

Building a Culture of Safety: Teachers' Perspectives in Promoting Disaster Awareness in Schools

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Abstract: In my recent study, I wanted to explore the heartfelt experiences of elementary teachers from the Sto. Tomas East District in Davao del Norte. These educators are truly passionate about raising disaster awareness in their schools. Through personal conversations with ten dedicated teachers, I discovered not only their inspiring stories but also the creative strategies they use to tackle the challenges they face in this vital area. As we talked, a number of themes emerged about how to make disaster awareness more effective. One of the most notable insights was the teachers' deep yearning for collaboration with the communities they serve. They shared that disaster preparedness becomes significantly more meaningful when they come together with parents, local organizations, and community leaders. A common point they made was the importance of engaging students in hands-on, participatory learning experiences. Not only do these methods help the lessons resonate more deeply, but they also empower students by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to respond to emergencies. Despite their commitment, these teachers often find themselves grappling with significant challenges, particularly when it comes to limited resources. Yet, they shared incredible stories of resilience and creativity in overcoming these hurdles. They frequently maximize what resources they do have, foster partnerships within their communities, and actively seek opportunities to enhance their own skills through training. Our conversations also illuminated the critical role of collaborative leadership and smart resource management in creating resilient schools. The teachers recognized that ongoing professional development is vital, not just for them, but also for their students, ensuring that everyone is equipped with the necessary skills to face potential disasters.

Keywords: Disaster Awareness, Teachers' Experiences, School Safety, Qualitative- Phenomenology, Davao Del Norte Division.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters can profoundly affect the safety and well-being of communities, especially in areas already prone to environmental hazards. During these challenging times, schools take on an essential role in disaster preparedness and response. They are not just safe havens for children but also vital centers for disseminating important information on staying alert and safe during disasters.

In the Sto. Tomas East District of Davao del Norte, dedicated elementary teachers are stepping up to ensure their students are ready for whatever might happen. This study seeks to capture these passionate educators' perspectives on their responsibilities and the various experiences they encounter while teaching their students and the wider community about disaster awareness. By exploring their teaching approaches, the challenges they face, and how they adapt to obstacles, this research aims to

develop effective strategies to cultivate a culture of safety both in schools and in the surrounding community.

II. METHODS

In this study, we had the wonderful opportunity to connect with ten passionate elementary school teachers from various schools in the Sto. Tomas East District. Our conversations were not just interviews; they were meaningful exchanges that allowed us to tap into the rich tapestry of experiences these educators bring, especially concerning disaster awareness initiatives in their classrooms.

We approached our conversations with a semi-structured format, which meant we had specific topics in mind, like how teachers collaborate with their communities, the hurdles they face in getting resources, and what teaching strategies work well for them. However, we also made it a priority to create a warm and inviting space for them to share their personal stories and insights without hesitation.

Over four weeks, we dove into these enlightening discussions, always ensuring we had the participants' consent to record our talks. After each conversation, we took the time to carefully transcribe everything and then analyzed the data using thematic analysis. This method proved invaluable as it helped us uncover important patterns and themes that could enhance disaster awareness in schools, guided by the framework proposed by Creswell and Poth (2016).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Recent discussions have illuminated some essential themes that can truly enhance disaster awareness in schools. One of the key takeaways is the importance of schools connecting with their local communities. When educators build strong partnerships with local governments, non-profits, and community leaders, they can make a real difference in preparing for disasters. Many teachers have shared creative and engaging techniques they use, like simulations and disaster drills. These not only empower students but also emphasize how vital it is to be prepared for emergencies.

Yet, it's essential to recognize the challenges teachers face, especially when resources are tight and training opportunities are scarce. Many expressed their frustrations about having to be resourceful and make the most of whatever materials they can find to run disaster awareness programs effectively. There's a palpable desire among educators for ongoing professional development, as many feel they aren't fully equipped to tackle disaster-related topics comprehensively.

These experiences echo previous research highlighting the crucial role teachers play in promoting a culture of safety in schools. Engaging students in disaster preparedness isn't just about delivering lessons; it should involve collaboration among teachers, parents, and community members. By incorporating hands-on activities and innovative teaching methods, disaster preparedness becomes not only educational but also relatable and impactful.

The hurdles faced by teachers often reflect larger systemic issues, particularly in low-resource settings. There's an urgent need for more professional development opportunities and smarter allocation of resources. Schools should focus on developing partnerships with various stakeholders to ensure their disaster awareness initiatives are effective and sustainable over time.

Ultimately, these insights can guide policy decisions at both local and national levels, underscoring the value of a multifaceted approach to building resilient communities in the face of disasters. Creating a culture of safety depends on collaborative leadership, thoughtful resource use, and a genuine commitment to continuous learning.

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