

Human Library: An Innovative and New Library Services in 21st Century

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Structured Abstract:

The modern concept of the Human Library (HL) has been around since the beginning of the 21st century. Its function is very similar to other libraries except that in a HL people, rather than books- are available for check-out for the readers.

Purpose: This paper presents history and development of Human Library along and gives an overview about how the Human Library Organization (HLO) acts as a global facilitator to spread the concept worldwide by providing methodology and guidelines to the potential organizer to host such living program.

Methodology: The ideas regarding the Human Library and Human Books are received from various sources like books, journals articles as well as the websites of The Human Library Organization.

Conclusion: All these will carry the potential encouragement to successful social inclusion and well beings of social awareness. This paper tries to describe in brief how this approach sets a path as a social movement worldwide and has the potentiality to encourage and enhance the social awareness through social inclusion of our world community.

Value: The Human Library approach is a novel way to engage the reader with the human books in dialogue by providing a safe and comfortable zone. The interactive session among them can enhance a mutual understanding of various view points, human dignity and social justice by challenging prejudice, biasness, stereotyped and violent attitude.

Keywords: Human Library, Living Library, Human Book, Stereotyped, Prejudice, Social Inclusion.

Introduction

We live in an age, the age of information. It is becoming increasingly difficult to evaluate the correct and most relevant norms that reduce our cultural stereotypes, prejudices or

discrimination. The use of Human Libraries comes at an appropriate time due to rapid changes in information and communication technology. The new concept of HL came to exist within our world at the very beginning of the 21st century. A group of Danish students organized the first living library event in 2000 at Roskilde musical festival, Copenhagen, Denmark and after receiving a great response they founded an International Non- Profit Organization in the name “The HLO” in 2010. From then this organization acts as a global facilitator to spread this concept all over the world by encouraging the new organizer to host such program across the world. Here books are actually the people who have experienced discrimination and prejudice, stereotyped hardships, and significant life challenges. Like our regular library, in HL the readers can also enter, browse the catalogue, select the topic and check-out their chosen book for specified period of time; the event is the dialogue in nature and required to conduct in a safe, secure and comfortable zone. The topic in Human Books are based on their life experiences which can include anything such as Transgender, Refugees, Lesbian, Recovering Alcoholic etc. To make the event a great success the organizer should look upon to choose the topics very carefully depending upon the community, culture of the society where this event is hosted. The reader then meets the book one to one (may be in group or class) conversation and able to ask question, seek advice, learn about alternative perspectives and find common ground. As such HL develops greater understanding between readers and human books and the reader can able to discover new world, people and ideas. It is an innovative method, designed to promote dialogue, reduce prejudice and encourage social awareness and can challenge negative stereotypes. So HL is one of the most successful and enduring initiatives in the world for promoting social justice as well as social inclusion movement.

History and Development of Human Library

The HL or “Menneskebibioteket” as it is called in Danish was developed in Copenhagen, Denmark in “Roskilde Musical Festival” in the month of July, 2000 as a project by the ”Stop The Violence“ organization, founded by Ronni Aberjel and his brother Danny Aberjel and colleague Asma Mounq and Christopher Erichson. The organization “Stop the Violence” established soon after a serious knife attack on one of their friends in 1993. They think that every one may have a tendency of prejudice, negative stereotype and violence. If any mechanism is hosted for that person such as face to face communication, deliver dialogues; engage in a pleasant and secure place etc. It will lead the better understanding of diversity, educate against violence, stereotypes and prejudice and resolve misunderstanding. This will

create more inclusive and cohesive communities across cultural, religious, social and ethnic differences.

After 7 years of that senseless youth violence, in July, 2000, the organization hosted the first Living Library event in “Roskilde Music Festival” which continued for four days. The HL event was open for eight hours a day. Over 75 “Real Books” (also called human books or living books) were presented in various different titles with multiple sessions of each human book. Each Living Book can be borrowed / loaned for a specified time by the readers according to their own interest. As such each reader enjoyed a broad collection of human books as well as able to loan the desired Living Books according to their suitable time due to multiple sessions of the each Human Book.

The organizer stunned about the impact of the event on the society when they noticed more than thousands readers took advantages of Living Books who would not normally come into contact with each other and the society had taken part in the Living Library event with great enthusiasm. The success of this event, this organization also hosted the same event in other parts of Denmark and other countries in European Union. At last, these Danish Activists of “Stop the Violence” group established “The HLO” in Copenhagen, Denmark in the year 2010. Ronny Aberjel was the one of the main Creator and Co-Founder of “The HLO”.

The Human Library Organization (HLO)

HL is a library which replaces books with human beings. The concept might be a new one and the first HL program was officially presented in “Roskilde Music Festival” in 2000 and received a huge response from the society. Ronny Aberjel, one of the main creators of “The HLO”, realizing the potential of the Living Book concept, decided to work to promote it worldwide to the potential new organizers of HL.

Since then he has founded the human HLO with the assistance with other activists in 2010 in Copenhagen, Denmark. This organization produced a guidebook to new organizers with the Nordic Council of Ministers and Council of Europe. The members of HLO travelled many countries providing help to form new local organizations, plan to host the events and present the idea to the interested organization and public authorities.

The HLO is a Non-Profit registered international organization. Its head quarter is in Copenhagen, Denmark. This organization is open on all the weekdays from 10 am to 4 pm.

Any interested person, organization, corporate body, institution can be reached via phone or e-mail. It is dedicated to ensuring a global implementation of the HL.

The main aim is to unite active organizers of the world and to promote the use of the HL in efforts to create more social inclusion and respect for diversity and human rights. Being a global facilitator, the HLO forms a network to recruit and train new organizers, shares experiences and further develops methodology, to encourage volunteers, regional HL co-ordinators so thus HL can expanse, develop in their own region. The HLO serves as a marker for the principles of this methodology and an entry point for new organizers. It should be noted that HL activities took place before 2010 under the name of Living Library. In 2010, the name has been changed to HL in English Speaking Countries and other parts of the world. But council of Europe has continued to use the Living Library name for activities in continental Europe.

Since its inception in the year 2000, now HL presents their existence in more than 85 countries in 6 continents of the world. Most of them are operating on a co-partnership basis with other libraries like public libraries, schools, colleges, university libraries and other academic or special libraries. It also holds the events with the help of the local administrative authorities

Organizing a New Human Library

In order to organize a new HL, the general procedures are the same. Interested library or the new organization at first contacts with “The HLO” and registered with them. After granting permission to use the HL concept, the HLO provide the guide books, methodology and other helpful support to the new organizer. Then the new organizer set up a planning committee to execute the living event. The planning committee should consider the various issues like the recruitment of volunteers as staff and Human Books, topic and title of the living book, choice of venue, scheduling of the events and other logistical details.

The HLO learns from mistakes, formulated strategies, developed resources, provided guidelines, analysis of some successful HL events and experiences of the world which are placed before the new organizer as sample documents and such helpful suggestions from these experienced sources of the pioneering human libraries save the time and efforts for that organization to host such living program. So careful planning of each new HL is required for

hosting a very successful event and it must consider various logistical supports which are described below.

Various Logistical Supports to organize a Human Library

A successful HL event will depend on so many factors. Broadly it can be divided as venue, Human Book, staff, reader, schedule of the event, budget, training of Human books, and also advertisement and promotion of the living event

1. Venue: The choice of venue has a great impact on the HL event. This can be broadly divided in 4 categories. These are context, location, space and facilities.

1.1: Context: HL may be a part of a larger event such as festival, conferences etc., may be a planning to stand alone program. It is very easy to reach the potential readers in case of a larger event with lesser attention in comparison to hold a standalone case.

1.2: Location: Being a part of a larger event, location may be out of control from the organizer. They force to compromise with the best venue available to its hand. On the other hand the best venue can be provided if the living event runs with stand alone case. The event organizer must be very careful about the location keeping in mind the location is easily accessible to all of those i.e. staff, potential readers of the community where they runs the event. They may carry out some consultation with the human books, potential readers of the community for deciding a place which provides comfortable zone for both of them.

1.3: Space: The context and location have to be balanced with physical space. The organizer may have to compromise to location not with the context for achieving the crucial aims of their HL event. They must need to adopt for the best use of the available space.

1.4: Facilities: To run a HL event successfully, the organizer considers deeply about the facilities are to be provided to the readers and the real books. They will look upon whether the location are easily accessible to everyone or not, what type of refreshment will be served during the event is going on, any Thank-You gift is to be given to the Human Books, whether there is sufficient furniture and other accessories are available to make the event zone more secure and comfortable zone to all of them or will these need to be transported etc.

2. Budget: Any HL event is to be offered for no cost. But it cannot be ignored that hosting any public program, some minimum cost must be required. To run a successful Living Library event, some facilities are to be provided which are mentioned earlier. Beside these,

some other costs such as cost regarding advertisement and promotion for making poster, leaflets, TV and radio broadcasting and other some miscellaneous cost for office use etc. are also to be considered. So the organizer should carefully look into the budgetary provision matter seriously well before the HL event will be hosted.

3. Schedule: It is the most important for the potential readers in details of the event well in advance so that they can join according to their choice and time. In schedule, all the information may provide such as where and when the Living Library event will run and also the timing. A good schedule would promote the event very effectively to reach out to the community if the organizer may include more information such as the number of Human Books are available with brief title, the loan-out time, multiple session for a particular Human Book or not, type of conversation facilitates between Human Books and the readers i.e. whether it is one to one or a group or class type. This schedule is a kind of advertisement through posters, leaflets, websites, and social media in the society where the event will be hosted.

4. Recruiting the staff: The main aim of any HL is to provide services to the society with no cost. HL can be operated as a part of any library or stand alone organization. Whatsoever may be, to run such events organization require some staff who will manage various official matters relating to the living library events under the supervision of the planning committee of the organization such as they will look upon the location, facilities, scheduling, advertisement and promotion readers registration, refreshment arrangement, recruiting the human books and training to them etc. The organizer will publicize the HL events with the aims and objectives and the people who are interested to acts as a volunteer to this event may come to contact with the organizer. Then the organizer recruit the staff as volunteers and arrange some basic training so that the volunteers are well aware about the events and acts to that direction to execute the aims what the organizer wants to achieve from this events.

5. Recruitment and training of the Human Books:

5.1 Recruiting the Human Books: The best library acquisition requires careful selection and human books are no different. Recruiting human books is to be the most challenging part for any HL organizer. Human books played the pivotal role to success the event. So findings of new books may be easier if the organizer have a clear understanding of their aims and objectives, the community they want to run the event, information about the potential readers and their choice of that locality. In most cases the organizer approaches specific individual

who have identified or recommended by someone from the friend circle or the society. The organizer may have developed an online form through which any one can suggest a person to have the potentiality of a Human Book. The event manager may describe the broad topics of the book and the people to be a human book those who have the unique life experiences against prejudices, biasness, and negative stereotypes of their own. An organizer can also taking help of their own website, and the other social media like Face book, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. for recruiting the Living Books. When suggestions are received from different angles then they contact to the potential Human Books for a conversation.

Sometimes the Potential New Books are not so aware about the aims and objectives of this event and also not so comfortable to describe their own life story. In that position some kind of training utmost needed for the New Human Books in order to place them as a successful Human Book for the event.

5.2 Training the Human Books: The effective training will ensure that all books are safe and valued and also know why they have been invited to share their experiences to the community as human books. It is very important to seek human books with credible narratives, who speak collectively to a diverse range of relevant and engaging topics.

To prepare the human books, the organizer may provide some important information to consider,

- a) Your read is not a presentation; it is more than an informal conversation.
- b) There is no power point and there are no handouts.
- c) Readers may ask any question and if you are not comfortable of answering any one of the question, you did not have to answer
- d) Sometimes Human Book may forget some key points at the time of conversation is going on, organizer suggests them to bring point -form notes about they want to say. Developing notes help the Human Books to organize their thoughts before the event.
- e) Date, loan-out time of the each slot for , types of conversation with the reader (may be one to one, more than one in group, or class type) etc. should be informed by the organizer well in advance so that which will help enhance the mental preparation of the Human Book to a great extent for that live event.

The organization team made some arrangement for conversation with the new recruited Human Books on the above matters vividly and the conversation may take one or more days. Thus Human Books are trained for the event, keeping them safe on the day and retaining the services from them for the future.

6. Advertisement and Promotion of the events:

It is very essential for a HL event to recruit volunteers for staff and Living Books and lastly reach to the potential readers. The first step is to publicize the event through various media to attract volunteers and the second stage is to promote the event to attract the readers.

In the first stage, the organizer may take help of local media, TV channels, social media, poster, websites etc. through which they clearly presents their aims and objectives, title of the book, what type of works to be done as volunteers (as staff and as Human Books) to make the Living event success and what will the organization want to achieve from them through this program.

After recruiting the volunteers, the next stage is to promote the event for the potential readers. Here also the organizer may take the help of local media, newspapers, radio and TV broadcasters, websites, and other social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter etc. They also can circulate leaflets, campus newsletter and display LCD screen, posters, flex etc. When promoting the event using these methods; it is the duty of the organizer is to provide the details of information such as venue, schedule, location, timings etc. The organizer is to give clear indication of what the concept is about and why it is important to the community, number of title of the Human Books are available and the loan -out time of each Living Books, and also assured that the event will be hosted in very safe, secure and comfortable place. If the new organizer follows these guidelines the more and more readers may joined and will make a great success to achieve the HLO's goal to reduce the biasness, negative stereotypes, and prejudice among the readers through dialogue.

7. Objectives and Benefits of Human Library:

After senseless youth violence in 1993, a group of Danish student founded "Stop the Violence" organization. The main aim is to reduce violence, biasness, discrimination as well another ill elements which are harmful for the society. They seemed to believe that if they are able to introduce a strategy where conversation and discursion facilities are to be made between such person who has posses negative prejudices and stereotype to some extent with

the volunteers from the community who offer up their own unique life experience against discrimination, prejudice, hardship and significant challenges, then it would hinder violent attitude, biasness, negative stereotype and prejudice. Based on this belief, they organized first Living Library event in “Roskilde Musical Festival” in the year 2000. Their belief had proven true as the event received great success.

This success prompted the establishing “The HLO” a Non-Profit International Organization by Ronny Aberjel, one of the main creators of this organization in Copenhagen, Denmark. The objectives and benefits of the HL are described below:

First: This organization is now acting as a global facilitator of the concept of HL. Any organization who is interested to organize such living event, must obtain license from “The HLO”. This is due to the fact to maintain some sorts of standardization of HL project to be maintained worldwide. It helps new organizer to host the HL events with no cost principle by providing guidelines, methodology etc. to achieve their goal to reduce prejudice, negative stereotypes and other ill attitude from the society.

Secondly: Human Books with particular experiences or perspective on life often been stereotyped in some way, agree to converse openly with other members of the community called readers. After borrowing the human book of their own interest for specified time, readers can ask question, seek advice, learn about alternate perspective and find common grounds. The conversations have no prescribed direction and developed automatically, making the loan period unique. It facilitates better mutual understanding between human books and readers, can exchange ideas and know the opposite sides perspectives which will enhance the social awareness and social justice.

Thirdly: Living Library event is not a story telling, not a counseling or therapy session. It is two way interaction session and hence to reduce prejudice, negative stereotype, biasness, discrimination etc. and the society will be benefited to a great extent.

Fourthly: It is a positive experience for everyone involved a unique opportunity to explore another character and to be inspired by real life experiences. It can help to respect and the value for other culture in multicultural society.

Fifthly: HL project has the potential to change our feelings, perception and opinions about ourselves and others. Thus the benefits of the readers can be achieved by offering both an

intellectual and emotional experience. All these objectives may achieve by providing the facility of safe, secure and comfortable discussion zone for both of them.

Sixthly: It can facilitate social inclusion considering that both (readers and human books) are the part of the society.

Seventhly: Any event which uses the same format of people as books but without challenging prejudice, stigma, stereotype or discrimination, is not a HL.

Since its inception in 2010, the HLO gives permission to many organizations to hold the living library event according to their norms and guidelines worldwide. The HL is a social movement and now its presence over 85 countries in 6 continents e.g. Europe, Asia Africa, Australia, and north and South America. India has also no exception. First HL event was conducted by IIM, Indore in the year 2016. In 2017 three more Human Libraries came into existence i.e. Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi. In 2019 the first living library event started at Kolkata on 6th January, 2019 by the hands of Smt. Deblina Saha who is the initiator of HL of Kolkata

The HL event flourished all over the world about its low cost features. Human books and staffs provide services voluntarily and normally taken place in the community setting such as public libraries, academic libraries like school, college or university libraries. Social media like WhatsApp group, Twitter, Facebook, webinar, You Tube etc. are the primary means of advertisement and promote the events. The event is to be placed before to the readers with no cost basis. So this method helps to reduce the various social ill attitudes with a simple way of conversation incurring a very low cost feature.

So HL creates a tangible awareness of issues related to social justice based on mutual understanding and respect for the dignity held by individual, culture and history and thus our society is benefitted to adopt this noble approach.

8. Conclusion:

After the foundation of “The HLO”, in the year 2010 in Copenhagen, Denmark, the HL is going to flourish as a social movement all over the world. This non-profit organization serves as a global facilitator to spread the living library concept to our human community through inspiring to establish the new organization worldwide. It provides the Living Library guide under the heading “Don’t Judge the Book by its Cover”. This document serves as a

primer guidelines and methodology for understanding the details and intricacies to setting up the new organization. This guide book also helps to hold HL event, recruiting procedure of volunteers as well as provides insight on evaluating the event with patron's feedback. The success of any such living program mainly rest on dialogistic nature. So conversations between human books and the readers must take place in a pleasant, congenial social environment with respectful manners as the "Do No Harm" principle. Arrangement such as location, selection, pre-sharing training and debriefing the topic of the Human Books are also very important. HL event predominantly takes place in public library which tends to have a greater social justice mandate but it does not exclude the potential Human Libraries have to flourish in academic and school libraries.

Despite of encountering stereotype and prejudice of their own life, the Human Books presents themselves to the readers how they can still live with their own personal challenges and to take part meaningfully in the community. The facilitation of conversation between them provides an opportunity to exchange ideas, develop relationships with other economical, social, cultural and religious community members in a spontaneous and informal manner. Human Books have also got an opportunity to reflect on the reviewed their past experiences. Hence this platform also serves as a learning experience for Human Books as well as for the readers. The equal status interaction between them breakdown the "Us- Them" demarcation and this approach has proven the effectiveness to reduce negative stereotype, stigma, biasness, violent attitude, social distancing, prejudice. This event then enhance mutual understanding, dignity, humanity, mutual relationship, social responsibility among the readers. This project has an advantages over large scale impersonal mental health wellness methods and has value of potential in mental health setting which obvious benefits of the readers in challenging stereotypes and prejudice and can effectively facilitate social inclusion and promote to awareness about social justice. In practice the HL can enhance an understanding of various world views by disparaging stereotypes and engaging community conversation that give rise to an awareness of human dignity.

So HL is a service that provides access to people, for people and makes seemingly unapproachable people approachable so that they can engage in real conversation beyond social protocol and politeness. Hence HL provides the personal context needed to understand the empathetic passion and inspiration necessary to involve and encourage real social change and a step towards the integration of an increasingly diversified society.

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