Case Study of De La Salle Santiago Zobel Grade 12 Students College Application During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This action research explored college application experiences of 12 graduating senior high school students for AY 2020-2021. The purpose of the study is to increase students' information about college preparation and to eventually have a framework which can be integrated in the career guidance program. This research answered the central question: What does college preparedness mean to DLSZ grade 12 students? With sub-questions: 1. How do grade 12 students prepare for college applications? 2. In what ways do grade 12 students prepare themselves from high school to college transition? 3. What have the grade 12 students discovered about themselves during college preparation? Data collection was done through individual interviews, focus group discussions, and written questionnaire. Thematic coding was used to analyze the data using qualitative design. Trustworthiness was established though member checking and triangulation. Result revealed the following 5 categories on college preparedness: Academic Skills, Goal-Setting, New Beginnings, Self-Efficacy and Self-Care.

Keywords: College Application, Grade 12 Senior High School Students, Case Study, Action Research, College Preparedness, Career Guidance Program

Introduction

"DLSU joins other universities that have canceled their entrance examinations for the next school year due to the pandemic. ADMU and UST canceled their exams in September and August, respectively. Meanwhile, University of the Philippines in October announced that it will not administer UPCAT (UP College Admission Test) 2021."

The coronavirus disease, which began to spread from Wuhan China to the world starting from December 2019, has negatively affected all of us and has caused millions of deaths until now. The virus has affected our lives in many aspects, and educational institutions conducted their courses using electronic and technological facilities such as online applications with distance education method in the final semester of the 2019-2020 academic year and the succeeding year of 2021-2022 to present. During this process, school activities are conducted using online distance learning method at De La Salle Santiago Zobel School as well including college applications.

As a senior high school counselor, I have often wondered about the ways in which I am preparing students for life beyond high school, specifically on how I can help my students when it comes to college application assistance during this time of Covid-19 pandemic. My action research central question - "What does college preparedness mean to you?" – seeks to find out just that. In executing this research study, I desire to explore the college preparation experiences of grade 12 students, with an end-view of creating a career preparedness program, under the school counseling office, that can contribute to college readiness of incoming graduating students.

I believe it is important to first locate my own place in this study and uncover the significance of the action research by articulating how shock I am about our current "new normal" while battling the Covid-19 pandemic. As I begin the academic year 2020-2021, my mind was blank because I have zero idea on how college application will turn out. I am used to telling my high school graduating students to prepare for college by attending review classes during the summer, before the start of the school year, to prepare themselves for college admissions test.

In my 20 years of being a school counselor, I am used to the idea that the majority of percentages of college application acceptance is when students pass or qualify for college admissions test. Regardless of how high or low their academic standing, as long as they pass the entrance test, they will be able to study in a university. Lo and behold, when grade 11 AY 2019-2020 was about to end in De La Salle Santiago Zobel (DLSZ), our Philippine president declared a lock down. Some of my students still did prepare and enrolled for review classes, via online classes, while some did not.

Knowing that I will be there to assist my students for

college applications, inquiries flooded me via email, Google chats, viber chat, and facebook messenger regarding how to go about the process of application. At first, all I could say was to visit university websites, local and abroad, and wait for official announcements. Several months passed, the "top 4" local universities started announcing their college application guidelines. Universities, one by one, started announcing that college admissions tests are waived due to health and safety reasons that the Covid-19 brought about. Even some universities abroad waived their Student Ability Tests (SATs).

Instead of the usual college entrance test as the major qualifier for acceptance, each university developed their own unique guidelines regarding requirements for acceptance. Majority of the requirements are junior high school grades, awards, certificates, recognitions, extra-curricular activities, essay, and recommendations from the teachers, principal, and counselor. The first local university to announce that there will be no college entrance test was University of Santo Tomas (August 2020), next was Ateneo de Manila (September 2020), followed by De La Salle University (November 2020) and University of the Philippines (January 2021).

Since college application, through the many years of assessing admissions through entrance test results or scores via SATs as basis for qualifiers for acceptance, the new college application system is very new for AY 2021-2022. With this in mind, I thought of doing research on college preparedness of grade 12 students of De La Salle Santiago Zobel School. This way I can create a framework or a model to the career program of the school counseling office, which will eventually help contribute in one of our services in the office, which is the college application assistance to students.

Research Questions

This action research seeks to contribute in a unique way to the popular dialogue on college preparedness. The case study begins with a central question followed by the sub-questions below:

What does college preparedness mean to DLSZ grade 12 students?

Sub-questions:

1. How do grade 12 students prepare for college applications?
2. In what ways do grade 12 students prepare themselves from high school to college transition?
3. What have the grade 12 students discovered about

themselves during college preparation?

Literature Review

For Jackson (2015), his research about "Does an Early College Readiness Signal Discourage College Application and Enrollment?" focuses on one state's effort to increase students' information about college readiness. The purpose is to provide high school students with early information about college expectations. Regression discontinuity design was used to determine whether a student receiving a signal that he/she needs remediation lowers the probability of that student applying to or enrolling in participating universities. Logistic regression was used as a method to get the statistical data because of the causal estimate of the relationship of the study. In addition, Early Assessment Program (EAP) Test was used to measure college readiness. There were 1,235,621 freshmen applicants in 23 campuses of California high schools. In the background of their study, it was mentioned that there's a need for high school students for remediation (Shulock, 2010) to prepare themselves for college. It was said that it is important to align high school course work to college expectations (Conley, 2012). Purposive sampling who voluntarily participated in the study was used for data collection. Result revealed that remediation has no effect on enrollment and college application.

The result from Jackson's study reveals no effect if there will be remediation for college application. This is a good finding because the most common misconception of students applying for college is to attend review classes in order to be more equipped in their chances for getting accepted to a prestigious university. Since a number of students during Covid-19 pandemic was not able to attend college review centers unless they were done online, the research finding somewhat gives confidence boost to students who feel that they are not prepared in case there will be college admissions tests in the future.

Sharma et al (2017) study on "The Effects of Purpose Orientations on Recent High School Graduates' College Application Decisions". The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature of high school students' life purpose and further examine the relationship between their purpose and college application decisions. Data from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) by the US Department of Education was collected. Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) Survey was used as the instrument. The research design and statistical tool on the other hand

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were quantitative- factor analysis to determine the life goal items, while logistic regressions to investigate relationships of predictors. 12,027 sample of US public and private high school students were gathered via purposive sampling who took the ELS. Theoretical background of the study were based on the researches about the purpose on students' college decisions (Leppel, 2005) and factors that motivate students to apply for college (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Result showed that there are 4 types of purposes orientations: (1) career, (2) interpersonal, (3) altruistic, and (4) self-oriented purpose. Only career purpose orientation was positively related to high school graduates decision to apply for college.

This action research further supported by Robinson & Roska (2016) in their study on "Counselors, Information, and High School College-Going Culture: Inequalities in the College Application Process". This research considers the high school context in which counselors and students interaction play a significant role in predicting application to college. Data was collected from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS). Statistical tool used was descriptive statistics using quantitative design so that it is able to do prediction by multinomial logit model. There were survey questions from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) given to 8,980 grade 10 high school students in year 2002 and grade 12 in year 2004 (follow-up) which visited the counselor for matters pertaining to college via purposive sampling who took the ELS. Theoretical background of the importance of school context for student's outcomes including college preparation and enrollment (Engeberg & Wolniak, 2010) and the research on high school counselors are important for facilitating college-going students (Belasco, 2013) supported this study. Result showed that seeing a counselor plays a significant role in predicting application to college.

Every year junior high school and senior high school counselors arrange college orientations and career talks as part of the career program of DLSZ school counseling office. This action research validates that arranging such orientations do really help high school graduates when it comes to assisting the students with decision-making regarding specific courses that they intend to take for college and what kind of career path they envision themselves to achieve. Further, this also validates the current career program of DLSZ whereby, students can see their respective counselors freely for career consultations and counseling. Some questions about holding career and college orientations, when it comes to college preparedness, are asked in the survey questionnaires for this study.

Questions about career consultations and counseling to counselors are also part of the questionnaire for this research.

In the study of Cortes & Lincove (2019) entitled- "Match or Mismatch? Automatic Admissions and College Preferences of Low-High Income Students". The research study examines the role of information in college matching behavior of low-and high-income students, exploiting a state automatic admissions policy that provides some students with perfect a priori certainty of college admissions. Data was provided through the Texas Education Research Center (ERC) from the state's public education, higher education, and workforce system. Instruments that were used was the American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) state assessments. 146,993 public high school graduates from spring 2008 and 2009 in 31 Texas public universities were used in the data that was provided via purposive sampling who took the ACT and SAT. Based on the researchers' background of the study, there is a gap in access to college quality and academic qualifications (Black et al, 2018).

Similar study on "Gaps in the College Application Gauntlet" research study by Holzman et al (2019) examined race-and income-based gaps in college enrollment. Data was collected from the High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS) of 2009 administered by the National Center for Education Statistics. Quantitative research design and correlations between enrollment gaps and applications were used to analyze race, ethnicity, gaps, SES. Instrument used was the High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS) Survey. 15,360 public school students from 10 US state-representative samples via purposive sampling were data collected. Background on the theory of effectively maintained inequality by Lucas (2001) was mentioned to support this study. Result showed that gaps in academic qualifications and gaps in taking a college entrance exam are the strongest predictors of gaps in the selectivity of eventual enrollment.

Research studies about financial constraints and inequalities affect college enrollment further supported the above-mentioned studies by Hyman's 2017 research about "Act for All: The Effect of Mandatory College Entrance Exams on Postsecondary Attainment and Choice" whereby it examined the effects of requiring and paying for all public high school students to take a college entrance exam. The researcher used an original dataset containing ACT (American College Testing) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) college admission exams. Result

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suggest that students are less likely to take a college entrance exam in the absence of the policy and students in the poorest high schools.

This study predicts the limitation and validates that my action research study does really have a gap when it comes to participant demographics. The researches done by Cortes & Lincove (2018), Holtzman et al (2019) and Hyman (2017) mentioned about financial differences and inequalities of high school students pursuing college education. They mentioned that some students who have financial difficulties for studying college education limits their chances to enroll in United States of America. Since my participants focuses on our students in DLSZ, this can only be better appreciated by students who come from similar demographics.

For the last literature review, the study by Arici (2020) encapsulates the current education status when he studied about the "Analysis of university students' opinions on the Covid-19 process and the distance education method applied in this process: The sample of Muş Alparslan University" in Turkey. Research was conducted to reveal university students' opinions on distance education, which is connected with the Covid-19 process and to offer solutions to the problems encountered during this process. Result suggest that students participating in the study describes this process as a hard and distressing process and a process that requires precautions. In addition, students state that economic and psychological problems as well as the socialization problem have increased within their families, and that their relations with friends are badly affected by the process.

Though the study of Arici was mostly focused about the students' opinions on distance learning, my research study can relate to this as the participants are doing online distance learning as well while fixing their college applications on the side. Since college application is relatively new to every graduating senior high student this academic year of AY 2020-2021, their self-discovery about themselves during the process of college application is a good finding to know.

Methodology

Research Design

According to Hinchey (2008), to qualify as action research, at least one stakeholder—teacher, principal, staff member—must be engaged in finding the answer to some question he or she deems important. The new college application guidelines during Covid-19 pandemic is very new to us. As a counselor, I find that in order to better understand the student's college preparedness, it is necessary to devise a plan or framework that could enhance our career program in the counseling office by exploring graduating students' college preparedness.

Practical action research is a process in which practitioners identify a local, practical problem they want to address and then systematically work to identify action strategies for improvement (Hinchey, 2008). When it does explore technique, its purpose is not to test empirical generalizations (although they may be one type of information considered), but to help practitioners use their own intelligence and creativity to find ways to effect change.

Since my action research also delves into case study, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "a case study is an in-depth analysis of a single entity". Similarly, Creswell (2005) defines a case study as "an in depth exploration of a bounded system". For the purposes of this research, a multiple case study design is employed to answer the research central question, "What does college preparedness mean to DLSZ grade 12 students?" The case study involve 12 students that are graduating from a catholic private basic education school in Vermosa, Imus Cavite in the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Respondents

As directed by the central research question itself - "What does college preparedness mean to DLSZ grade 12 students?" the participants of the study are current grade 12 students, all of whom are graduating students from the same private catholic high school in De La Salle Santiago Zobel School, Vermosa Campus in Imus Cavite of Academic year 2020-2021. This school serves senior high school students mostly coming from junior high school students from the De La Salle Santiago Zobel Alabang Main Campus in Muntinlupa City and surrounding suburbs in the area. The grade 12 graduating batch has 433 enrolled students. High majority of the students are Filipino students while minority are foreign students and dual-citizens (Filipino with foreign citizenship). It is noteworthy that the school considers its curriculum to be college-preparatory in nature. On average, over 90% of the members of each graduating class attend a four-year post-secondary institution.

Research Instruments

Instrumentation of this research is done via Google Form (see Appendix II) to get information about college preparedness. Since our school is currently on online distance learning, the whole research is being done on-line. Research questions are validated and approved through consultations with 2 research consultants/facilitators from De La Salle University who facilitated a research workshop that I attended in DLSZ. The workshop was done to encourage us employees to do an action research for the institution. Aside from answering written questionnaires from the Google Form, gathering of data will come from individual interviews and focus group discussions. To ensure validity of questions, there are 2 pilot study participants involve for this as well, so that if there are changes needed, the questions are adjusted.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection methods as noted by Smith (2013), requires rich data. Therefore, participants should be able to tell their stories, develop their ideas, and share their thoughts and feelings about college preparedness. For this action research, data gathering are collected in 3 ways: (1) Individual Interview (2) Focus Group Discussion and (3) Written questionnaires. Participants for this research, though sampled purposely to 3 students per strand of the senior high school, is somehow randomly collected. Since students would send me messages via email or Google chats regarding consultations for their college applications on a regular basis, I told myself whoever starts to send me a message on a particular day will be a potential participant for the study. Thus, every single message, on a "first message, first served" coming from the different strands will be receiving an invitation to participate in my action research.

The first 2 participants were invited for a pilot study. See appendix IV for a sample transcript of pilot individual interview. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a pilot should be done to provide for the researcher a sense of how much time it takes to complete a questionnaire, as well as identify concerns with the language and provide a sense of what types of responses will result from the questions. Seeing that the pilot can be successful in identifying needed changes, it provided suggestions to improve the clarity and format of my research questions. After the pilot, 12 students coming from the 4 strands of the SHS participated excitedly. This overwhelmed me as a researcher because I noticed that all of them were very happy to share their college preparation experiences.

All of them received an email invitation and informed consent form. After they agree, they are sent a Google questionnaire form. There's an instruction that once they agree to accomplish the form, it means that they voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Once the answered Google form has been submitted, students are scheduled for individual interviews and focus group discussions on their available time. The interviews are done via Google Meet link and I made sure that everyone agreed if I start recording the session. Fortunately, all of them all understood the reason behind the recording for the research and everybody voluntarily agreed.

During interviews, the central question and sub-questions are asked on a personal level by directly asking for their own college preparation experiences. The questions are relayed as "What does college preparedness mean to you?" for the central question while 3 sub-questions are answered from their own experiences by asking: (a) "How did you prepare for your college application?" (2) "In what ways are you prepared from high school to college transition?" (3) "What have you discovered about yourself through-out the course of your college preparation? As Charmaz (2006) notes, "interviewing has long been a useful data-gathering method in various types of qualitative research." In relation, focus group interviews are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain, since the lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive, interviews. (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Ethical Issues

The questionnaire is administered electronically using Google Forms. Participants are sent a link to the Google form via the school's Gmail, which includes an informed consent and voluntary participation agreement. Answering the Google form is contingent upon the confidential agreement between the participants and I. This is to follow ethical protocols that participants are treated with utmost confidentiality by the students' voluntary agreement.

Demographic data was collected at the beginning of the questionnaire. Majority of the items are mostly open-ended questions with some items specific to basic information from students such as name, gender, age, senior high school strand/track. The questions are categorized based from the 3 sub-questions, while both the central question and sub-questions are mostly gathered from individual interviews and focus group

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discussions.

Interviews and FGDs are done with the same ethical conditions, such as voluntary agreement to record the sessions and assurance that the sole purpose is for this action research and that the confidentially of data is well treated. Apart from the researcher-participants confidentiality, there was a research ethics letter to the school stakeholders. This letter was released for ethical considerations, support and cooperation for the researchers who are doing action research.

Results

The analysis that took place led to the produce final themes in answering the research central question, "What does college preparedness mean to DLZ grade 12 students?" with sub-questions "How do you prepare for college? "How is your transition from high school to college?" What have you discovered about yourself throughout the course of college preparation?

Using the coding process, tentative categories from the data began to emerge. This was accomplished by naming each piece of data from within the transcript and grouping similar or matching data into a labeled category. Charmaz (2006) defines the creation of these categories as "the analytical step of selecting certain codes as having overriding significance or abstracting common themes and patterns in several codes into an analytical concept". These categories represented answers to the central research question and sub-questions.

In total, 5 different categories emerged from the focus group interview, individual interviews, and written questionnaires. These include: (1) Academic Skills, (2) Goal-Setting, (3) New Beginnings, (4) Self-Efficacy and (5) Self-Care. These are also supported by writing analytic memos because "it forces researchers to develop codes into categories early in the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006). Otherwise stated, "Through writing memos, [researchers] construct analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories" (Charmaz, 2006). When these observations appeared redundant or similar, categories were combined or discarded, bringing the total number of categories to 5. Refer to appendix VIII for the extracting of common themes. More detailed explanation of the final themes are discussed per category below.

Category I: Academic Skills

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), "categories

are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena". In the first category, Academic Skills, there are subcategories initially emerged: academic foundation, academic development, academic readiness, self-achievement, and desiring for achievement. These were extracted from the participants' responses that can be viewed in the transcripts of interviews in appendices V & VI. Examples of the responses are: "*academically, it is important that the academic foundations have been solved and that it should be really deep*"; "*Yes, I learn from my teachers but there are still things that I want to know so I can better understand and so I can have more practice*"; "*Mentally, this is the crucial part, if you are not mentally prepared, you will fall apart*".

The findings in my action research further validates previous literature mentioned in my theoretical framework under the content proficiency. To reiterate, Adelman (2006) mentioned, "the content of a student's high school curriculum exhibits one of the strongest influences on successful college completion - the more rigorous and robust the content, the more likely a student is to complete college". This goes to show that by having academic skills, with students having good academic foundations, help them with their college preparation

Category II: Goal-Setting

Aside from the central question, answer to the sub-question, "How are you preparing for college?" is answered mostly by this theme. For the goal-setting category, some sub-categories emerged during coding process. These are: motivation, direction, goal orientation, career orientation, decision making, life setting, career setting, target/dream, future career, attitude of success and learning/future goal. Common responses from the participants that were extracted from this theme are: "*having a clear understanding of the course you want*"; "*the college application process, preparing for the requirements*"; "*understanding where you want to be in the future*"; "*something that you will utilize for you to be ready for college*", "*a big part of a student's life because it will greatly affect our future*".

Included in this category is an item in the sub-question in the Google form questionnaire. To prepare for college, I have been arranging college orientations and college talks from junior high school to senior high of the batch. In one item of the Google questionnaire, the participants were asked if they have been attending college orientations and talks because this can also

guide them in which course to take in college or which future career they envision themselves into. The figure below are their responses:

Figure 1. *College Orientations Attendance*

Have you been attending college orientations?
12 responses
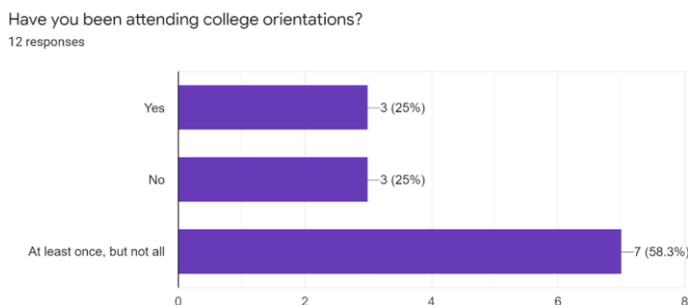
7 out of 12 (58.3%) of the participants mentioned that they have attended at least once, but not all of the arranged college orientations. However, only 3 (25%) said yes, and similarly with the yes attendance are the non-attendance of the participants which is also 3 (25%). I can assume to say that the attendance for the orientation for AY 2020-2021 is lesser as compared to the previous several years most specially in junior high school and grade 11 senior high school because all of them are required to attend. For the current academic year, since everything is done online, it is hard to monitor students' attendance. They have the option not to attend any scheduled school activity unlike when they are physically in school whereby they are forced to attend activities even if they like to attend or not. Nevertheless, this is just one factor that can affect their goal's mind-set in their preparation for college.
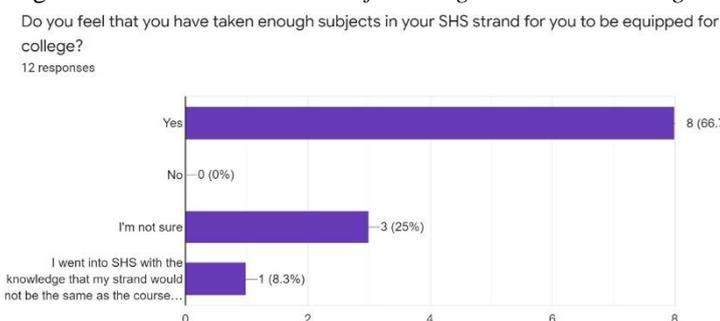
Category III: New Beginnings

New beginnings for this action research purposes is catered to answer the students' transition from high school to college. With answering the sub-questions, "How are you preparing from high school to college transition?", this final theme category emerged from the following sub-categories: uncertainty, perplexity, new chapter in life, transition to adulthood, confronting the future, difficulty, new hope, new look, movement to the future, and pre-requisite to adulthood. With responses coming from the students like: "you are going to be in the next chapter of your life after you graduate from senior high school"; "you have to prepared to be a college student"; "it's way more different than being in high school"; "a step that is mandatory to take so that you can move on being an adult"; "to confront the future without the support of the parents"; "independence in getting a job". Those are some answers that show students' preparing

Themselves for a new chapter in their education life after senior high school completion, thus having a new beginning for college.

2 items in the Google questionnaire were asked about the students' experiences for high school to college transition. The figures below will show if the high school academics subjects equipped themselves for college and if they feel that they are college-ready after senior high school graduation.

Figure 2. *Academic Transition from High School to College*

Do you feel that you have taken enough subjects in your SHS strand for you to be equipped for college?
12 responses

No one from the participants feel that the high school academic subjects did not help in their preparation for college. However, one mentioned that while she is applying for college, she feels that her strand subjects helped her, which is under the Arts & Design track, but it did not help when she changed her mind in her application to business courses. She said, "*I am well equipped with both theoretical knowledge and applied knowledge though Art, however, as I am applying mainly for ABM courses, I do not feel completely equipped for my future courses*". Most of them mentioned that the academic subjects they have taken in high school equipped them for college while 3 participants were unsure.

Figure 2.1 *College Readiness*

Do you feel that you are college-ready after SHS graduation?
12 responses
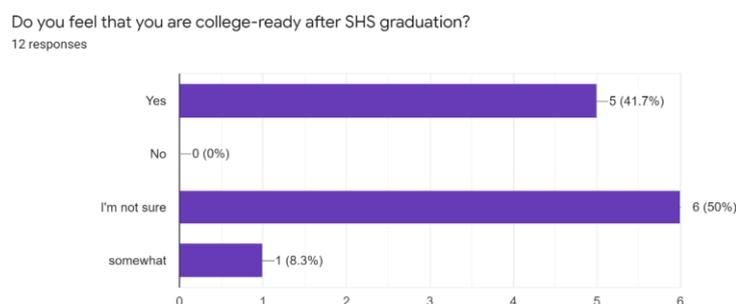
When asked if the participants are college-ready after

SHS graduation, 6 (50%) of them said that they are not sure if they are ready. As their guidance counselor, this is understandable to note because they have been used to taking face-to-face classes all through-out their grade school and high school life, but with Covid-19 taking place at the moment and online distance learning is used as a platform, it probably added uncertainty for college readiness. 5 (41.7%) on the other hand mentioned that yes, they are college-ready and 1 said somewhat ready. It is good to note too that no one said "no", meaning they are all college-ready but students are just unsure or somewhat unsure, perhaps lacking confidence or having a fear of uncertainty on what will happen to college.

Category 4: Self-Efficacy

In relation to the theoretical framework discussed the previous chapter, the final theme or category about self-efficacy validates previous literature on college preparedness. To reiterate on what I have mentioned, "the higher a student's self-confidence and self-motivation, the more likely she is to both engage and succeed in school (Caraway,Tucker, Reinke & Hall, 2003)". Likewise, Bandura (1997) noted that self-efficacy specifically affects effort and achievement. In this finding, self-efficacy emerged from the following sub-categories: independence, self-discipline, passionate, autonomous, determination, focus, persistence, self-reliant, responsibility, commitment, self-learning, self-knowledge, preparation of self, intrinsic motivation, and resourcefulness.

Common responses from the participants who mentioned statements dealing with this category are the following: *"I want to confront the future without the support of my parents"; "independence in getting a job", "if you are not mentally prepared, you will fall apart"; "you should be disciplined", "the pandemic taught me that I have to work on my own"; "my only ally to succeed and to learn the things that I need to learn is doing the extra work, going the extra mile"*. Based from the participants' responses, having a positive self-efficacy really help in their college preparation because students "with poor self-efficacy often have low motivation that can result in cyclical and recurring sub-par academic performance (Margolis and McCabe, 2006)".

Category V: Self-Care

Some children have parents who are college educated; others do not. Some get regular visits to the doctor and the dentist; others do not. Some live in comfortable homes in safe neighborhoods. Others do not. These differences affect children's readiness to learn. They influence their vocabulary and background knowledge. Access to health care and nutrition affect their physical and mental development. Of course, all children can learn, but some have a head start because of their socioeconomic circumstances, while others start far behind. (Ravitch, 2013).

Self-care emerged in this final category with sub-categories good mental health, mentally prepared, physically prepared, well-being, holistic preparedness, sound body and mind and enjoying the surroundings. The common responses from the participants are*: "you have to take care of your body"; "you have to enjoy once in a while"; "you have to sleep"; "this pandemic taught me that I have to work on my own"; "you should be mentally, physically, and academically prepared"*.

Having to take care of oneself, learning how to self-manage, are healthy ways of college preparation. In relation to the environment and demographics category of the previously discussed theoretical framework, having a nurturing environment helps with having a health body and mind as well. As Heckman, a Nobel Prize winning economist writes, "A large body of evidence suggests that a major determinant of child disadvantage is the quality of the nurturing environment rather than just the financial resources available" (2013). This, of course, is referring to the home environment itself. Like Bronfenbrenner and the Coleman Report before him, Heckman recognizes the significant effect that outside forces can have on academic achievement.

Discussion

In the memo writing, it is reflected that having academic foundations is important to discipline oneself and to be ready for challenges that come in our daily lives. Exerting extra effort is also helpful in succeeding to learn. Apart from having good academic grades, being passionate and having clarity of thought can help someone into achieving something to become successful. This validates the previous study by Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) who mentioned "that college readiness, success and completion are contingent not just on content knowledge, but also on a host of more general behavioral conditions." Thus, considering the other final themes of this action research.

For the goal-setting category, being organized in

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preparing for college requirements is helpful. Being decisive with what you want to achieve help as well with a clarity about the course students want to take. Students need to be fixing their college application documents and requirements in advance to lessen their load. Students should find importance that getting ready for college helps them to mold their future. In addition, keeping their aspiration for future achievement in selecting an appropriate choice of course while preparing for college application and having a thorough knowledge about the requirements are necessary. By having a clear vision and familiarity with the course and admission process, it would greatly assist the student-applicants in moving forward smoothly.

The category about new beginnings discusses about having a new chapter of the students' life after senior high school. Students start to being college ready and that college preparation is something that senior high school students normally go through or experience. According to the participants, they should be prepared in major aspects of life, mentally, physically, and academically. Therefore, each step is an important journey for their transition from high school to college. Participants said that preparation for college is very important as it directly affects their future career and their future life. Students are aware that college life is different from high school, they have to do mandatory steps as they lead themselves toward adulthood and that they need to confront the future with independence.

For the self-efficacy analytic memo of this final category, it is noted that being responsible, being on your own without the help of the parents reveal independence. Since most of the senior high school students are used to be under the care of by their parents most of their lives in the basic education, not being dependent with their parents is a great feat already for the students of DLSZ, especially with this kind of demographics who belong to the upper socio-economic-status in the Philippines.

Moreover, being independent from doing things on their own and doing extra-work, going the extra mile, are already high fulfillment at this stage of their pre-adulthood life. Being self-sufficient during the Covid-19 pandemic is very important together with having academic discipline. Learning to face head-on their tasks and responsibilities while remaining to be independent is a good sign of self-discipline because they become more resourceful and hard working. Students need to learn how to be resilient most specially in times of overcoming struggles so that they will be able to bounce back and stand on their own legs.

There are 6 categories of self-care according to Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid (2011). They said that a practical way to begin is to create a personalized self-care plan. Ensure that it includes all six categories of self-care that build on individual strengths and behaviors (Wolpow et al., 2011). Working definitions of the six self-care categories. First is *Physical self-care:* The things I do to improve my body in healthy ways. Second, *Emotional self-care:* The things I do to deal with my feelings in healthy ways. Third, *Social self-care:* The things I do with others and the world around me. Fourth, *Cognitive self-care:* The things I do to improve my mind and understand myself better. Fifth, *Financial self-care:* The things I do to stay financially responsible. Sixth, *Spiritual self-care:* The things I do to gain perspective on my life.

Student participants from this action research mentioned the importance of self-care. They said taking care of their body and enjoying sleep are good for their well-being. During the pandemic situation, enjoyment is very important for one's self. Since they are striving to work hard to achieve something in the future, having a holistic attitude and keeping a healthy lifestyle keep them stable. Body care, which includes good physical hygiene and physical health, enjoying food, wants and fulfilling desires, sleep hygiene, are some factors to having good mental health. Achieving holistic integration of personality with a balanced body and mind, students can overcome any life challenges they may encounter in pursuing their future career. After all, the benefits of self-care include reduced stress and overall distress, improved performance, and stronger relationships.

To be clear however, one's self-efficacy is not the product of a single factor. It is affected by multiple variables. In an academic setting, these variables are usually bi-products of the learning environment and the teaching strategies used (Fencl & Scheel, 2005). To that end, a pedagogical approach to improving self-efficacy should be practiced through the years, as another form of intervention that may lead to more confident, and therefore more prepared, students. The research-derived data also suggests that goal setting as an intervention strategy may improve self-efficacy, and therefore impact academic achievement.

Plan of Dissemination

Given the findings of this case study, it seems wise to disseminate my findings and give recommendations at the same time. I plan to share information of my findings to 3 stakeholders. First, of course, is the school counseling office. Since the purpose of this action research is to provide a career program that can help in our college application assistance. The counselors under the department need to know the findings so all of them, whether grade school or high school counselor, will be informed about our grade 12 students' experiences regarding college preparedness during covid-19 pandemic. This will be helpful most specially to the junior high school and senior high school counselors because we follow our batch developmentally, meaning, every academic year, we move up to the level of the batch as they move up to their grade level.

At the start of the academic year as well, we all conduct guidance services orientation and batch profile presentation to our teachers and students. This is a good chance too to disseminate information on how to properly prepare for college applications by sharing the results of my study because this action research cater to first-hand experiences of DLSZ grade 12 students.

Second, presenting the results to the junior high school and senior high school academics will give information about the importance of the findings most specially under the academic skills and goal-setting categories. However, it would be of value to further pursue data on the topic of academic skill. Academic foundation or content proficiency under my study's theoretical framework referred to as "content knowledge" or "basic content knowledge" throughout the case study. Enhancing content proficiency for incoming college students would be interesting to expand the research on this topic

This can probably be supported by the study of Conley (2010), who lays out the elements of the "Core Academic Subjects Knowledge" that he believes are critical. They include content within the disciplines of English, Math, Science, Social Studies, World Languages and the Arts (Conley, 2010). In terms of remedying the great need for remediation when it comes to content, Conley also suggests some specific interventions that he believes would be useful in eliminating the gap between the content with which high school graduates are actually equipped and that

which they must master in order to be prepared for postsecondary work.

Further, "tackling this fundamental disconnect requires rethinking relationships and assumptions about the content of courses and how the senior year of high school and the freshman year of college are connected" (Conley, 2010). Conley's suggestions for doing so are fourfold.

First, high school and postsecondary course syllabi must be aligned relative to the "expected skills and prerequisite knowledge for success in the course" (Conley, 2010).

Second, Conley contends that the employment of college-ready seminars can help eliminate the content gap by "emphasizing deeper understandings of content knowledge previously taught and an emerging awareness of the structure of knowledge in core academic subject areas". To be specific, a college-ready seminar is defined as "a specially designed course that seeks to challenge students in ways that approximate what they will face soon in college" (Conley, 2010). Though this is given to our students already, since counselors arrange college orientation and career talks especially in high school, it is good also to emphasize the importance of raising this yearly career activity from the school counseling office.

Third, Conley calls for more college-ready assignments in high school. Such assignments should be created with great sensitivity to postsecondary readiness criteria and scored along those same lines (Conley, 2010). Finally, Conley advocates for a paired-course model, wherein high school and college teachers work together for course creation. In his view, "the purpose of the partnership is to develop guidelines that apply to exit-level high school courses and entry level college courses" (Conley, 2010), thus establishing a clear connection between high school and college. This is just to validate on DLSZ's academic practice in the senior high school. Since the students are getting subjects specific to their academic strand/track already, this will not be much of an issue, because this just goes to show that we are on the right path.

The final stakeholder that I would like to disseminate this information is no other than the parents of our students. Sharing the findings of my action research can be feasible because we have a very active parents association in the school. Each academic year, parents would gather the level teachers, including the counselor, for a meet and greet session. For academic

year 2020-2021, I experienced a Google meet video conference meeting together with the parent level representative and parent strand representatives from the senior high school before the start of college application. In the said meeting, we were able to discuss on how to go about college application announcements and concerns about dissemination information. This communication with parents is a good way too to discuss about the students' college preparation.

This further validates the study of Hill and Taylor (2004), through a longitudinal study. They mentioned that among parents with greater academic involvement in the lives of their adolescent students (across all demographics), there were fewer behavioral problems, higher achievement and higher aspirations. Thus, the environment of the home (specifically parental involvement) plays a significant role in academic achievement and any subsequent college preparation.

Reflection

The first few paragraph of this action research discussed with statements about the new college application procedure in the "new normal" under the pandemic time. While getting things done, through learning about college application experiences of DLSZ grade 12 students, each question in gathering my data has inherent value. Collectively, however, those questions became the impetus for the entirety of this research. In asking the central question, "What does college preparedness mean to DLSZ grade 12 students?" I was not only seeking to do an action research for a post-graduate school requirement, a research that would contribute to the counseling office, and to probably publish and share a current research study during the time of Covid-19 Pandemic in the future. I was also seeking an answer for myself as high school counselor.

I wanted to know more about the ways in which I am somehow preparing students for life beyond the classroom. What effective assistance I am providing that will be valuable in future contexts? What, if any, are the transcendent skills that I am forming my students? I now have some answers. Ironically, Covid-19 had to happen first because this is something new in the college application. What I also learned was that the most important thing the school is providing for our students, though it's a big chunk for college application requirements, is not only a set of academic skills. Rather, the most important thing that I am providing is context - a place and time to cultivate and explore the

psychological tools they will need to be prepared for college.

While doing the analysis of this research, I was happy that 4 out of 5 categories that emerged are mostly personal and holistic in nature namely: self-efficacy, self-care, goal setting, and new beginning. To be clear, reading, writing and personal study skills are most certainly valuable. The data reflects this. But as the action research concludes, these things account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness. The majority (qualities such as self-care, self-efficacy, goal setting and new beginnings) are not necessarily elements of college preparedness that are often initiated by a teacher in the same way that the development of writing skills can be. Elements such as a strong work ethic, discovering personal limits and maintaining balance typically have their origins outside of the classroom. But that doesn't mean that schools can't start to aid in the development of these qualities.

So what does all of this mean for me as a counselor? It means that I won't stop being passionate about the quality of student formation. It means that I won't stop providing substantial guidance services to the students. At the same time, it also means that I will take more time to help my students understand themselves *as* students and as persons - assessing their state of mind, talking about managing time, and perhaps facilitating more self-discovery along the way.

At the start of the academic year as well, we all conduct guidance services orientation and batch profile presentation to our teachers and students. This is a good chance too to disseminate information on how to properly prepare for college applications by sharing the results of my study because this action research cater to first-hand experiences of DLSZ grade 12 students.

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