

Self-Disclosure toward Understanding Youth with Disabilities

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Abstract— This study examines the way in which a trainer without communication or psychological skills, trains 300 Indonesian disabled youth in Jogjakarta, Cirebon, and Bogor. The trainings are done to prepare the selected disabled youth for a global IT competition that will be held at the end of this year, in China. The program that the trainer teaches is called Scratch Program, in which participants will learn on how to create two dimensional visual animation. The purpose of this research is to find out how the ‘untrained’ trainer communicates with disabled youth and deals with difficulties on the field. By using in-depth interview and field observation, the results are analyzed by Social Penetration Theory, or more specifically Self-Disclosure Concept. The results indicate that by opening oneself and accepting differences (i.e. impairment and language barrier) the trainer is able to communicate more successfully and interactively. Furthermore, eye contacts and gestures are not as important as visual aids or papers and pencils.

Keywords— Disability, Interpersonal Communication, and Social Penetration Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Not until recently, Indonesia has never been a friendly-country for its disabled citizens. It is (already) very difficult to live in a country where pedestrians have to fight for their trotoire against motorcycles, or ‘able’ people have to get into a long and steep stairs to cross the street. Those are only a few examples that Indonesians of any age and gender, have to deal daily. Thus, it is only natural if disabled people are prone to be

dependent towards their caretakers. Whereas in other countries, they are being treated like ‘normal’ or independent individuals, in Indonesia they are hardly ‘self-reliant’ when doing their daily activities.

For example, there is no ‘special’ lines for those who are in needs when they want to pay their shopping sprees. As a consequence, they have to stand in a line (usually a long one) like the rest of the ‘healthier’ people. Another example is the lack of space for wheel-chaired people when they want to get into the bus, or other public transportations such as the train. Thus, at the end of the day, they would resolve their problems by avoiding doing daily errands and become a recluse in their own houses.

Fortunately, this year the current President of Indonesia – Joko Widodo – seems to take matters into his own hand, concerning this matter. One of its breakthrough is to demolish the Gelora Bung Karno’s fence which is the biggest stadium in Jakarta, so that it could be replaced with facilities for disabled people. Although his order was not specific what type of facilities that would replace the fence, but the concept for doing so needs to be appreciated. According to detik.com (Monday, the 22nd of May 2016) “the Gelora Bung Karno (GBK) will be renovated in order to get ready for the Asian Games. Its fence will be taken out and facilities for disable people will be built. But as there is a heritage section, the renovation will be done carefully and hopefully on schedule” (www.detik.com, uploaded on the 2nd May 2016 at 18:00).

Another example of Joko Widodo’s government paying attention to the disabled citizens, is that the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia has (since 2 years ago) collaborated with the Foundation for People with Disabilities (Yayasan Penyandang Anak Cacat – YPAC) into preparing young people age 12-17 years old into competing at Global IT Challenge for Youth with Disabilities. This year, the competition will be held at the end of this year, in China. Over 100 youth with disabilities from 15 countries will be participating in IT competitions in the area of

information searching, making story books, and creating games through Scratch programs (<http://www.unescap.org/announcement/2015-global-it-challenge-youth-disabilities-asia-and-pacific>, uploaded on the 3rd May 2015 at 1:50am).

Thus, in order to support Indonesians' youth with disabilities, the government through its Ministry of Communication and Informatics has since hired and provided tutors as well as trainings to prepare the contestants before hands. Selected professionals from associations such as The Professional Association of Visual Communication Design Indonesia (Asosiasi Profesional Desain Komunikasi Visual Indonesia – AIDIA) were chosen and asked to become trainers for the contestants. As accomplished and experts those professionals, they have one common obstacle, that is the lack of experience handling youth with disabilities. Many had to self-taught and relied solely in positive attitude, as well as faith. Fortunately, the trainings were supported by the schools in which the participants came from. Up to three teachers and a sign-language translator are ready to give any help, necessary. Nevertheless, such situation is never an ideal nor a comfortable one. Hence, this research will focus on how one of the selected trainers solves and deals with his problems, in the field. Hopefully, it will give significant inputs for all related parties that are involved.

II. DEFINITIONS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND DISABLED STUDENTS

A. *Interpersonal Communication*

Self-Disclosure

The self-disclosure theory is a purposeful disclosure of personal information to another person (Howard, 2011). Self-disclosure does not always have to be deep to be useful of meaningful. Often, a form of "small talk" is the key in initiation relationships which then move onto more personal levels of self-disclosure. For example, by telling a person our major or hometown during the first week of school, can build into a friendship that lasts for a long time.

Social Penetration Theory

According to Altman and Taylor (1973), Social Penetration Theory provides an understanding of the closeness between two individuals. It also states that as "relationships develop, interpersonal communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper and more intimate ones" (Griffin, 2011). Usually, the process occur through self-disclosure and participants proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion. Not until one's self opens to another person and vulnerability arises between them, that social penetration has successfully been performed.

Penetration goes through a number of stages: orientation, exploratory affective, affective and stable stages. At the first stage (orientation) there is a simple and small talks as well as harmless clichés. For example, "me too" or "good for you." People tend to follow the social norm of appropriateness so that they would get what they want.

At the second stage (exploratory), people begin exploring one another. "It's a process of revealing ourselves and expressing our feelings towards moderate topics such as the government, education and etc" (Altman and Taylor, 1987). At this level, people would not express the whole truth so in order to be accepted. Usually, people in this stage regard the relationship as a casual friendship.

At the third stage (affective), people start to talk about private and personal matters. Thus, there is a level of intimacy and trust so that criticism (which is rare at the previous stage) starts to rise. This stage is equivalent to romantic couples, married couples, and best friends.

At the fourth stage (stable) is where the relationship starts to stabilize. People at this level know each other feelings by just looking at simple signs such as face expression and/or body language. According to Altman and Taylor (1987) "by now, the relationship reaches a plateau in which personal things are shared and each can predict the emotional reactions of the other person."

Aside from the four stages, there is another level in which can or cannot exists in real life, is the depenetration stage. In another world, depenetration is a gradual process of layer-by-layer withdrawal. It is a deterioration of a relationship because the process of 'exchange' between people is decreasing. According to Altman and Taylor (1987) the relationship is likely to break down in a gradual cooling off, and not in an explosive argument.

In other words, social penetration is best known for its onion analogy. Therefore, it is sometimes called the "onion theory" of personality. In which, personality is like a multi-layered onion, and as time passes and intimacy grows, the layers of one's personality begin to unfold to reveal the core of the person. Three major factors that influence self-revelation are: personal characteristics, reward/cost assessments, and the situational context (Altman and Taylor, 1973).

B. *Disabled Students*

Disabled students are students with some physical or mental impairment that limits one or more major life activities (<http://definitions.uslegal.com/d/disabled-students/>, uploaded on the 1st October 2016, at 12:00am). According to the University of State of New York, Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, there are categories used to define the word disabilities. They are as the following: autism, deafness, emotional disturbance,

hearing impairment, learning disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment including blindness (uploaded on the 1st of October 2016, at 12:05am).

C. Teaching IT to Disabled Students

Based on the research conducted by Tee and Cowen (2012), “the support of nursing students with disability in practice requires a high level of understanding amongs those responsible for their development and education, principally their ‘trainers’. However, recent literature suggests the general level of awareness amongst trainers in practice is inadequate with gaps in knowledge of relevant legislation.” Thus, in an ideal environment, those who trainers disabled students should have had the knowledge and awareness of dealing with them above trainers of abled students, it does not necessarily is the case. Most of the time, those trainers are not equipped with the skills or knowledge.

According to Roberts, Crittenden and Crittenden (2011) “individuals with disabilities currently taking online courses and discovering if these students perceive that the institutions in which there are enrolled, are satisfying their unique needs within the various online learning environment.” Based on the data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) there are approximately 600 million people worldwide who have some type of disability, in 2009. Thus, there is a potential number of students with disabilities who are enrolled in online courses. As a consequence, the statistic indicates that their existence are not be taken lightly as nowadays, the use of technology in everyday life is as natural as doing daily chores.

III. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

This research is a qualitative that describes the experience of one of the trainers from AIDIA. In-depth interviews were done in order to get a detailed account from his perspective, and it will be supported by field observations. For this specific research, the informant was chosen based on his lack-of-experience with disabled people (or in this case, none existence exposure prior giving the trainings), his three times involvement as trainers at Jogjakarta, Cirebon and Bogor, and his desire to improve himself for future engagements with disabled Indonesian’s youth.

However, in order to keep this paper balanced, interviews were also conducted toward several students and their accompanied-teachers. Thus, the researcher is able to know whether the informant’s attempt to get closer to his audience is successful or not.

A. Jogjakarta

Based on the interview and field observations, it can be said that there are three significant findings during his interactions with the trainees. First, during the first encounter in Jogjakarta, the trainer was helped by a sign-language translator who helped the participants into understanding the trainer’s explanation. The reason is because most of the participants had hearing problems, speech-difficulty as well as impairment. Thus, the language of ‘able’ person and ‘disabled’ ones can be understood by both parties.

During the encounter, the trainer opened up by introducing himself and what are his expertise. His action was meant as an ice-breaker so that the lesson would be successful and active, since he did not have any guidance from the Department that sent him. Unfortunately, the translator translated word per word in which the language was unfamiliar to the participants. For example, the participants do not use and understand conjunctions such as ‘which’ or ‘hence’ in sentences. As a consequence, when the trainer said, “I graduate from Visual Design Graphic which is why I am going to teach you the program call Scratch...” the participants were a bit confused. They would understand more if the sentence was, “I graduate from Visual Design Graphic. I will teach the Scratch program.”

Another example of a sentence that was a bit difficult to be understood by participants, was “If you have any questions then please don’t hesitate to ask.” The better sentence should have been, “You have questions, ask me.” Nevertheless, the trainer later redeemed himself by interacting directly with the participants and had the initiative of writing his instructions or explanations to them. Hence, the session went successfully since most of the participants became active, interested and productive. Some of them even thanked the trainer personally and asked to be taken their pictures together.



Picture 1. The trainer with the best participants



Picture 2. Inside the classroom



Picture 4. The big hall where all participants are gathered together



Picture 3. The trainer with other participants



Picture 5. The training process

B. Cirebon

The trainer's second experience was in Cirebon where the participants were put together inside a big hall so around 300 participants gathered together with different impairments and agendas. As a consequence, the room was a bit overwhelming for trainers as well as participants. It took both parties fullest effort to make the sessions work successfully. Luckily, there were teachers (as chaperons) who were very helpful and ready at hand. The translator was also more proficient than the last one so that any miscommunication was minimalized. He did not translate word per word, but delivered the main idea or topic of what the trainer said. Thus, the participants were able to understand the exercise and do it correctly.

It cannot be ignored that the success of the second training was due to the trainer's previous experience. As a result, he was prepared with the language or words as well as additional media (such as video, paper, and other visual aids). He was also more open and interactive with the participants so the learning process was more enjoyable for both of party even though the hall was crowded with people and other activities.



Picture 6. The trainer with the participants and teachers

C. Bogor

The trainer's third experience was in Bogor where participants were from different Department (i.e. Social, and Communication & Information) in which the age difference was more diverse. Whereas before the age range was between 13-18 years old, this time the age difference was between 13-30 years old. They were, therefore, bolder and more experienced than the previous ones. One of the evidence was the way they introduced themselves during the training session, by singing, dancing and doing a pantomime. Another example was the way participants interact with the trainer during coffee break sessions in which they talk and joke around as old friends. The participants also invited the trainer

to come to their schools or places to spend more time and give more trainings. Overall, the third experience was very enjoyable for the trainer and participants. The success of the day, was also noticed by the Departments and Association.



Picture 7. The place where the training is held



Picture 8. The training process



Picture 9. The trainers and participants in Bogor

IV. FINDINGS

Based on the field observations during those training sessions, the research finds out that:

During the first encounter, the trainer was overwhelmed by the differences that exists between able and disabled people. In their 'notes' they were give some

instructions on how to deal with disabled students, but the reality is a bit different. Thus, the trainer needed to quickly get his misperception under control as soon as possible, and act accordingly to the situation or environment at hand.

Whereas during the first encounter he relied on the translators or helpers, as he went to other cities he became more certain of himself and relied more in developing relationship with his students. He used informal sessions such as breaks to make a bond between him and his students, and get to know them. He even was able to get their jokes and laugh with them.

He utilized all the information from his students in the classroom which help a great deal both parties. He no longer gave long or explicit explanations, but shorter and to the point instructions.

More visual aids were being used, and affective gestures and/or responses became more and more pronounce in his manners.



Picture 10. The trainer with participants during coffee break

V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and discussions above, it can be concluded that there is a distinctive way of communication between abled and disabled people. The reason is because both people have different perspective of the world around them in which reflect to their choice of words, and wordings. Whereas abled people have the advantage of 'using indirect language/words' the disabled people only understand 'direct language'.

It is unfair to put 'trainers' in a situation where they were not prepared with skills and knowledge necessary in dealing with disabled students. Both parties were put under pressure, or in a difficult situation where they have to deal as best as they could, in a very short of time. Luckily, the results show that trainers and students were open-minded and flexible enough to accept the unfortunate circumstances.

The "small talk" and the first-second stage of the social penetration theory (self-disclosure) were very helpful in making the process of learning a successful one. The trainer's

willingness to get close and understand each other during breaks, has definitely make a strong bond in which affect the next sessions that followed. His eagerness in knowing his students as best as he could, opened the door towards a next level of relationships. The students were willing to teach him on how to use their 'language', to best teach them, and get more familiar. For example, they told him to concentrate more on using visual aids, pencils and papers for a way of communication. The reason is that facial expression or long definition make them confused. Such advice were put into use, immediately so that a bond between the trainer and students was produced in the classroom, but it still exists until nowadays, where invitations to the trainer were being sent in order to visit them in their own schools.

For further research, it is necessary to understand whether a better guidelines for the trainers, in which they are being trained properly, would make the experience more fruitful for both parties.

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