

Teacher's Reflection in Teaching Computer for Retirees and Senior Citizens

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Abstract— We all know that teaching is a noble profession. Teaching is encouraging and satisfying. A good teacher must be collaborative and creative in his or her classroom management. However, what it takes to be a teacher of a class of retirees and senior citizens like 84 years old? This paper presents the experiences and reflection of a teacher who trains batches of retirees and senior citizens about the fundamentals of computer and Internet. The training is one of the three free computer education at Silliman University. It is a literacy program about the basic and fundamentals of computer, windows, Internet, email, & social media. The first batch of training was launched in January 2019, and each batch of training is composed of 25 retirees and senior citizens. The training is conducted every Saturdays for three months. The reflection of the facilitator surrounds the lessons learned in terms of teaching techniques and procedures, classroom management, as well as assessment and evaluation. It also describes the facilitator's most challenging and satisfying parts of teaching retirees and senior citizens.

Keywords— Community extension, lifelong learning, ICT for community.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the target participants of the free computer education of Silliman University through the Mariano Lao Innovation, Creation, and Invention Laboratory (MLICIL) is the cohorts of retirees and senior citizens. The free computer education for retirees and senior citizens is a computer literacy training. Topics include the basic and fundamentals of computer, windows, Internet, email, and social media. The participants are expected to showcase their portfolio of hands-on exercises. The training is conducted every Saturday morning from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon for three months. Each training class consists of 25 participants with a 1:1 computer ratio. The first batch was launched in January 2019. To this date, the third batch is about to end. The trainer is a member of faculty members of the College of Computer Studies, Silliman University. The training program is facilitated and managed by a team of staff of MLICIL.

Research shows that teaching older adults is a challenging process. It takes a lot of preparation in terms of its pedagogy, classroom organization and management, and assessment. Social, cognitive, and functional changes affect older adult learning [1]. "Some elders have increasing difficulty understanding complex sentences, are less proficient than younger people in drawing inferences, and have problems with motor tasks" [4]. Hearing problem is among the striking experience by many teachers who have taught senior citizens [5].

Walters endorsed some ways to address the number of issues which educational institutions, coursebook and material writers, course designers and teachers in teaching older people. These include varied educational backgrounds, less willing to take risks and make mistakes, student-teacher relations, entrenched behaviors and opinions, seniors talk a lot about their experiences, intrinsic reasons, social element, mobility, among others [2]. On the same manner, Mauk suggested ways to overcome age-related barriers to teaching [1]. These are physically ready, use visual aids, use of microphones, and employing new tricks to teaching.

Addressing the seniors very kindly, exercising patience and maintaining a professional attitude throughout the training is highly recommended also [3]. In terms of the teaching techniques, it is suggested also "to be individualized to fit the needs and lifestyle of the older patient" [4]. Teaching senior citizens should emphasize opportunities for learners to work collaboratively [5]. Chen urged that teachers teaching senior citizens must also acquire core competencies in teaching strategies [6].

The goal of this article is to describe teacher's experiences during the free computer education program of Silliman University. Specifically, this article presents the reflections and lessons learned by the training providers who trains batches of senior citizens about the fundamentals of computer and Internet.

II. THE TRAINING DETAILS

A. Training Outline

This literacy training is designed to train senior citizens about the basic and fundamentals of computer, windows, Internet, email, & social media. Participants are expected to showcase their portfolio of hands-on exercises. Hands-on assessment is conducted after each lesson which could either be time bound or not. Time bound hands-on assessment is intended to check the speed of the trainer in performing a certain computer skill. Hands-on assessments that are not time bound are intended to check the accuracy of the trainer in performing the computer skill.

B. The Training Providers

The dean is an advocate of ICT for the community and a prime mover of ICT service-learning and community extension in the university. As the program leader, the dean is in-charge in the overall operation and management of the program. The dean approves the list of applicants for the training. The program leader is assisted by an MLICIL staff who is in-charge in the screening of applicants, facilitating all sessions from the first day until the closing ceremonies.

<p>Module 1: Computer Fundamentals</p> <p>A. Introduction to Computers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a Computer? • Using a Mouse • The Computer Keyboard <p>B. Introduction to Windows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Windows? • Menu Bars • Toolbars • Helps and FAQs 	<p>Module 3: Using Web-based Email</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is an Email? • Creating Email Account • Accessing your Email • Send and Receive Email with or without Attachments • Email Safety
<p>Module 2: Introduction to the Internet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the Internet? • Web Browsers • Search Engines • Viewing Multiple Pages with Windows and Tabs • Get Entertained with YouTube • Internet Safety 	<p>Module 4: Computerized Typing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typing Quest <p>Module 5: Staying Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Networking thru Facebook • Get your Message Across with Messenger • Stay in Touch with Skype

Fig. 1. Training Outline

The trainer is a faculty of the College of Computer Studies, Silliman University. She is the chairperson of the IT department of the college. She is teaching IT majors and other applied ICT concepts for 18 years. Notably, she has no prior experience as to teaching senior citizens.

TABLE 1. Profile of the Trainee-Senior Citizens

	Batch 1		Batch 2		Batch 3		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Sex								
Male	4	16	3	12	2	8	9	12
Female	21	84	22	88	23	92	66	88
Total	25	100	25	100	25	100	75	100
Age Range								
70 & below	14	56	18	72	18	72	50	66
> 71 & < 80	7	28	7	28	8	32	22	29
80 & above	4	16	0	0	0	0	4	5
Total	25	100	25	100	25	100	75	100

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Teacher's Reflection and Lessons Learned

On Classroom Culture. Being able to establish a good relationship with senior citizen learners is very vital for learners like senior citizens to make computer learning easy and meaningful. Having a good and harmonious relationship with them capacitated them to grasp the lesson well and apply the skills learned accordingly despite the challenges of memory gap and muscle pain. The classes are conducted a week apart from each other that contributes to the challenging retention among the trainees. Though lesson retention is a big challenge, being patient towards them and having an enthusiastic attitude towards repetition is a big help. When procedures or rules are laid out on them, senior citizen learners painstakingly follow each one of them. Thus, proper mind setting and thorough prior discussion of expected learning

outcomes, at the start of each session, is critical to set the tone of the conversation and enable them to appreciate the lessons.

Aside from that, the teacher's demeanor and attitude also contribute to the effectiveness of student learning. Regardless of the teaching pedagogy of choice for each lesson, the teacher should always maintain a positive attitude towards life-long learning. In this way, adult learners like senior citizens will be excited to learn the new experience.

Also, being able to cater to each one of their needs, may it be a skill application or simple lesson clarification, is also very significant. Senior citizen learners are curious learners. So, making it a point to attend to each one of their questions or clarifications is also a factor for active learning. The mantra of "no learner left behind" is of utmost importance. There is never a dull session with the trainees. The trainees never run out of questions and clarifications even if the same topic or activities have been repeatedly discussed in class and performed by them. With that, as a trainer, it makes the teacher excited to go to each session, not knowing what clarifications or questions will be bombarded with the new topic or with previously discussed topics. But the good thing is, all their questions and clarifications are carefully prepared and relevant. This signifies that the learners are also excited to come to each Saturday session. They always ask questions because they are still eager to learn.

Aside from their eagerness to learn, newfound friendships and fellowship with their co-learners also excite them to come to class. Absences are never really a problem with senior citizen learners. If not for health reasons, they are always present in class and comes ahead of schedule or on time. This may mean that they are excited to attend class. Together with their excitement to attend class, a personalized teaching/learning approach is also essential for senior citizen learners. The learners are often given the choices as to when, how, and what activities they would want to perform.

Learning pace with senior citizens varies and not the same due to mental, physical, and elderly emotional factors. A personalized teaching-learning approach is not difficult to do with adult learning. Learner profiling is the key and is not

difficult to do since they love to talk about their personal lives in class. So, the teaching strategies and pedagogy of choice are based on the learners' voluntarily shared profile.



Fig. 2. The Trainer discussing the lesson

On Curriculum and Instruction. The grade book of the teacher reflects the results of all assessments given to the senior citizen learners. Each lesson comes with a discussion and application of skills through hands-on exercises. After which, an evaluation is carried to evaluate student learning. Since lessons are centered on acquiring basic computer skills, all assessments are hands-on and are evaluated based on speed, accuracy, and thoroughness of performance. Usually, assessments are done twice (two rounds) per topic to assess students' learning with a specific lesson accurately. The appraisals are intended to reflect students' learning, not merely task completion or memorization skills.

must. Appropriate learning strategies vary from one learner to another and from one batch to another. Recent strategies that teacher have tried to help struggling student is to pair that student with a classmate who is more advanced in terms of computer skills. At the same time, to let younger students sit beside the more senior ones. Letting the advanced student sit beside the struggling student is beneficial to both.

Retention is enhanced for the advanced student and is challenged to continuously excel in the lessons to be able to help the struggling classmate. On the struggling student's end, the strategy is beneficial since an advanced classmate is mentoring. Whenever the majority of the students are not learning, the lesson is discussed again. At the same time, the learners perform the exercises repeatedly until there is mastery of the assigned skill. Further, the teacher always made it a point to have a relaxed, friendly, and democratic atmosphere in the classroom so as not to stress the senior citizen learners. For the teacher, senior citizens are sensitive learners, emotion wise. Thus, the trainer emphasizes respect with each one's learning pace but at the same time, let them understand that they have limited number of sessions in the training. And thus, the need to maximize each session through collaborative learning is necessary. By doing so, all of them will be benefited.

On Collaboration. The teacher felt a truly humbling experience to train senior citizen learners because they are very appreciative but mentally, emotionally, and physically challenged due to age. The teacher believes that there are still areas to be improved professionally, like time management, content, and teaching pedagogy. Time management because of the repetitive nature of lesson discussion and performance of the hands-on exercise. Content because of the interest to include advanced topics. And, teaching pedagogy because the teacher wants to identify and use one that would be inclusive of the different mental, physical, and emotional learning capacity of senior citizen learners. The teacher feels that the



Fig. 3. The Participants read their hand-outs

A student hand-out is a must for senior citizen learners. This printed reading material consist of instructions and procedures that allows the learners to perform over and over again. Using the computer without the hand-outs is just one of the evidence of learning. Other evidence of learning is students being able to help a classmate perform computer-related tasks. Also, being able to use needed software applications on their own and of course, improved or better results in the second round of assessments.

The same evidence of learning may be identified from all of them, but still, their learning capability varies from one to another despite being categorized the same as senior citizens. So, the employment of strategies appropriate to make learning faster and suitable for their unique learning capability is a

most fulfilling and rewarding experience in the academe in training senior citizens. At the same time, the teacher believes that the program is the most challenging teaching experience.

Mastery of the subject matter is not enough. What is most needed is a remarkable level of patience to handle the challenges of teaching senior citizens. Teachers must be ready to handle learners who are forgetful with hearing and eyesight difficulties, health challenges like muscle pains, among others. But they are also the most interested and eager learners who love to write everything that the teacher has spoken and everything they perform. They are passionate learners, capable of learning at a high level, who deserves a passionate teacher.



Fig. 4. The Participants collaborating with each other

Collaborative learning works for them and capacitates them to deal with their learning challenges and be connected with the world through the Internet. Moreover, the fellowship and camaraderie among each were emphasized. Most importantly, the teacher claims pride in teaching senior citizens.

B. Organizer's Reflection and Lessons Learned

The organizers initially expected that there would be few takers in the program. Likewise, the organizers initially assumed there would be a hard time assisting the senior citizens because of the generation gap. Fortunately, it surprised the organizers that there were a lot of senior citizens signed up for the training program. On the first day of sessions, the senior citizens were very excited to start the lesson, especially how to navigate the computer properly using the mouse. The trainees shared some information about their lives that made the organizers get to know them more. The close relationship with the learners inspired the team in assisting them when they come and visit the ICI laboratory to practice their lessons. It is also surprising that the senior citizens are active learners. They are perceived to be energetic in the classroom. It was also observed that there was teamwork and collaboration among the learners. The experience has widened organizer's perspective of teaching and learning. One of the organizers mentioned that she wanted to keep the communication and she planned to introduce them with more advanced topics of the internet.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Teaching computers with senior citizens is a special kind. It is challenging yet the level of satisfaction among the training providers is high. It demands a distinct teaching preparation in terms of strategy and delivery, organization and

management, and assessment. It also requires a diverse trainer-learner relationship. Further, lifelong learning with computers among the senior citizens provided a sense of fulfillment not just by the learners but also with the teachers.

For further research, the concept and theory of andragogy should be explored. There is also a need to document quantitative and qualitative experiences of learners and assess its relationships and differences.

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