

Embedding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Activities in an Academic Library: Highlights on the Social Aspects of the Human Library

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ABSTRACT

One dimension of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the social responsibility. At De La Salle University (DLSU), the Libraries conduct outreach programs that may be considered CSR activities. For instance, the library donates books to the less privileged schools and offers training programs that can be of use to such libraries and its personnel. Recently, the libraries launched its program called the Human Library. The human library provides an innovative way to experience a different kind of reading which encourages understanding by engaging the community to participate and interact with the "human book." The human library transforms its readers to be sensitive to any form of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination or bias. Designed to have real humans as "books" to interact with the readers in promoting tolerant individuals, the human library aims to lessen prejudice and live in a harmonious environment. The human library tries to be socially relevant and adapts a culture of acceptance and tolerance. To ensure that social responsibility is achieved, this event is free for all readers from all walks of life. The main objective of this paper is to share the experiences of the human books as well as the readers of the human library.

Keywords: human library, corporate social responsibility, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are now consciously creating and fulfilling their strategic place in our society by form of extending viable programs to the community. Aside from taking into consideration and exclusively providing the prevailing needs of the academic community they serve, undertaking socially responsible initiatives for the society has been innovatively maximized.

Social responsibility is a dimension of corporate social responsibility (Uddin, 2008). This paper will then highlight the social facet of the recently introduced concept in the Philippine libraries - the Human Library. Deeply anchored in humanity and respect for individual uniqueness, the Human Library event is seen to bring people together and enable them to unreservedly communicate and share their views.

Unlike a typical library with books and audiovisual materials to search for, a human library event presents its own set of "human" books that a reader can personally interact with. A human book is a person that is recruited to be a public representative of a particular group who is prepared to share his/her story based on a certain stereotype and/or prejudice.

With the gaining worldwide regard and outstanding recognition of this concept, the said project was pioneered in the Philippines by the De La Salle University. The planning stage commenced from February 2014 to July 2014 - a total of six months. A committee of librarians were formed to set things in motion for this noteworthy endeavour. The first key challenge for the team was the identification of the set of prejudices that is most prevalent to the community. The group surveyed students and faculty which yielded the top prejudices and bias. The results used then became the basis for searching the suitable human books for the first session.

After six months of detailed planning - from forming the event committee, drafting guidelines and scouting for human books, the first session of the Human Library was introduced on August 2014. Following its success, the second session was soon held on November 2014.

Being a conscious member of the society, the De La Salle University Libraries has conspicuously recognized the fundamental civic value of libraries as a shared safe place and then used that value to push forth for this significant project in the Philippine libraries. Furthermore, as guided by the Lasallian competencies set forth by the institution through "*forming critical and creative thinkers, effective communicators, reflective lifelong learners and service driven citizens who are catalysts for social transformation*", we have capitalized on the rawness of the 'living books' personal experiences in the context of a library which ultimately provided a venue for truthful conversation pieces which makes it an indispensable learning opportunity for everyone.

OBJECTIVES

As a project recently launched in the country, this paper will underscore the underlying social aspect and impact of the Human Library. Highlighting on the main purpose of this program, which is to recruit human books that are sources of real and unfiltered experiences, the paper will try to delve in the societal effects marked by the introduction of a new yet very humane model of breaking barriers and promoting understanding between people.

The paper will showcase both the experiences and views of our human books and readers as they participate in the event. We believe that these real and unfiltered experiences contain prejudices that ordinary readers face every day. As an institution determined to cultivate an image of a sensible and sensitive community of Lasallians towards social issues, the primary information to be shared by these human books to our readers reflects their daily encounter with their self and the society which will help our readers to be open-minded and mindful of the laws of humanity with no pre-judgment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's setting, issues related to social responsibility and sustainability are gaining increased importance, even in the case of academic libraries. The institution's aspiration is now getting more inseparable within the community they operate. Hence, creating a set of programming that highlight their commitment to general issues in the society is now favorably utilized.

As defined by Murillo & Martinek (2009), "corporate social responsibility is a doctrine that promotes expanded social stewardship by businesses and organizations". It suggests that institutions must increase their sphere of reach to its surrounding neighbourhood. Consequently, it asks the inclusion of stakeholders – from employees to clients and even to the community at large.

An enhanced public image is seen when firms devote themselves to sustainable, societal projects. CSR initiatives may affect the image that the institution is trying to achieve. Forte (2013), attests that "corporate social responsibility provides a crucial element in a corporation's image and livelihood". A carefully mapped out CSR plan that genuinely consider its impact in the society can accomplish this goal.

The Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) Program Planning Committee (2010), also noted that "CSR view the business landscape through a lens that focuses less on profitability and more on the greater good." Further stressing that, "corporate giving is one of the philanthropic opportunities that a corporation can engage in to promote their social responsibility program". Doing goodwill for both ends progress sake is ideally a brand of responsible commitment to the society that is usually focused on considering the concerns of the community.

Nonetheless, embedding this brand of social responsibility in academic libraries has been in place for quite some time. Evidently, as pointed out by Yap, Dar Juan & Perez (2013), a variety of activities ranging from conducting outreach programs, charity work and community extension sessions were readily provided by some academic institutions in the country. As elaborated by the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) Program Planning Committee (2010), "corporate giving, charitable contributions, philanthropic giving, and corporate altruism are just a few of the terms that describe a company financially contributing to an issue or cause expecting nothing, or little, in return". Utilizing the institutions resources

for these programs are given to promote and encourage positive social and environmental change - an initiative that has been going on in the country either as a short term activity or as a long term partnership with the target recipients.

However, the continued accomplishment of CSR initiatives can be attributed to thinking and introducing new ways to the people. Forte (2013) asserted that, for CSR initiatives to thrive, we must fuel it with innovation and creativity.

THE HUMAN LIBRARY

Libraries around the world introduce human library to create a venue where users can find diverse forms of information. The human library serves as a place where ideas can be explored through an open dialogue. Public and academic libraries offer this kind of program to promote the library space and to create an identity that libraries can be a safe place for human interaction and lifelong learning.

The librarians act as the organizers of the event. All kinds of librarians and library personnel are welcome to join and organize such event. This is not limited to a specific type of librarian (e.g. reference, cataloger, systems, special collections, etc.).



Fig. 1 DLSU hosts the first human library event in the Philippines

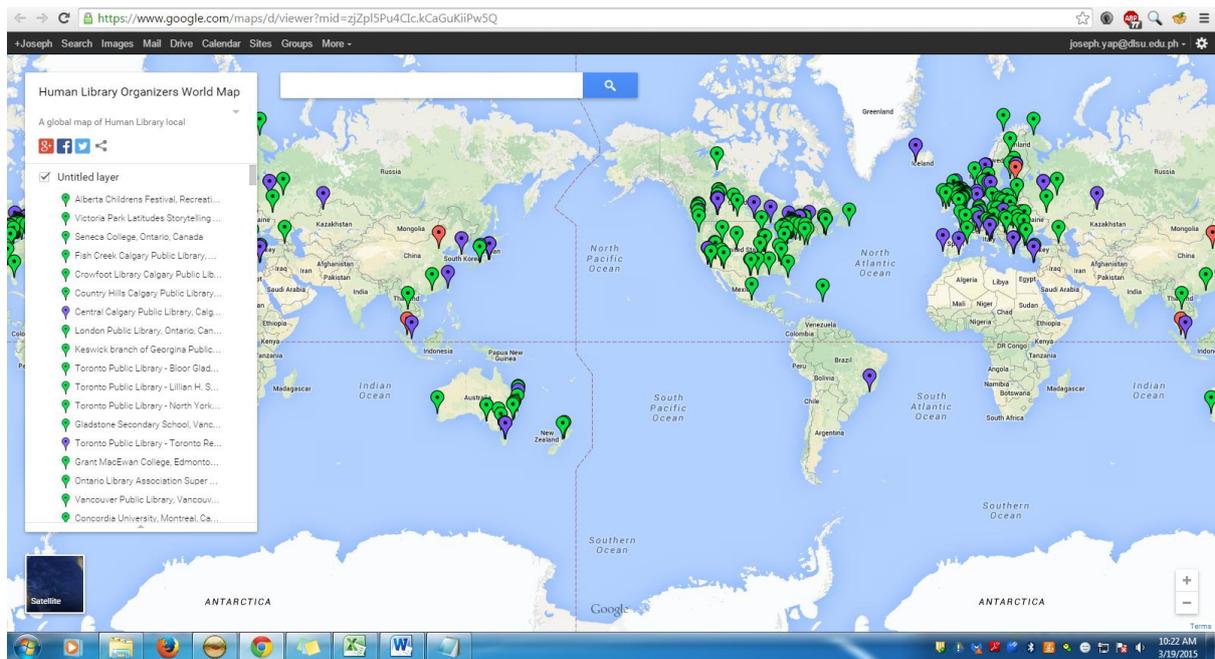


Fig. 2. Human libraries around the world

There is no exact number of human library events being conducted worldwide. The map above captures the places where the human library can be found.

In the Philippines, the Human Library is a new concept introduced by the De La Salle University. It is an alternative way of learning – a liberating moment for both the reader and the human book. As Watson (2015) described, “the Human Library method [is] a process that aims to rupture and discontinue the construction of distorted understandings of what it means to be human”. Those distorted perceived notions towards other people are the key element in this method. To rid the society of prejudices is a common goal of all human library events.

The Human Library can be traced back when a group of youth from Copenhagen, Denmark decided to initiate a non-government youth movement called “Stop The Violence”. After a friend was brutally stabbed in 1993, the group of Dany Abergel, Asma Mouna, Christoffer Erichsen, Thomas Bertelsen and Ronni Abergel realized the need to raise awareness against violence, particularly with Danish youth. Mr. Leif Skovthen encouraged “Stop for Violence” movement to put up activities that would give emphasis against anti-violence during the Roskilde Festival in 2000. Activities were centered on encouraging dialogues and building relations among the visitors of the festival through which the idea of first “Human Library” among Northern Europe’s biggest summer music festival was born (Human Library, 2012).

Today, the Human Library is now held in countries around the world. With its capability to transcend social barriers of discrimination and inequity, it has been progressively being adopted globally. Watson (2015) has further noted that, “the Human Library regards its anti-prejudice method as its means of contributing to the promotion of social cohesion especially in societies that are becoming increasingly pluralistic and are seeking ways of responding to

the challenges associated with this phenomenon”. It empowers people to gain understanding and acceptance towards our differences which, if successful, is seen to encourage them towards achieving a common goal in unity.

Operating in the context of academic libraries, no printed books or e-books are used during the event. Instead, a set of interesting human books are introduced. Human books are people that are subjected to stereotyping and prejudices who will present themselves to challenge the bias of other people. However, selecting human books is proven to be somewhat tricky. As reiterated by Watson (2015), those who accept as a 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.

During the session, readers are able to personally ask questions and learn from a different perspective. 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. Garbutt (2008) noted that, “just as living books are courageous in making themselves available to repeated conversations with strangers, readers in living libraries [should] participate with courageous listening that is open to changing one’s opinion.” As a reader of a human library event, one must accept that some views might be hard to acknowledge. A reader should have conditioned oneself that his/her perceptions may perhaps be the exact opposite from the others. Therefore, one must genuinely listen with an open mind. Having an open mind when participating on such events permits readers to empathize with the person and will require less effort in trying to understand some unfavourable beliefs.

Celebrating diversity is a key aspect of every Human Library. As Kudo et.al(2011) indicated, “the Human Library [acts] as a bridge between people of different backgrounds”. No matter what they believe in, it enables people to freely express their thoughts and experiences thus creating a powerful instrument that cultivates our capability to act on differences.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study involves the human library experience of De La Salle University (DLSU). Since DLSU is the first institution to establish a human library event in the country and there is no other known institution conducting the same concept, it will be difficult for the researchers to conduct a local comparison of libraries doing the same program. Moreover, the identification and comparison of international libraries where the main implementers of the program are reference librarians are challenging for the researchers. Ample time is required to conduct such research.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will describe the experiences of the human books and readers. Two sessions of the human library were conducted in 2014. The first one occurred in August 14 and followed by a second one in November 18.

A print evaluation form is given to the human books and readers at the end of every session. A total of 18 human books, 10 during the first session and eight (8) during the second session, served as volunteers eagerly supported this activity. A total of 59 readers from all walks of life were present during the two sessions. The sessions are open and free for everyone. There were 11 questions prepared for the human books and 14 questions for the readers. Preliminary questions do not count from the total number of questions and some of the questions are open-ended to elicit true and honest responses. Answers were transferred to an online survey using Google Forms to organize the data. The online survey forms serve as the warehouse of responses.



Figure.3. Human Library session 1 (August 14, 2014)



Figure 4. Human Library session 2 (Nov. 18, 2014)

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Experiences from the Human Books

Inviting human books to participate in this endeavour take a lot of time. Organizers have to carefully select them based on scouting or referral. A waiver form with Filipino translation was prepared for them to understand, accept and sign. They were made aware that this activity is for free and there will be no monetary gain. However, a modest transportation allowance shall be given to augment their travel cost. The waiver form specifies the agreement of both parties to conduct the session. It also includes a volunteer agreement where several statements have to be read and understood before the human book takes part in the event.

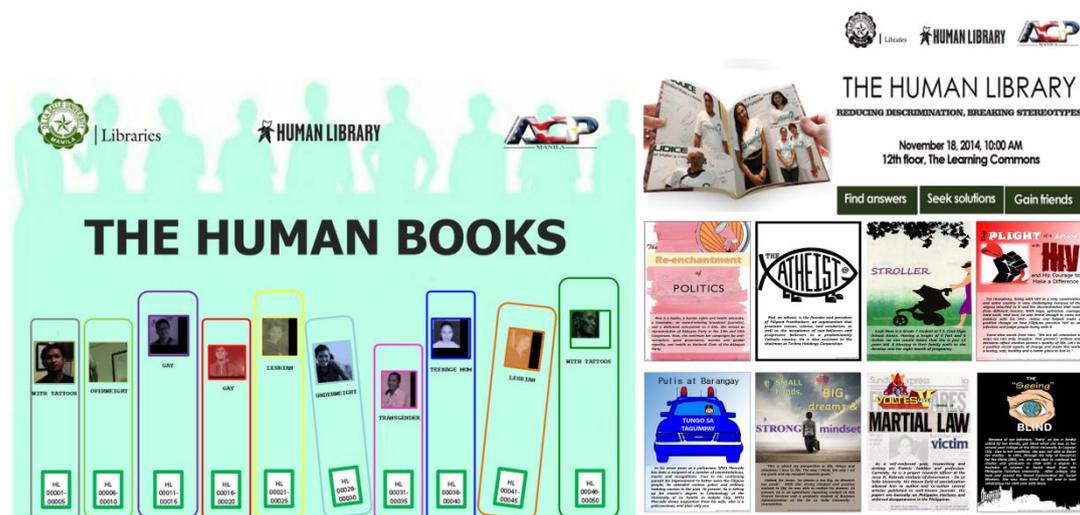


Figure 5. Teasers of the Human Library 1 and 2

A book can accommodate multiple readers at a time. The least number of readers present in one reading were two and the most were nine. Most of the books said that their experience was very good (72%) and the remainder said it was good (28%). They believed that most of the readers were very keen and interested to learn more about them. Descriptions about the books were published in advance so that readers can take a glimpse of them. 72% said that their descriptions were sufficient while the rest said it was somehow sufficient. All of them agreed (100%) that the support given by the library organizers was fantastic. When it comes to the duration of the working hours (reading moments), 61% said it was very appropriate. Others thought that we need to increase some reading time. Overall, our invited human books would love to join us again in our next human library sessions.

Experiences from the Readers

A reader has to pre-register before the session to reserve a human book. Just like a physical or digital library, human books may be searched using the Online Public Access Catalog

(OPAC). However, the organizers also decided to open the session for walk-in participants. Readers are briefed first before they can interact with human book. One organizer is assigned to provide a short introduction of the event and of the human books.

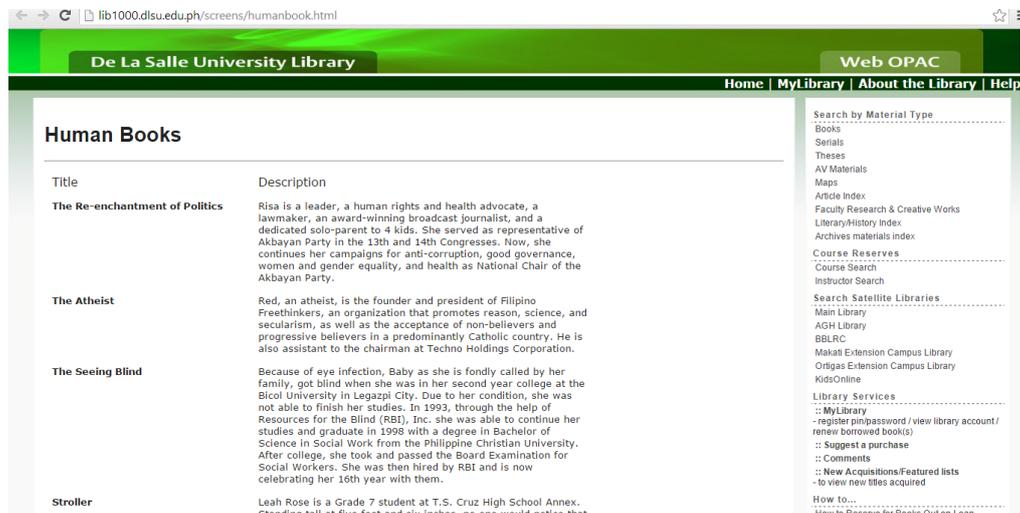


Figure 6. Human Books in the OPAC of De La Salle University

Our sessions were advertised in various forms of media. We coordinated with a radio station, newspaper publishers, and utilized the social media. Posters were circulated within the campus and electronic bulletin boards were also displayed. 54% of the readers learned about the event through their friends while 34% attended because they saw the advertisement via the web, social media or blog. 24% attended because they read the announcement from the HelpDesk of De La Salle University. 20% of the readers saw the posters, 5% glanced it from the newspapers and 2% heard it from the radio.

Since two sessions were already conducted, 10% of them attended both sessions. 90% of them were first-timers. The readers thought that the human library is an excellent (71%) opportunity for them to learn about prejudice and discrimination. 68% agreed that the selection of human books and stereotypes are very sufficient. To date, the 18 human books represent the following stereotypes: With Tattoos (2), Gay (2), Lesbian (2), Transgender, Overweight, Underweight, Teenage Mother, Politician, Atheist, Blind, Pregnant Teen, Policeman, Person Living with HIV, Midget and Geek.

71% of the readers approved that the duration and appropriateness of reading hours is very appropriate while 25% said that it is somehow appropriate. They were given 45 minutes to have a discussion with their chosen human book.

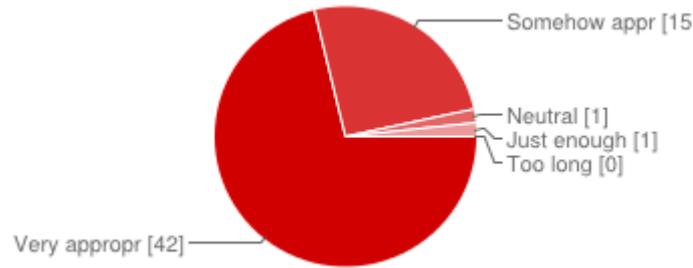


Figure 7. Appropriateness of Reading Hours

Readers were asked about their most important experience while reading books and the following are some excerpts from their responses:

“I was able to learn something from the human book that can’t be found on any other printed [material] in the bookstore and [in] the library.”

“That understanding is [the] key to learning.”

“My prejudice towards the subject decreased because I learned the broad cause and effects...”

Finally, the readers were asked if they will recommend this activity. Surprisingly, 88% were happy about the event and they would love to participate again. Some 12% did not like the idea and would never participate again.

CONCLUSION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be understood as activities that proactively seek to deliver socially-desirable results. This is what the human library is all about. The human library provides an innovative way to experience a different kind of reading which encourages understanding by engaging the community to participate and interact with the "human book." The human library transforms its readers to be sensitive to any form of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination or bias.

However, since the program has just been recently introduced in the country and was conducted inside the academe, it has to be noted that a large number of people are still oblivious to the importance of this event. Given that fact, organizers might consider taking the event to the peripheries. Consequently, living up to the CSRs stretched out goal by extending to a larger community of people.

As an institution promoting lifelong learning, it is an affirmation on our goals when the readers of the human library thought that it is an excellent opportunity for them to learn about prejudice and discrimination.

Aside from getting an interested group of readers on each event, an intriguing set of human books significantly marks the success of each session. This then confronts the committee by ensuring that each prejudice are well represented. With a large pool of people to scout and match, organizers could consider doing this exploration pace with a larger team. Partnership with other academic institutions, local government units and private groups can be explored. Thus, expanding their network that fosters collaborative efforts in the society. It is good to know, however, that in spite of the challenge faced, many agreed that the selection of human books and stereotypes are very sufficient for all the sessions held.

Likewise, telling experiences were hard for some of the human books but they are willing to share them. Conveying their often bitter and cruel memories and relieving them was their burden. Nevertheless, it is with their courageous and willing spirit that enables people to identify with their experiences. Human books believed that this is a great academic experience and educational opportunity for the readers to learn about the uniqueness and differences of everyone and eventually accept each other to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

In a world where bigotry and injustice runs rampant, ingenious CSR activities like these are quite indispensable. After all, as Forte (2013) positively stated, socially responsible initiatives fundamentally contribute to attaining an environment with an improved quality of life where people exist harmoniously - a common goal for all CSR plans.

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