



Defining, Understanding and Promoting Cultural Diversity Through the Human Library Program

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The paper is intended to present the role of libraries in promoting dialogue to reduce discrimination; share how libraries document human library sessions as a form of oral history and provide information on the effect of human library sessions to readers. The paper documents the human library program as an alternative source of information which promotes cultural diversity to improve many facets of literacies, which include media and information literacy. Human library aims to lessen our prejudices and makes us more tolerant individuals. In order to achieve cultural equality and social inclusivity, De La Salle University (DLSU) Libraries continues to offer human library sessions to form critical thinkers, lifelong learners and catalysts for social transformation. Most readers thought that the most important learning experience they gained while reading the books was to accept and understand each one of us as unique individuals. The human library program encourages people to be more tolerant and embolden acceptance.

Keywords: Human library; Media and information literacy; Cultural diversity; Equality; Prejudice; Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries create programs to provide alternative learning experiences to its diverse users. Libraries become a space for participation, collaboration and knowledge dissemination. De La Salle University (DLSU) Libraries are committed to support the learning needs of the users by providing a wide-array of programs. For



instance, the Libraries adopted the Human Library to challenge stereotypes, stigma, prejudice and discrimination among diverse group of people. The human library was able to attract hundreds of readers from all walks of life and has conducted at least ten sessions since 2014. The human library program is properly documented and it tries to reach out to the public by producing an online platform where human books may be viewed and watched online. Since 2016, selected videos were uploaded via YouTube, an online video sharing tool.

As the DLSU Libraries continue to provide alternative ways of sharing factual and evidence-based information, how can they best assist the public aside from the academic community they serve? What technological trend is already available and free for use by the general public for them to access the collection of the library? With the adoption of an online video sharing tool, the propagation of knowledge becomes fast and efficient for those who want to retrieve information as conveniently as possible. The paper seeks to explore how effective an online video sharing tool is as a primary source of media and information literacy resource, considering that the human library program would want to get a wide reach of viewers (readers) especially to those who were not able to attend the live/actual activity. Furthermore, the paper will provide its readers insight into the status of human library programs in the Philippines.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Literacies

The Philippines is an archipelago with an approximate number of 7,500 islands as conveyed by the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA). The geographic area is composed of straits, seas and mountain ranges. The country has total land area of 30 million hectares (De Vera, 2007). In August 2015, there are 100.98 million Filipinos. Ethnolinguistic groups are also present in the entire nation. There are 110 major indigenous groups across the Philippines, and each one has its own traditions and culture. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) presents a comprehensive list of them. Peralta (2015) also provided all the ethnic boundaries and numerous aspects of the ethnic groups in his online book entitled, "Glimpses: Peoples of the Philippines."

Functional literacy rate was 86.4% as of 2008 (PSA, 2014) and 90.3% in 2013 (PSA, 2015). Meanwhile, the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) data is different from the previous statistics stated above although it came from the same parent institution. FLEMMS recorded a 95.6% functional



literacy as of 2008 (Lee, 2015). However, functional literacy does not suffice the necessities in understanding a more complex situation especially when the individual requires providing a reliable and credible source of information. Functional literacy may have increased, but, the way people use and interpret the information is questionable. The reading habits of the citizens have declined primarily due to economic reasons and perhaps the attitude of people towards reading. The National Book Development Board (NBDB) recorded a slight decrease of Filipino adult readers in 2012 (NBDB, 2012). From 92% in 2007 it became 88% in 2012. In Philippine libraries, information literacy programs have been established. For instance, the De La Salle University Library has been offering information literacy (IL) courses since the 1970's (Valerio, 2009). Consequently, there is the emerging concept of media and information literacy (MIL) where libraries need to adopt and develop.

Cultural Diversity

The Philippines is embodied by many cultures, and hence, one can say that it is a good example of a very diverse nation. With its rich and colorful history, the Philippines is a place for more than a hundred indigenous tribes. The long presence and influence of the Spaniards as well as the Americans, Japanese and Chinese made the country a multi-cultural state. Such diverse culture sometimes leads to misunderstanding between groups. Each group has their own way of life cultural practices. To avoid misinterpretation among cultural groups, citizens have the right to be fully informed about the various customs and traditions which may be taught in school.

MIL in the Philippines

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is a concept that refers to the essential competencies (i.e. knowledge, skills and attitude) that allow citizens to engage with media and other information providers effectively and develop critical thinking and lifelong-learning skills for socializing and becoming active citizens (UNESCO, 2011). Currently, MIL in the Philippines is still being discussed. With the introduction of K-12 in the country, the Department of Education has included MIL as a core subject in the curriculum of grades 11 and 12. The Enhanced Basic Education Act (also called Republic Act 10533) passed into law in 2013 which adds two years of senior high school education. The Senior High School started its implementation in 2016. Textbooks are already available; however, the content is more inclined in media literacy rather than media and information literacy. Some books also forgot to



include the important aspects of information literacy. MIL truly happens if people know how to seek and find reliable media and information, manage media and information and create a systematic way of organizing it, evaluate the sources critically, cite media and information sources correctly and demonstrate ways on how to treat media and information ethically.

To institutionalize MIL in the country, the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC) is spearheading a national consultation towards Philippines MIL policies and strategies. This is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) project. A background paper is being developed and stakeholders are being consulted to come-up with an output of creating a policy brief on MIL policies in the Philippines.

Seminars are also available for librarians to keep them abreast about the status of MIL. The latest was conducted in July 2016 by the Philippine Normal University Library and Information Science Alumni Association (PNULISAA). They organized a half-day forum on “Teacher-Librarian Collaboration: Developing Meta-literate Learners in a K-12 Environment (Media and Information Literacy)”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Library is an innovative method that leads to the reduction of prejudice, encourages understanding and promotes dialogue (Zhai, Zhao & Wang, 2012). As Yap & Labangon (2015) discussed, human library is an alternative way of learning for both the reader and the human book which eventually creates a liberating moment for both parties as they share their experiences. It empowers people to accept the differences among individuals. Moreover, human libraries promote good values by hearing unheard stories appreciate stigmatized groups of people (Rhodes, 2016). This program promotes social cohesion to address the discrimination in the society (Watson, 2015). By participating in this kind of event, people widen their understanding about the other people, strengthen their life skills and are able to build good relationship with one another (Pope, 2013).

Events such as this start with creating a committee that will handle the activity and then the committee decides on how to recruit books (Wentz, 2013). Human Library events need a good collection development strategy (Granger, 2017). An organizer should be able to conduct a survey to its users about their perceived prejudices among groups of people. Organizers must carefully select their human books protecting not only their reputation but also the groups they represent. Human books are cataloged and readers may pre-select human books



before the actual event. A human library encourages individuals to check-out real humans to share stories and engage conversations (Dobreski& Huang, 2016). Since human libraries addresses racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination, it is not only libraries that hold this kind of program. Even art galleries as a venue to promote cultural dialogue can be a perfect venue. Clover and Dogus (2014) have written about their human library experience combining both dialogue and exhibit. Towards the end, human libraries create an environment of discussion and interaction and are geared towards benefitting both the book and the reader into a learning process that is reflective and active (Gamtso, Mannon& Whipple, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This paper used a survey method using a print questionnaire to gather insights from the human books and readers. The responses were gathered, encoded and tabulated using an online tool (i.e. Google forms and spreadsheet) to analyze the results. Each time a session is finished, the person-in-charge of the program encoded the responses in the online form. The print copies were preserved for verification purposes. For the evaluation part of human books and readers, only the first five human library sessions were included in this study.

The videos uploaded were also analyzed using the built-in analytics of YouTube. Since 2016, a total of 29 videos were uploaded in the Libraries' YouTube account with clips ranging from seven minutes to videos with more than one hour of running time. Using the built-in analytics of YouTube, each video was examined based on the number of likes, shares and views. The results provided the average number of likes, shares and views of all the uploaded videos from October 2016 to January 2017. The Human Library program has been described and an evaluation of the readers has also presented and discussed. For the purpose of analyzing the uploaded videos, the study included the sessions recorded from session one to six.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

MIL at De La Salle University

De La Salle University (DLSU) Libraries have always been at the forefront of providing user education programs to its patrons. MIL programs help the library patrons become independent and lifelong learners. One notable program is the 'IamInfoSMART' launched in 2013. This program fosters the development of information literate library patrons. According to del Mundo, Narvaez & Yap (2014), the 'IamInfoSMART' campaign features an exhibition on Information Literacy cycle with the purpose of guiding students and potential



library users on how to effectively search, retrieve and use information available in the library.”

To strengthen the IL and integrating MIL, the DLSU Libraries introduced the video pick of the week. It started in July 2011 as an initiative to stimulate media and information literacy in the academic community. Film and documentary titles have been carefully chosen based on the themes/observances officially proclaimed at the calendar of the Official Gazette.

Furthermore, a relevant and important program called ‘The Human Library’ was also introduced in 2014 to challenge certain stereotype, stigma, prejudice and discrimination (DLSU Newsette, 2014). This paper will focus more on the human library as form of oral history, as an avenue of corporate social responsibility and as a program that leads to social transformation. The United Nations proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which included two goals that our program can fully support. These are goal number 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and goal number 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Singh, Grizzle, Yee & Culver, 2015).

The human library. Since its inception in 2014 as part of the programs of DLSU Libraries, the Human Library had a total of ten sessions. Human Library aims to create a venue where users can find diverse forms of information (Yap & Labangon, 2015). It surpasses social obstructions of inequality and discrimination. Currently, it has been adopted by many libraries and social groups globally.

Human library sessions consist of human books and readers. Human books are people that are subjected to stereotyping and present themselves as representatives of the marginalized groups. Human Book volunteer must be selected carefully to justifiably signify the group they are representing. They should also be properly oriented to prepare themselves in maintaining such intriguing yet sometimes challenging dialogues (Watson, 2015).

For those who intend to understand the relationship between human book and readers - it is basically to create dialogue with each other. Readers in the human library session may literally ask unscripted questions to clarify things based on their views on the subject of the human book. They can personally ask questions and learn from a different perspective. As stated by Yap and Labangon (2015), “the dialogue has no structure, making each loan period a unique one. It is important, however, that the readers are appropriately briefed



about the activity so as to enable them to find a common ground during the interaction.” Celebrating diversity is a key aspect of every Human Library it was indicated that “the Human Library [acts] as a bridge between people of different backgrounds” (Yap & Labangon, 2015) Kudo et al. (2011) assert that it creates a powerful instrument that cultivates our capability to act on differences.

DLSU human library. Human library sessions are free and open to the public. Everyone is encouraged to participate and join. The Committee advertised and invited participants through all kinds of media – through online radio, print newspapers, posters and social media. The organizer also tapped and partnered with other DLSU offices and student organizations including the alumni. Some sessions also combined exhibitions organized by a separate committee in partnership with the public programs librarian.

The sessions were video recorded. Human books were asked to sign a waiver form. Human books were asked if they are willing to be volunteers as they are not going to receive any monetary amount from the organizers. As a volunteer, they were asked if they agree to be photographed or documented through video recording.

One problem the committee encountered was the lack of available video camera. Therefore, only selected human books were being video recorded to capture their stories. This type of video recording may also be categorized as a new and evolving nature of oral history captured in video. Oral histories are considered primary sources of information (Starr, 1996). They capture and preserve life events by recording autobiographies through sound and video. If appropriately examined, oral histories can be good sources of oral documentation. Delivering socially-desirable results make human libraries a socially relevant activity. An academic library acts as an entity that is innovative and at the same time transforms its readers to be sensitive to any form of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination or bias (Yap & Labangon, 2015). This is DLSU Library’s own way of serving the people with pure and unbiased intentions. This is their way of being a corporate social responsible institution.

Video recordings are the end product of the activity. This is the only replay that the organizers can offer after every session. The videos undergo simple editing and are cataloged. Videos become part of the library collection and may be loaned out to the library users especially those who were not able to attend the sessions. The stories of the human books do not end after the session. It needs to be shared



to the greater public so that people may understand their struggles in life. This is our way of educating people about the uniqueness of every person. Each one of us has our own differences and similarities. We should stop discriminating individuals or groups just because we can't identify ourselves with them. This is our way of transforming lives. This is our share of making everybody media and information literate by re-packaging sources of information and making it widely accessible.

Summary of the human books. Our human books vary with every session and we strive to provide a diverse selection to our readers. In the course of our implementation of this program, we have classified the prejudices in the following:

- 1) *Physical traits.* e.g. person with tattoo, overweight, underweight; person with physical deformities, blind, midget;
- 2) *Gender preference.* e.g. lesbian, gays, bisexual and transgender;
- 3) *Profession.* e.g. politician, policeman, banker, businesswoman, columnist, fitness teacher, lingerie model, young entrepreneur;
- 4) *Religious belief/practice.* e.g. atheist, Buddhist monk, Muslim, nun;
- 5) *Afflicted with disease.* e.g. person living with HIV;
- 6) *Distinct character.* e.g. geek, person with third eye, vegetarian, animal lover; strict parent, social activist.

The readers. A total of 192 readers attended the first five human library sessions. 60% of them are females and 40% are males. 92% are first timers and 8% of them supported the program many times. After every session, our participants were asked to answer an evaluation form to which they were asked regarding their thoughts about the selection of available human books.

Readers were asked regarding their thoughts about the selection of available human books. 53% said that the selected human books were very sufficient and appropriate. Readers were also asked about the most important learning experience they gained while reading the books. Here are some of their answers:

"My prejudice towards the subject decreased because I learned the broad cause and effects, advantage and disadvantage of the subject."

"Understanding is [the] key to learning."

"I learned a lot and I hope that I could help him advocate for breaking the stigma of the LGBT."

"Acceptance of oneself and others."



"I was able to learn something from the human book that can't be found on any other printed [materials] in the bookstore and the library."

"More enlightened on the subject."

Most of the readers expressed that they would still consider attending future sessions and that they will recommend the human library program to their peers and friends.

YouTube as a video sharing tool. The Human Library committee decided to upload the videos via its institutional YouTube account to document and reach out its human library program to a wider public. From October 2016 to January 2017, a total of 29 videos were uploaded. Session six had the most number of videos uploaded due to the increase of video cameras used during the event. (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLz3D8L0uJ_UUEp-qHzG6SZhWVlKY-YDaK).

The five most viewed videos out of the 29 published human library reading sessions in YouTube were as follows: "*Meryenda's not enough: moving beyond personality based politics by Vico Sotto*" from Human Library session four with 765 views; "*Bisexual by Ms. Ana Alexandra Castro*" from Human Library session six with 219 views; while "*Of Laces and Runways by ThonieSabile*" from Human Library session five got total views of 214; "*Olympian by Ms. Ian Lariba*" from Human Library session six got total views of 168; lastly, "*The green archer's game by Jeron Alvin Teng (student athlete)*" from Human Library session three received 119 views. The most shared video was "*Returning Filipinos by IreeneLeoncio*" from Human Library five which received five shares and the video that acquired the most number of likes among the viewers was "*Meryenda's not enough: moving beyond personality based politics by Vico Sotto*" from Human Library session four with 10 likes.

Based from this data, political personalities such as Mr. Vico Sotto had a strong impact on the viewers. Even during the actual reading sessions, a lot of readers showed-up to listen to his story. Sensitive issues such as sexuality and gender are also a notable topic for the Human Library readers. It shows that reader's interests and curiosity are into timely and familiar topics where they can relate themselves. Videos as sources of information can be influential to those who are watching them. It is hoped that by sharing the Human Library program to the wider public, most of the citizens become more understanding and tolerant individuals.



CONCLUSION

In the midst of continued abundance in media and information sources, libraries and information professionals have a significant role to play. Our programs move ahead with socially relevant content, as our roles continue to conform to the changes in our society.

With the aid of an online video sharing tool, the means to distribute a socially-relevant and multi-culturally diverse program that is funded and taken-over by a library in an organized and fast manner will help us ensure that we reach our target market. Libraries serve not only to the confines of its bona fide members but try to cross the border and close the gap in making sure that all the potential learners will be able to have access to the most important collection and resources that are available. The library is an instrument to provide means to the underserved albeit there is really a need for the help of other stakeholders to provide other means such as free internet or available physical space to connect and have access to library resources.

As an information provider, it is the role of the libraries to give accurate and meaningful information through educating and guiding the community in becoming media and information literate. As a knowledge space, what we can do is to help the community to be aware and be more open minded towards our differences and accept cultural diversity. The human library program is a way to have dialogue and encourage people to be more tolerant in understanding others. It promotes social cohesion, peace and interreligious dialogue that help us grow as people of the world; it reminds us to be human and humane to others. And with the ongoing technological trend we have, the library can only hope that all information may be accessed free online.

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