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## **In Loco Parentis: Perceptions of Secondary Education Teachers During Online Learning**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Educators' perception of the in loco parentis role is highly significant in carrying out their responsibilities during face-to-face and online classes. This research aims to determine how the loco parentis role of secondary education teachers is observed during the online distance learning modality.

This research used a qualitative approach, specifically phenomenological research design and the purposive sampling method. The respondents in the study were 11 teachers of Small World Christian School Foundation, who handled Grades 7 to 12 for School Year 2021-2022. The teachers conducted an interview to portray their roles during their synchronous sessions.

The data gathered implied that the teachers in loco parentis role have been emphasized during the online distance learning setup. The secondary teachers can intertwine academic learning with character-building, cultivate a Christ-like mindset, and continually set appropriate student behavior and conduct.

The overall data derived from the research leads to the conclusion that secondary education teachers can understand the dynamic nature of the concept of In Loco Parentis during the online distance set up, however, limits them to practice such a role to its full extent. Though the high school teachers can fulfill their duties of being the "second parent" in an online learning modality - instilling lifelong learning, following up on misconduct, and setting time for guidance, devotion, and support groups, challenges such as technical issues, no physical contact, and role limitations were faced by the educators in portraying the role and there is still that sense of warmth, sincerity, and openness they sorely miss when meeting with their students face to face

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Keywords: In Loco Parentis, Teacher Role, Secondary Education Teachers, Online Learning

### **I. Introduction**

In loco parentis is a Latin phrase that means in the place of a parent and refers to a relationship in which a person puts himself or herself in the position of a parent by assuming and fulfilling parental duties towards a child.

In the Philippines, school authorities and teachers are considered substitute parents or guardians and can exercise parental authority over their students once they enter school. (Art. 349, par. 2 of RA 386). The moment a child enters school, parents place the child under the effective supervision of the school. Its administrators and teachers have special parental rights and responsibilities for the children under their supervision or custody (Philippine Family Code, Section 218).

Even in an online setup, a teacher can act as loco parentis with the help of technology. They can easily communicate with their students through online learning or social media platforms. With these, teachers can get to know their students and develop a special parent-child relationship.

Furthermore, teachers must not only impart knowledge, educate minds, and facilitate skills, but they must also leave a legacy of real loco parentis capable of producing students with deeply ingrained values.

### ***Role of Teachers in Online Learning***

Teachers are fundamental to the development of a learner. The Department of Education aims to develop a learner's deep love for the nation, possess the values and skills necessary to reach their full potential, and make meaningful contributions to its development. With skilled educators, a nation can produce holistic learners equipped with 21st-century skills, capable of driving the country to development and advancement and immersed in values.

Today's world is awash in knowledge from technological advancements and electronic sources. With the online modality, the educators' responsibilities are stretched to motivating the learners throughout lessons. According to Michelle (2021), with the difficulties of online learning, children encounter issues like lack of discipline, motivation to study, and loss of interest in learning. Effects also include the difficulty of teaching concepts to the learners, the social barrier due to the online setup, and the trouble of developing communication skills.

On the other hand, given the vast technological advancements, teachers and students can properly utilize online learning platforms for clear communication, interaction, and dissemination of information. During synchronous sessions, the role of the teachers is to integrate moral values with

lectures, utilize the time to clarify misunderstandings, and encouraging students to share their knowledge or ideas about the topics discussed. The educators develop and deliver engaging lessons while monitoring and supporting the development of the learners. A learner's future self can be shaped by their teachers.

## II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to achieve its purpose. It sought to evaluate how the loco parentis role of secondary education teachers is carried out during the online distance modality.

The purposive sampling method has been utilized to identify the study population. A total of 11 secondary education teachers who handled grades 7 to 12 online during the school year 2021-2022 in Small World Christian School Foundation in Baguio City participated in this study.

The subject school is a Bible-based school that "envision generations of vibrant and godly servant-leaders equipped with a well-rounded education, able to make a difference in the world" perfectly fits this study's goal as they value character more before intelligence. The school started conducting its online classes in April of 2020 to finish the school year 2019-2020 during the strict implementation of lockdown all over the Philippines.

The researchers gathered their data through Google Form. The following questions were asked:

1. How do you understand educators in loco parentis role?
2. How do you manifest or practice such a role during online classes?
3. What challenges are met in practicing the loco parentis role during online learning?

A letter addressed to the School Head has been sent personally to the subject school, expressing the researchers' desire to conduct their study with the help of their teachers. Each teacher participant has been asked for their available schedule to conduct the interview. The researchers applied the saturation method to the gathered data to develop relevant and significant information needed to achieve the study's goals.

## III. Results and Discussion

This section contains the findings and in-depth analysis of the data. Its results were based on the data gathered from Google Forms. These data were then chosen, analyzed, interpreted, and emerged as themes.

**Table 1: How do you understand an educators in loco parentis role?**

Theme	Quotation
Responsibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The educator has a very distinctive responsibility that is not shared with any other profession, and that is to take the role of the parents in their absence. They are given the privilege to make decisions that are best for the child in school or in any school-related activities where they have been entrusted to look over the well-being of the child.</li> <li>2. To take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent or being the second parent in school.</li> <li>3. Having the secondary responsibility of bringing up each student that I teach in the ways of the Lord. Whether by discipline or encouragement.</li> <li>4. It is the legal responsibility of the teacher to fulfill the role of the parent in school and school activities.</li> <li>5. The teacher acts as a second parent of the child. This function is not only limited to the educational needs of the child. It could also extend to the child's spiritual, emotional, and sometimes physical well-being.</li> </ol>

**Responsibility.** Teachers continue to play an important role in the life of every student. The role of a teacher is not limited to the classroom, whether it be traditional or online, but their different responsibilities are apparent even outside the classroom.

Some rights of the biological parents are given to the teacher while the child is in their care. As a result, the teacher must accept the responsibility in return and understand the moral and legal obligations expected to attain in each aspect (Mohammed, Gbenu, & Lawal, 2014).

### As mentioned by a participant:

*"It is the legal responsibility of the teacher to fulfill the role of the parent in school and in school activities." Furthermore, "To take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent or being the second parent in school."*

The teacher becomes an external parent to students as they spend time in school. The educators are to be the role models or mentors. Since teachers contribute a massive part of their students' lives, several develop almost parental relationships with them.

**Another participant stated:**

*“The educator has a very distinctive responsibility that is not shared with any other profession, and that is to take the role of the parents in their absence. They are given the privilege to make decisions that are best for the child in school or in any school-related activities where they have been entrusted to look over the well-being of the child.”*

The educator takes the responsibility of looking over the welfare of each student. Given tasks and activities convey the information the children need to hone their critical thinking and analytical skills.

*“The teacher acts as a second parent of the child. This function is not only limited to the educational needs of the child. It could also extend towards the child's spiritual, emotional and yes, sometimes even physical well-being,” another participant mentioned.*

The goal of education is not merely academic learning. For some, additional learning could be behavioral, social, cognitive, affective, physical, or even altogether different things.

**Table 2: How do you manifest or practice such a role during online classes?**

Theme	Quotation
The Teacher as a Disciplinarian	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Though a bit limited during online, my role as loco parentis does not change. I still discipline my students, checking on their misbehavior, following up on their requirements, and checking how they are.</li> <li>2. While online, I make sure I impose the online guidelines or rules that need to be followed. Like, remind them to turn on their cam to ensure they are really present, check their mic if it's working, make sure they are properly dressed up for online classes, and the like.</li> <li>3. Listening to them, correcting them and giving discipline if needed, encouraging them to keep on, appreciating what they have accomplished, praying for them, and calling the attention of their parents if needed.</li> </ol>
The Teacher as a Counselor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For me, this special role is more applied during counseling and guiding the child to make right (biblical) and wholesome decisions. The child may approach me for help, or I approach them when I notice something is off or different in his or her behavior. There are times when I correct students for misbehaving, but I communicate what I have done to the parents for follow-up. There are those who would seek guidance in deciding what to take up in college; some got into trouble, some were failing in their studies, or some were in situations out of their control and were bothered with it.</li> <li>2. Guiding the learners in their tasks and helping them fulfill their roles. Trying my best to ask them how they are first before how their works are.</li> <li>3. In my opinion, you may manifest this aspect through verbal counseling only. This pertains to addressing the academic, emotional, or spiritual needs of the child.</li> <li>4. Though disembodied, a teacher continues to guide their students through the subject matter; they teach online, making sure they are able to appreciate the value of what it is the students are learning. If there are any gaps or discrepancies observed in the students, they are mentored until these are addressed, with the hope that this trains them to be able to tackle similar issues without the need for oversight in the future. If a student expresses a certain skill or ability, an online teacher can still nurture it through words of encouragement and recognition. Additionally, if a student is struggling with personal issues or if a class is not performing according to their ability, an online teacher can still talk to them through their issues and chide them when necessary.</li> </ol>

**The Teacher as a Disciplinarian.** Discipline is how children learn right from wrong, acceptable from unacceptable (Obadara, 2010). Under the in loco parentis role, the teachers are given the right to discipline their students. Discipline and teaching are some of the vital components of achieving educational goals.

**As mentioned by some participants:**

*“Though a bit limited during online, my role as loco parentis does not change. I still discipline my students, checking on their misbehavior, following up on their requirements, checking how they are.”*

**Other participants stated:**

*“While online, I make sure I impose the online guidelines or rules that need to be followed. Like, remind them to turn on their cam to ensure they are really present, check their mic if it's working, make sure they are properly dressed up for online class and the like.”*

Discipline is not just giving a command or instruction on what a student should do, but first and foremost, the teacher should be able to establish a good relationship with their students as they support and listen to them. Discipline in school refers to practices and policies in the educational institution settings such as structure, support, and teacher-student relationship, which affect all school-based activities (Gregory et al., 2010).

*“Listening to them, correcting them and giving discipline if needed, encouraging them to keep on, appreciating what they have accomplished, praying for them, calling the attention of their parents if needed.”*

**The Teacher as a Counselor.** Given the position, teachers can interact with their students very often. With this, they could know more about their students' profiles and backgrounds. They may lack the professional training of a counselor; still, helping and guiding students toward making the right decisions and judgments are distinctively attached to their job. As they work closely with the learners, providing developmental guidance becomes integral to their responsibility.

#### **Some participants mentioned that:**

*“For me, this special role is more applied during counseling and guiding the child to make right (biblical) and wholesome decisions. The child may approach me for help or approach them when I notice something is off or different in their behavior. There are times when I correct students for misbehaving, but I communicate what I have done to the parents for follow-up. There are those who would seek guidance in deciding what to take up in college, some got into trouble, some are failing in their studies, or some are in situations out of their control and are bothered with it.”*

#### **Others stated:**

*“Guiding the learners in their tasks and helping them fulfill their role. Trying my best to ask them how they are first before how their works are.”*

*“In my opinion, you may manifest this aspect through verbal counseling only. This pertains to addressing the academic, emotional or spiritual needs of the child.”*

“Adolescents at the middle and high school level need personal attention and guidance as much as, if not more than, young children. A trusted high school teacher is often the student's first choice as someone to turn to in discussing personal problems” (Ellis, 1990). With this, secondary educators always have an eye on the learners who need assistance and mentoring.

*“Though disembodied, a teacher continues to guide their students through the subject matter they teach online, making sure they can appreciate the value of what it is the students are learning. If there are any gaps or discrepancies observed in the students, they are mentored until these are addressed, with the hope that this trains them to be able to tackle similar issues without the need for oversight in the future. If a student expresses a certain skill or ability, an online teacher can still nurture it through words of encouragement and recognition. Additionally, if a student is struggling with personal issues or if a class is not performing according to their ability, an online teacher can still talk to them through their issues and chide them when necessary.”*

**Table 3: What challenges are met in practicing the loco parentis role during online learning?**

Theme	Quotation
Technical Issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Doing counselling online is a challenge because of some technical issues. There were times when the internet signal was weak, which delayed the sound or made the voices choppy. Also, you wouldn't be able to know the facial expression of students who have to wear masks because they are in their parents' office or store. Some may also choose not to turn on their camera so you won't see their gestures or facial expressions, which may help you determine the direction of your conversation.</li> <li>2. I cannot talk to the students properly due to unstable internet connection.</li> <li>3. Students could just reason out their camera is broken, the mic is not working, and that they are lagging.</li> </ol>
No Physical Contact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is no physical touch like you can't hug them or simply give a tap, which some students need sometimes. You cannot see or supervise them too if they are really going to do or practice what you have said.</li> <li>2. It's harder to read their faces and feelings. A virtual hug is so much different than a real one or even a pat on the back.</li> <li>3. It's hard to build a relationship if you're not together physically.</li> </ol>

Role Limitations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Despite being able to continue parental tasks online, there are still limitations to disembodied teaching. The healthy time restrictions placed on e-lessons mean that teachers cannot completely and well-roundedly discuss a certain topic with their students in ways that more relatable resonate with them, or else the lesson for the day/week would be derailed. The derailment has to be avoided as much as possible because the lack of time requires only the fundamental topics to be taught.</li> <li>2. Online teaching limits a teacher's ability to mentor students who need further training because once a lesson or meeting is done, the student is now in effect "returned to the void", and the teacher cannot watch over them to see if they are indeed addressing the discussed issue, e.g. answering a missed work or taking the time to fully answer a seatwork question. Lastly, when a student is struggling with personal issues and is underperforming, an online teacher can only do so much if the student is unwilling to open up to them online.</li> <li>3. You can only implement your role only to some extent. Take, for example, the implementation of rules where you can only give them reminders and wait for them to follow. Their option of whether to follow or not is more on their side as they are in their territory.</li> <li>4. You are limited in what you can do. You can only remind, advise, encourage, and pray for them with your words.</li> <li>5. The face-to-face restrictions make it difficult to function in the totality of the "loco parentis" role, I guess. You can only do so much. The parents still have the primary responsibility of teaching, guiding, and correcting their children.</li> </ol>
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**Table 3: What challenges are met in practicing the loco parentis role during online learning?**

**Technical Issues.** Technology today has impacted almost every aspect of life, and education is no exception. In the traditional setup, collaboration was limited to students in the same classroom or building and classes were relatively isolated. Nowadays, technology enables forms of collaboration and communication that were unprecedented in the past. Although teachers generally appreciate the benefits of educational technologies, teachers cited technical issues as one of the major challenges in practicing the loco parentis role during online learning. A study by Muhammad and Kainat (2020) found that internet access problems, a lack of interaction between teachers and students, and a lack of technological facilities challenge the efficacy of online learning.

As one participant mentioned:

*"I cannot talk to the students properly due to unstable internet connection."*

**No Physical Contact.** The relationship between teachers and students is of a powerful kind. In physical classrooms, intimacy can be fostered through direct actions such as the use of humor, eye contact, and physical proximity. However, in the virtual space, there are not many nonverbal and casual communication tactics (Eisenbach et al., 2018; Ghamdi et al., 2016; Song et al., 2016). This is especially true for behaviors related to intimacy, such as warmth and receptivity. Teachers find it very difficult to communicate through body language, facial expressions, and informal interactions when a student does not or cannot turn on the camera.

As one participant stated:

*"It's hard to read their faces and emotions."*

**Role Limitations.** The majority of respondents said that teachers have a limited role as parents in online learning. They can only play a limited role, and parents still have primary responsibility for teaching, guiding, and correcting their children.

Another participant mentioned:

*"In my opinion, face-to-face limitations make it difficult to make the whole Loco Parentis role work. You are limited in what you can do. Parents still have primary responsibility for teaching, guiding, and correcting their children."*

According to the Department of Education, they are only bolstering the education their children receive from their parents at home and are appealing to parents to help discipline their children at all times. Under the Child and Youth Services Act of the Philippines, children are one of the nation's most important assets in the promotion and improvement of children's lives, and well-being is also anchored by the moral supervision and support of their parents or guardians. Parental support and involvement are clearly defined when school leaders, teachers, and parents work together to achieve progress for students and the school community as a whole (Evangelista, 2008).

Another participant added:

*“You can only implement your role only to some extent. Take, for example, the implementation of rules where you can only give them reminders and wait for them to follow. Their option of whether to follow or not is more on their side as they are in their territory.”*

Overall, though teachers want to maximize the totality of their loco parentis role online, challenges such as technical difficulties, no physical contact, and limitations hinder them from doing so, and there is still that sense of warmth, sincerity, and openness they sorely miss when meeting with their students face to face.

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#### IV. Conclusion

Based on the results of the studies, the secondary education teachers of Small World Christian School Foundation (SWCSF) understand the dynamic nature of the concept of In Loco Parentis. Despite the online modality, the educators were able to fulfill their role and get hold of it as their given responsibility to be the second parents of the students. With this responsibility, the educators instilled deep-rooted learning, both academically and spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Also, following up on misconduct and allotting time for guidance, devotion, and support groups benefited both the learners and educators. The teachers reinforced the Christ-like character of the students, fulfilling the school's vision and mission. In addition, the teachers were able to exercise such a role of disciplinarian and counselor. The SWCSF teachers constantly observe discipline during synchronous sessions by implementing online guidelines or rules that must be followed. Even in an online setup, educators could establish open communication. Reaching out to the homes, guiding the learners in decision-making, and spending time with some students who need counseling or guidance were apparent in this process. On the other hand, educators can only limit their role to some extent due to challenges - unstable internet connection and faulty hardware make communication difficult for teachers and students. The online modality also makes it critical to build a personal relationship with each learner. Comfort and sincerity cannot be readily established in a virtual setup. The educators also experienced limited supervision as they could only see what was on the screen. With this, the parents or the guardians still have the primary responsibility of teaching, guiding, and correcting their children. The online modality may limit the In Loco Parentis role of educators but will always be a significant aspect of being a teacher.

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