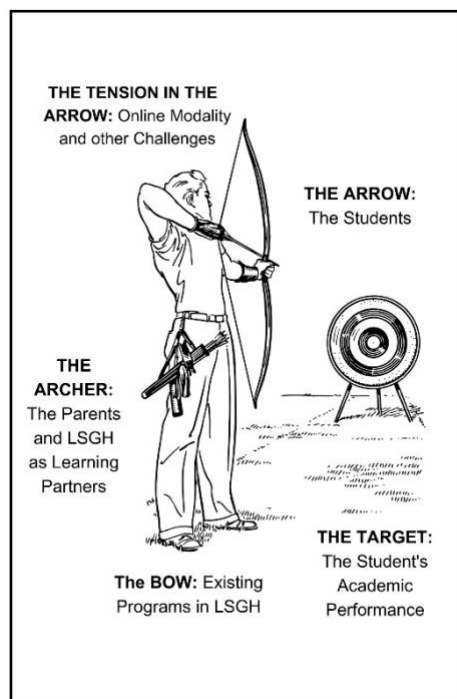
TIES: A Wellspring of Renewal

Figure 4: An Archer

Throughout the several tedious steps in the research process and being the listening ear to the participants' lived experiences, the researcher has been able to collate the significant ideas and message behind the reason why this study exists and aims to exist for. Thus, it is only befitting to illustrate this analysis through the institution's *mascot*: an archer. Archery, similar to parent-school partnerships, requires a delicate balance and a keen eye for the target, which is to be able to produce well-mannered and sharp-witted students for their improvement and of their communities as well.

Conclusion

Aiming and Releasing the String: A Short Summary

Everyone Needs a Listening Ear

That is the first point made during the interview. These parents willingly agreed to participate because they wanted their voice and their concerns to be heard. The researcher has been faced with several different views, reactions, and even tears as the parents express their stories of hardship and of their triumphs big or small during the duration of the pandemic and of the online modality.

Fear Is Ever-Present but That Does Not Mean It Cannot Be Alleviated

The pandemic has wreaked fear and anxiety to even the calmest parent. As parents, they shared that it was their responsibility to be able to take care of their family and protect their children from whatever risks and challenges the Virus and the vaccine can bring about and they felt that going online for the duration of the pandemic was their best move. It surely was not an easy task but, with the help of their personal views, strongholds, and the school's various programs, they found adapting to the online modality as…

A Formidable Ally

The parents interviewed expressed that the online modality had its perks weighing greater than its disadvantages so much so that they would like to have the set-up retained as an option simply because of two things: flexibility and practicality. Words that go hand-in-hand. The online modality presented itself as a challenge at first when one has to familiarize themselves with the various programs and requirements for the student to successfully be able to go to class. But, as soon as they become adept, the thoughts of how the online modality saves up resources, grants time to rest and relax without missing out, and the safety it can bring, then the parents are a testament that the online modality works. However, challenges are always around the corner and everyone needs a helping hand which the learning institution is happy to provide. But of course…

There Is Much to Be Improved…

As challenges arose, some of the parents have seen how much the existing programs can do to help them as a parent in crafting the most effective ways possible for their children to be able to move through the year swiftly, even in isolation. It has to be kept in mind however, that a program may very well work but it does not mean it works for everyone. Some cases, it may even be insufficient to cater to the child's needs. Thus, the implications of this research as a backbone to the proposed program is merely a statement that the learning institution is willing to be the voice to the child in question and to children who have gone through similar experiences.

The Working End: Recommendations and Implications

As aforementioned, TIES aims to provide an avenue to one of the school's most important stakeholders, the parents, to be able to assert any concerns and their stories in assisting their child in navigating through the unknown and the inclemency of online learning to be able to

find ways to make that journey any easier and effective for both the child and the parent or guardian.

To the Institution

The participants of this research place the school's initiative of creating programs as a means of communication to both the parents and the students to a high regard. Most of the parents that were interviewed view the online modality accessible and a success in providing students the ease of learning wherever they may be.

This recommendation roots from instances where students are ill and in need of isolation; online learning and classes will ensure that the child does not miss anything of note and thus, ensure the chance to maintain their child's academic performance. Furthermore, the participants also voiced the importance of creating online programs focused on the arts and on sports for both the students and the parents to further expose themselves to a wider array of skills and lessons that may benefit them psychologically and physically.

A Step Further

The researcher believes that the learning institution is making waves of effort, through meticulous research, to be able to accommodate the several varying needs of the parents with regards to their children's academic performance and learning environments as different as they can be. TIES is one of the many evident examples of that effort. This program, as a knot to bind the parents and the school in a partnership is a tangible example of living the Lasallian Core Values where Faith between the good of both parties are transformed, with physical efforts, into Service for the children so that they may live to be perceptive, and community-minded citizens.

Furthermore, the creation of the Perrette Family Engagement Center in the school would be able to consolidate on parent, guardians formation sessions, accompaniment activities; collaboratively coming up with solutions and well-thought-of plans with the intention to effectively lead the children in achieving their goals and their best version of themselves.

To Me As the Researcher

The creation of Project TIES has struck me both as a fellow parent and as part of the learning institution. To have the privilege of listening to the parents' stories of hard work in accompanying their children amidst the pandemic along with their desire to strengthen parent-school partnerships made me realize the significance of the position I held and will now be holding as a teacher in the classroom.

As a teacher, the lived experiences that have been graciously shared by the parent-participants is a reminder that as a teacher, I am the direct hand of the school to be able to interact and collaborate with my students and their parents. Thus, one should always have the patience, the precision, and the heart to be able to see students past the common eye; to see the students as they are and appreciate and cultivate what sets them apart.

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