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# From Experiences to Themes: Phenomenology on the School's Culture Contributing to Excellence

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## Abstract

“Excellence is a habit” according to the Greek Philosopher Aristotle. The substance that fuels every school on becoming responsive is excellence; therefore to understand the experience of every individual and stakeholders of the school is necessary to determine what contributes to excellence. As one of the most influential social institutions, the school is a place of excellence where every faculty, staff, personnel and other stakeholders partake in the goal of living excellence by applying it in all aspects of their jobs, roles and responsibilities. Since its establishment in 1963, the participant school has proven its educational legacy as a “center of excellence that fulfills the church mission of integrating quality education and evangelization.”

## Keywords:

Culture of Excellence, Phenomenology, School, Accreditation

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## Introduction

The role of school in the society is pertinent to the uplifting of the community and the whole nation. School, as the home of different individuals, serves as an institution of learning that adheres to the goal of changing individuals' attitudes and prepares them to a more challenging wave that the real life is bringing. As an institution, the school's *telos* is being defined and shaped by its governing philosophy, which cascades with its vision and mission statements forming a well-defined structure with a fortified structure. The School's PMV should radiate the school's physical and professional environment; define its core values and overflow positive academic feedbacks from its administrators, faculty and staff, students and other stakeholders.

Lopez and Scott (2000) have defended that social structure is not just a formidable backbone that creates a group or an organization but it also refers to the expectations of individuals' account towards each other's behaviour, thus establishing at the very end an “enduring relations with each other.” As a parochial school, the participant school have endured arduous times that challenges not just its academic structure but also its social structure characterized by cultural pluralism and generation gaps among its dynamic work force.

As a part of social structure, Deal and Peterson (1999) believe in the prevailing school culture in a certain institution. They believe in the schools or an institution's connected feelings and folkways that creates the atmosphere of excellence. Edmonds (1979)

defines school culture as “the atmosphere that should be catering no rigidness, not oppressive and generally conducive for the instructional business at hand.” The prevailing culture allows the people encompassed by the institution to become part of its outputs. Excellence is an element inside a social structure. Capodagli and Jackson (2007) have quoted the works of Aristotle to explain the force that makes excellence as it is.

Accordingly,

*Excellence is what we repeatedly do . . . excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit*

As a part of its Core Values, APOSTLESHIP (Amity, Patience, Obedience, Service, Trustworthiness, Loyalty, Excellence, Service, Humility, Integrity and Prayerfulness), excellence is ascribed in “everything we do and where ‘hindi pwede (can’t be)’ and pwede na (can be)’ in teaching, in research, in projects and assignments. For Gauuan, (2011) developing a culture of excellence requires unforgiving dedication, self-sacrifice, and unquenchable creativity. From a management point of view, it requires more than training, coaching and the issuance of official memoranda. According to the American Psychological Association, accreditation is contributory to the student, the faculty member and to the public. Accreditation facilitates achievement while radiating the quality “by which an educational institution or a program conducts its purpose.” As for the student, accreditation provides them the confidence on the program, institution or school in which they are enrolled. An accredited school is involved in the continuous revision, refinement and improvement of its “quality to meet national standards.” For the faculty members, the accreditation will zero – in the arduous process of assessment and evaluation of the teaching force to assure that they match the standards needed “in advancing the educational institution’s mission.” The role of accreditation to the public has stressed on the school’s accountability in attaining its goals and missions. The consistency as its philosophy cascades to its vision should be radiated on the process as in the attainment of its mission. Thus, every product of the institution is expected to reflect the reputable image to the school by the accreditation.

Apparently, the passing in the accreditation defined the schools’ strict and truthful compliance to its mission of evangelization, as a catholic school and

“catering student centered curriculum and producing academically excellent globally competitive and socially transformed individuals”, as a school of excellence.

To contribute to some existing knowledge, this study will seek to understand and describe the essences of the experiences that makes the San Felipe Neri Parochial School (SFNPS) a center of excellence. To explain and further understand its essence the phenomenological undertaking will be utilized. Phenomenology is a research undertaking that sought to make meaning among different experiences contributing to a structure, organization, and group or to an individual. Going back to the tenets of philosophy, this research undertaking will provide the essences of the experiences of the different individual inside the Nerian social structure that creates the atmosphere of being a “culture of excellence” while removing every visible aspects of presuppositions and subjectivity. As a method, it will delve on the understanding of the prevailing culture in the social structure of the Nerian Community. Best practices of the school will be interpreted in the light of the results; lapses will be analyzed and evaluation of results will be integrated for some recommendations for the betterment of the institution.

## **Purposes of the Study**

The need for understanding in the discovery of its essence gets the researcher inside the big quest of analysis and data – gathering for the prevailing “culture of excellence” on the social structure of San Felipe Neri Parochial School. Making meaning on its statement, this research seeks to understand and provide the essences of the different contributing experiences of the many subjects that builds the social structure of San Felipe Neri Parochial School.

This research is anchored on the phenomenological task of making meaning and revealing the existing essences of the different experiences that build the social structure. Specifically, the research sought answers to the following questions:

1. What live experiences contributes in the formation of a culture of excellence?

2. What is the influence of the schools commitment to excellence among the lives of its stakeholders?

The purpose of this study is to exhibit different lived experiences among SFNPS stakeholders (students, faculty, administrators, staff and parents) through qualitative transcriptions and its contribution to excellence. According to Japos (2007), the schools' culture of excellence "generates the intended teaching and learning outcomes." In other words, it plays a vital role in the attainment of its goals and realized mission. In addition, a globally competitive learner, higher licensure examination results and high employability are some barometers of success on a school that embraces a Culture of Excellence. Gauuan (2011) used the term "unforgiving dedication, self – sacrifice and unquenchable creativity" in establishing a culture of excellence in the school.

#### ***Assumption and Rationale for a Qualitative Design***

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, as cited by Creswell, 1998) define qualitative research as a multi – focus study that involves "interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter." This assumption reveals that the qualitative research design brings the subject on study under natural settings dealing on the process of making meaning and interpreting of experiences (phenomena) amongst individuals or groups. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as an "inquiry" that sought for understanding of phenomenon based on "methodological traditions of inquiry that involves exhausting exploration of the human or social problem." The researcher embraces the task of building 'a holistic picture', 'analyses words', 'reports detailed view of informants' and conducts the study on the most natural manner.

According to Merriam (1998), there are six assumptions strengthening qualitative research. First, the qualitative research addressed the process more rather than the outcomes or the products. This study delves on the existing social structure of San Felipe Neri Parochial School. This study will attempt to discuss and to explore the lived experiences that contribute to the emergence of culture of excellence inside the institution. Rather than exploring the teachers' quality and characteristics, this qualitative study, will then brought in the light of possibilities the existing phenomena that make the institution achieving its set goals and standards. Second, qualitative researchers are

concerned with meaning (essences), particularly with how people deal and make sense of his experiences. The researcher interviewed the participants to gain insights and become more understanding of their lives as teachers, students and administrators of San Felipe Neri Parochial School. Third assumption is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The data used in this research was gathered and collected personally by the researcher himself. The fourth assumption posits that qualitative research involves fieldwork in the most natural setting. Fifth defends that the qualitative research is descriptive – interpretative and analytical. The data was treated in the light of philosophical suppositions and narration of result was made to exhibit the significance and essences of the live experience of the participants. Sixth is that "qualitative research is inductive." Analysis and interpretation of data in the light of philosophical underpinnings were made to explore the lived experiences enabling the researcher to derive massive information from a simple experience.

#### ***Data Collection***

Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method was utilized to facilitate the data – gathering procedure. Its implementation requires the researcher the following activities:

- Tedious review of the collected data was made enabling the researcher to make sense with the transcribed data.
- Careful extraction of many significant statements were made; those that pertains directly to the phenomenon.
- Meanings were drawn out after the analysis of each significant statements. Moreover, the researcher also reread the original questionnaires that contained the response of the respondents.
- Clusters were then formed helping the researcher to form themes. The Colaizzi Phenomenological Data Analysis also demanded the researcher to continuously recapitulate the original sources and statements; thus making him more conscious in case of "repeating themes and discrepancies" (Bergstorm, 2004, p.14)

- Themes were then integrated into an exhaustive description. Again, continuous validation from the original protocol was made.
- The formulation of concise statements for the exhaustive descriptions.
- One procedure stressed by Colaizzi (1978) is the validation of the formulated information by asking the subject “What aspects of your experience have I omitted?” (p.62)

### *Methods for Data Verification*

Creswell (1998, cited by Bergstorm, 2004) defined verification as a process that “occurs throughout the data collection, analysis and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed” (p. 194).

The formulation of themes was made through the different efforts exerted in the verification of data. First, the researcher clarified each biases present on the interpretation of the study (Creswell, 1998). This clarification and scrutiny of biases help the researcher to bracket these comments for further analysis and interpretation of data. This tedious task requires the researcher to work, understand and reflect among different perspective of participants’ reaction about a certain phenomenon (experience). This can show the researcher’s vulnerability among biases. Therefore, triangulation is necessary.

Second, comprehensive and interpretative descriptions were used to bear the findings. In the study made by Bergstorm (2004, p. 58), he detailed that “through interpretative descriptions, readers could see and feel the process’s influence.” Creswell (2002) seconded, that in the same thought, interpretative discussions transport the readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.” (p. 198). The researcher made use of descriptions to provide the figure made out from details in the narration of experiences.

Third, checking the accuracy of participants was also considered. As a response to Colaizzi’s (1978) data collection procedure, the researcher found it as “the most crucial technique for establishing

credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This considers the participants’ feedback with the questions they encountered during the interview. The researcher put in high priorities every reaction, whether verbal or non – verbal expressions, gestures, in regard the participants’ response in the study. The researcher regarded this part of method as a chance to share experiences and opportunities while unobtrusively observing the participants’ reaction (i.e., facial expressions, voice inflections).

Setting of the research is also a part of verification. The fourth methodology requires the researcher to spend some prolong time in the field. Since the researcher is a faculty member of the San Felipe Neri Parochial School, the researcher did not have a problem on the research locale. For six years in the said setting, the researcher has already the acquired background in regard the school “culture” most importantly the academic atmosphere. Citing the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), they posited that prolonged engagement in the field is a pre – requisite leading to the understanding of the said setting. Moreover, communication with a range of people and the development of rapport towards the participants also falls in this part of verification.

Peer review, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is also an indispensable part of the data verification. Peers, who are knowledgeable of the said research tradition were gathered around to debrief and uncover some “taken for granted biases, assumptions and perspectives” made by the researcher in the interpretation of data. This helps the researcher become aware of his / her posture towards data and analysis. (p. 308) Peers who are pertinent to the research data review includes 2 seasoned teachers in the institution and an academic, non – teaching staff was not included in the interview process. Their role provided pool of indispensable essences prior to data interpretation. They also corroborate the established themes and the exhaustive description of the essences.

Triangulation is also a part of the data verification as included by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This ends the data verification. Triangulation is a method that requires the researcher to use varied resources to support and fortify the interpretation of the experiences.

## ***Outcome of the Study and Its Relation to Theory and Literature***

### **Discovering of Themes**

The process provided by Collaizi's method on data analysis pushes the researcher to go inside the rigor of data interpretation to discover the themes that is prevalent to the collected data. After the tedious review of the data collected and the thorough encoding of ideas from the interview, the researcher sets the ground for the extraction of meanings out from experiences in the process of discovering themes.

### **Theme 1 – Dedication**

The participants of the research have emphasized the prime importance of *dedication* in the emergence of culture of excellence in the institution. Participants have defined dedication in several ways – patience, hard work and continuing education. One of the participants answered

“ the rigor on the preparation of the lesson plan or backward design templates have test my dedication to my profession... Indeed, it's very hard but the school have shown its utmost respect and support to us, teachers.”

Most of the participants have posited that the rigor on the preparation of the lessons and visual materials defined the necessary requirements for dedication. The schools' supportive environment is also a factor that benefits the teachers and inspire them to continue striving hard for the betterment of the learning process.

As a seasoned teacher from the high school level shared:

“as a teacher, it's not the money that I count but it's the number of priceless minutes that I spend with my students. These students are the living evidence of my existence.”

Other participants on the other hand, like an English teacher from the elementary department:

“This is my 27<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and still

this institution will always be my first and last school. Memories are still fresh on my first day of teaching and when I took my teaching demonstration in this institution”

The school's guidance head and Seniors Guidance Counselor shared her pertinent experience that radiates her dedication related to patience. For her success is when she helped a child from his crisis he is experiencing.

“I let him see the reality of his life trying all my best to emphasize his importance and his uniqueness.”

Other participants, some five of them have enlisted the necessity for continuing education. For Teacher A (who wishes to be called on this way), the rigor, demands and expectations of the academe have pushes him to enroll in a graduate program.

“dedication is when you start loving your work and you tend to grow professionally while growing with it.”

### **Theme 2 – Innovation**

The term innovation, as second theme in this research undertaking, refers to the skill of the teacher in providing genuine, authentic and effective materials for the benefit of the teaching learning process. Many from the teachers who were interviewed define innovation as a skill that involves creativity in the creation of new materials.

“I used my creativity to design materials that will catch the attention of my students, of course in the primary level, you should always catch their attention every moment and seconds that you are teaching” (High school faculty member, AP).

Ideas combined with another idea, innovation embraces some sub-ideas, prevalent to the research undertaking, like genuineness and creativity. For this computer teacher

(On a computer class) “helping the student to achieve its goal and acquire the skill. When you lower down yourself to reach the ability of the child and the



child you just thought learns and became creative more than me on the same craft; it's like you created something out from nothing.”

Innovation in the school is not only present in the teaching learning process but also the social structure of the school itself is an epitome of innovation. A high school guidance counsellor explained that ‘even before the school passed the PAASCU Accreditation, the school has already embraced the concept of innovation on its facilities and even in its instruction’. This response was seconded by an elementary teacher who puts the main thought of her discussion in the effects of seminars in her as a teacher and as to the institution itself.

Accordingly:

“We were made updated constantly in the trends of education and teaching globally. This enhances our competitiveness and is making us not left – behind by the changing world and the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.”

Most of the teachers interviewed admitted that because of the seminars offered during in – service trainings, they were made creative and helped them reflect on their loop holes and strengths in the realm of teaching instructions.

### **Theme 3 – Professional Development**

Professional development is the third formed theme in relation with the culture of excellence in the San Felipe Neri Parochial School. Professional development is always mentioned during the interview especially if pertaining to the people inside of the teaching force. In the interview, they have expressed a strong connection bridging professional development with continuing education and support from the administration and colleagues. During the interview most of the teachers have expressed gratitude for the school’s effort and concern extended to them in terms of professional development.

“the seminars teach me and equip me at the very least on the different new trends of the teaching profession.”

“after 2 months of having seminars, it feels like I’m ready once again to improve more of my teaching skills.”

One of the aspects shed by this theme is support that coming from the administration and staff of the institution. Teacher CD (who wished to be named like this) explained that she is of great gratitude to the school for pushing her to continue her master’s degree. Now she is happy and enjoying the fruits of her labors. Citing the provisions made by the faculty manual it stressed the school’s unparalleled support to its personnel who wishes to continue his / her study in the graduate / post graduate program.

Accordingly:

“Scholarship grants for graduate and post – graduate studies may be extended to any qualified personnel who has rendered at least five continuous years of efficient, dedicated and very satisfactory service to the school.”

“Moreover, the school also offers thesis/ dissertation/ research writing assistance.”

Moreover, one of the strengths found in this theme is the camaraderie and moral support extend by every individual to his / her colleague. Throughout the interview, participants then revealed some stories of support and assistance. Notably is the sharing made by a faculty, non – academic staff who narrated

“You can do it. Many of us here started on some counted units in the graduate school. Now with patience and diligence, we are reaping the fruit of our patience..” One of some best quotes I received from my superiors.”

It was followed by:

“ I remember last PAASCU, our teacher in the department helped one another in the critiquing of our learning plans for its improvement. Luckily and in God’s grace we passed!”

#### Theme 4 – Expectations

Expectation will always be present to a growing and developing institution. In the San Felipe Neri Parochial School, expectation is a vital part on the growth of excellence inside the school. Excellence is a part of the core values of San Felipe Neri Parochial School. It is being defined as a condition in which

“what is enough is not just enough in research and in instruction. Excellence is a high virtue that makes it a habit when you started living it.”

In the course of the data gathering procedure, the researcher found out that one of the pertinent themes is excellence.

“After passing Level II accreditation, the school continues its legacy and progress towards excellence. Erection of new buildings and instalment of new facilities was added to ensure that we are always in service to the common good of our students.”

A seasoned teacher explained

“Every time that the in–service training for teachers starts, I welcome fresh ideas from the new trends in the academe and it’s like I’m a new teacher again. Ready to teach for the new academic year.. (smiles)”

Her words, indeed, radiate responsibility on the learning process. More so, it tries to reflect a very welcoming social atmosphere among the different personnel of the school. Underlining its social structure, the San Felipe Neri Parochial School has proven its worth among its personnel and students. Some testimony from the students have brought the researcher inside the history of the school dating back when the researcher is still in the college level. A student from the high school department told the researcher

“the school have dreamed a lot for his students and now we are already seeing the that dream turning into reality. We already have speech labs and even a very comfortable and wide space library. My

adviser has the sweetest smile and she told me I can go far if I study hard and believe in God.”

Living beyond what is expected is one of the sub – themes under expectations.

“When we won in the contest (oratorical) and the school have given us recognition during the morning assembly in front of many students, it’s a different feeling. It’s more than appreciation. It’s the greatest gift a teacher could have.” ( High School AP Teacher)

And for a student, living and striving beyond the expectations may seem to be like this:

“Every month, there is this subject area that celebrates its department. There are contests and other activities that will really test your ability to cooperate and share what you know. It is indeed a great feeling to work with your batch mates and their advisers. Winning isn’t winning. It’s about the experience on how you make yourself a winner.

#### Theme 5 – Real-World Experience

“ Service to our community is one of the department’s major program. Our immersion in the Nayon ng Kabataan (Youth Orphanage) last year is one the enlightening endeavors that I myself participated.”

The rigor in the process of discovering the themes present in the qualitative data collected has revealed the personnel’s and students’ active participation inside and outside the school. Inside and outside the school activities refer to the schools’ involvement to social immersions that develops competence and responsibility among its members and establishes connections among the many part of our society. Most of the teachers reacted in a welcoming way while trying to show their documentations and pictures of their previous outreach programs.

An involved intermediate student shared a story of his experience during their feast day:

“We have adopted families per classroom. During feast day we extend our gifts to them and ask them to join us with our feast.”

Inside the school, student and personnels have their own programs. There are monthly culmination of activities for every department.

“The different programs of the school every month contributes to the development of the skills of the learners. It also invites new talents.”

A high school student shared his story about his favourite day in the school:

“during activity day, we have our own club and we are really enjoying it.”

As for the teachers, the annual team building has caught the attention of the researcher

“the team building activity last year have put every members of the academe inside the bonds of camaraderie.”

Active participation, as one of the themes contributing to the emergence of culture of excellence in the institution, defines the school’s acceptance of challenges to change and develop more talents from his people.

### **Theme 6 – Teaching Moments**

“If I can affect life, even to affect the person towards betterment then I can say that I have contributed to that person.”  
(High School, Biology Teacher)

Teaching moments refer to the lived experiences from which every part of the community is learning from one another. The lived experiences that can be found in this theme are interactions inside the community most commonly by the teacher to his students. Some experiences were found as pertinent to the strengthening of the culture of excellence inside the institution. The first sub – theme is rapport with the teacher and student.

For a mathematics teacher, one of his favorite moments inside the classroom is when he teaches

the child the basics of math for his/her further understanding and mastery of the basic concepts.

“I used to engage my student a lot. I give examples a lot. Varying from the easiest to the advance. I always put in my mind that my students vary from their readiness and every student must learn according to their learning preference. It is really rewarding to see students learning a difficult subject in their own effort.”

Furthermore, the four guidance counselors have shared these experiences:

“Every day is best moment, especially when I see the smile of the students on their faces. My heart melts whenever they will approach me to seek counselling and advise and tell me that something improves in their personality” (High School Guidance Counselor, Grade 7 to Third Year).

“The best moment in this vocation, as a guidance counselor, is when you really touch student’s lives. I realize that advices are not just words needed by the students in their most problematic days. Advices are bridges so that students will feel that they belong despite this plurality. I understand that my role here is to touch lives and gave my students the light so that they will be on the right place” (Intermediate Level Guidance Counselor).

“I’m so happy to be with the primary level. They really opened me on the joys of being a teacher and being a confidante to them.”  
(Primary Level, Guidance Counselor)

Another sub–theme is camaraderie. Sir L, acknowledged that

“that strong professional, almost family, bond that ties every member of the San Felipe Neri Parochial School Family is really what speaks for itself. This is one of the strongest force why I’m not leaving the school”



The word camaraderie had been one of the most pronounced words during the interview some explained that their colleagues are always in help whenever you need it.

“as if solutions are just on their pockets (smiles)” exclaimed by a high school teacher.

### **Theme 7 – Respect to Every Individual**

“When I don’t know the answer to the question of my student, I accept my fault and apologize with my misgivings. In my surprise, they understand it. I learned that even we are teachers, we are still a human being capable of committing mistakes.”

The last prevailing theme is respect to every individual. This theme is prevalent during the data gathering procedure. This theme has three sub – themes that cover humility, teaching style and accepting individual’s strengths and weaknesses.

Teacher V from intermediate level, Grade 5 reminisced the days of seminars in connection to the third sub – theme.

“I always treasure the days that I’m learning with my colleagues during seminar. You know the sharing period in which you encounter fresh ideas from the new comers in the institution.”

A high school seasoned teacher admitted that

“I learned how to make a powerpoint presentation through the help of my students. And I will always be proud that my student thought have thought that skill to me.”

Her sharing helps the researcher to put humility under the sub – themes of the seventh theme. Remembering the core values of the school, it puts humility as one of its eleven core values. It clearly says

“to accept our own worth, talents, gifts, capabilities and recognizing the worth of talents, gifts and capabilities of others.”

Teacher Ken (not real name, the participant wished to be named like this) summarized:

“As a teacher, learned that not all of us here are the same. One has this talent and he has this kind of skills. Our individual differences are pillars of this institution”

### **Summary**

The researcher found out seven important themes after the tedious task of data collection and analysis. This seven themes are composed of the following: Dedication, Innovation, Professional Development, Expectations, Real World Experiences, Teaching Moments and Respect of Every Individual. When this seven themes were combined the product will be the fortified structure of excellence of San Felipe Neri Parochial School.

### **Discussion**

Deal and Peterson (1999) described school culture as “an underground flow of feeling and folkways ... in the form of vision and values, beliefs and assumptions, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories and physical symbols.”

Culture is what defines the school. Fisher, Frey and Pumpian (2012) explained that school culture is the implicit curriculum of the school; it should not be underground and assumed. They added, “it should be uncovered, openly and purposely discussed assessed and developed.” For almost 50 years of its existence as the only Parochial School in the heart of Mandaluyong, the San Felipe Neri Parochial School has almost a golden jubilee of history in its commitment to excellence. It is imperative for phenomenological understanding to identify how excellence perceived by the actors in a situation.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of school stakeholders and its contribution to excellence in San Felipe Neri Parochial School (which has been recognized by PAASCU as an Accredited School Level II). The focus of the study was to develop meaning through the voice of

the participants. Several outputs and ideas derived from the literature review revealed various ways of inculcating the Culture of Excellence in different schools. Some are quantitative in nature. Despite differences on the approach and context of the study, parallels were found between the results of this study and those in the literature review.

The first theme is DEDICATION which includes *patience, hard work and continuing education*. On the Handbook for Qualities of Effective Teacher (Stonge, Tucker & Hindmans. 2004), it defines dedication as an integral quality for becoming an effective teacher and contributing to a responsive school force. It goes along with influence and professional training, fairness and promotion of enthusiasm. In the qualitative literature of Swartz (2010), she mentioned dedication as “performing – not practicing” contributing to high expectations.

The second theme, innovation which includes genuineness, creativity, tech – friendly and support. Leithwood et al (1999) discussed that innovation is the beginning of change. Creativity is the ability of the teacher to manage the class, the ability of a guidance staff to relate with his counselee, the ability of a non – teaching staff to perform his job with ease even under pressure and the ability of the principal to understand the various needs of his people without exerting too much of his referent power. Innovation is integrating new ways of teaching, new ways of leadership and management.

The third theme is professional development and it includes *continuing education and support (financial and moral)*. Liu (2013) noted that motivating teachers and personnel to continue professional growth through further studies strengthen their understanding of their most important role in the organization. It enhances camaraderie and makes the work force up – to – date on the different trends of teaching.

Fourth is expectation and it includes *responsibility and exceeding expectations*. Grant et al. (2008) found that effective teachers have high expectations of students. Chickering and Gamson (1999) includes *communicating high expectations* as one of the *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Lickona and Davidson (2005) includes committing to high standards and

continuous improvement as one of the focus areas on culture of excellence and ethics.

Fifth is real–world experiences which includes *real world application and life – long learning*. The theme found congruence in the result of the study made by Swartz (2010). Also Stone (2007) and Grant et al (2008) emphasized the importance of real – life application of what students are learning and at the same time the administrators and non – teaching staffs must be exposed on in the situation of the society that is surrounding the school. This will definitely call for programs that involves the surrounding community and social centers from which schools could conduct their outreach programs.

Sixth is teaching moments which includes *“effort that leads to dedication and lifelong learning.”* Swartz (2010), Grant et al (2008), Goodman (2009) and Neubert and Binko (2007) are studies related to the sixth theme. This theme applies to the effort of teachers to apply formal and informal assessment and to understand diverse environment which enables them to create teaching moments that will meet students’ needs.

Seventh is respect to every individual which includes *moral responsibility and humility*. The theme applies for both teacher and students and teachers learning from his/her fellow teachers. This applies humility as a value that allows everyone to admit what he do not know and what he / she can learn from others.

Most themes found parallels between studies and literature review. As Berger (2003) mentioned “excellence is born from a culture.” The Institute for Excellence and Ethics on their paper “Developing the Culture and Competencies of Excellence & Ethics” discussed that every classroom, family, team or organization has a unique way for doing things on a “very specific way for a specific reason” ensuring that the norms, habits and behaviors are pervasive throughout the organization. Grant supports that culture of excellence is imprinted; not just for technical reasons or for functionally fulfilling the core missions but rather “that organizational habits that address towards the fulfillment of the mission.”

## Conclusion

The participants are defining the essence on the prevalence of a culture of excellence in a PAASCU Accredited school as life – long process, tedious and engaging. For them, the engagement of every singular person under the canopy of the institution is a must to attain its goals ascertain by its vision, inscribed by its vision and materialized by its objectives. A culture of excellence is a demanding endeavour that can happen to every particular individual inside the classroom or offices. A culture of excellence is a challenging venture that only the optimistic, hard – working and dedicated could light its might torch. A social structure is a component of excellence in which the vivacious workforce is inside and everyone shared one common goal. Despite cultural pluralism, a workforce vested with a multitude of individual differences will never undermine its odyssey to success. Culture of excellence doesn't only happen in a rich society, it can also emerge because a thousand dedicated and hardworking individuals are present under its umbrella. Once already started, excellence will happen naturally and will become a natural part of goals and undertakings. Excellence could not just happen inside the principal's office or in the faculty room, the canteen manager can also take part in the emerging culture of excellence. A student who was once problematic in his behavior yet has seen the right way can be a mighty part of the growing culture of excellence. They can, always, be a part of the puzzle that will build and complete the emergence of a culture of excellence. A teacher who dreamed and strived hard to finish his graduate studies is certainly living the tenets of excellence.

## Recommendation

After the data triangulation and the extraction of essences, a follow up must be made every 3 years to determine the consistency of the themes (essences) in this study. Since this is a qualitative study, there may be changes on the prevailing themes brought by “live experiences.” It may have the current themes consistent after 3 years or may discover new contributing themes. Furthermore a quantitative study may contribute to the understanding of leadership styles using the themes.

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