

Editorial

The 'Human Library' concept is an innovative, community-based initiative developed in Europe in early 2000 and being adopted by public libraries of advanced countries, which aims to bring people together in one-to-one conversation, to encourage understanding, challenge negative stereotypes, reduce prejudice and promote social inclusion. It is just like a regular library, but the books are people/experts, you borrow a person, not a book.

The metaphor of this type of library is to create a transformative space of dialogue and interaction and offer an opportunity to bring together people/experts who might never otherwise come into contact. Human Libraries play a more generally educative role for local/national policymakers within a community by involving a wide range of experts, groups, institutional and governmental actors (*viz.* community activists and local councils, writers and artists, NGOs and advocacy groups, universities, health services and public hospitals) for scholarly debates on subjects such as social justice and social change research, health related issues, anti-racism work, social inclusion and community building, local services and local civic, cultural and recreational activities, and to create awareness and advocacy, share information/skills and history, humanizing institutions and on the benefits and limits of cross-cultural contact or dialogue within context. At a Human Library event experts are asked to act as a Living Book and enter into conversation with a Reader – presumed to be an ordinary member of the general public.

The informal conversation between a Living Book and Reader takes place in a safe, comfortable space, and within a limited period of time. Readers and Living Books are free to ask questions of each other, and share as much or as little as they like about themselves. Librarians (or organizers) are on hand to facilitate each Reading. They handle the logistics behind interactions, booking a time for the Reading and introducing Book to Reader. They also act as unobtrusive yet active observers of the encounter – ensuring that both Book and Reader are comfortable during their interaction.

Pakistani libraries are yet behind advanced countries in exercising this concept. Though, they conduct similar activities like seminars and workshops intended one-to-many interaction in a formal way, they should also plan one-to-one conversation informally initially involving retired experts who may spare time comparatively easily to share their tacit knowledge. Libraries need to adopt this as a service involving different veterans as panelists and advertise this service extensively.