Making an Anti-Bullying Comic

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During my last year in elementary school, I despise those anti-bullying comic strips. Not like I am supporting the act of bullying, but it is because the way anti-bullying comic strips portrayed unrealistic resolution. In October 2011, Cartoon Network began a collaborative project between an online comic software called Bitstrip to bring anti-bullying campaign for schools and awareness on social media. Children can use Bitstrip's website to create their own comic in which it is up to them on how to solve the problem and have their comic shared on their social media. I was still in grade fifth back then, and I found the project was indeed bringing awareness, but not powerful enough to deliver the message. The cheesy storyline, simple art style, and predictable plot might be the reason why I found anti-bullying comics using Bitstrip format is gullible on a particular internet forum.

Social-awareness through visual is a nice idea, but without a proper caution will be futile. Throughout my school days in elementary, until I graduated from high school, I found making illustrations and comics as one of my coping mechanisms. Oddly enough, I have created several illustrations and comics related to the topic of violence or bullying, which mostly based on my personal experience or my observations. I supposed possibly it is because of my disappointment towards cringe-worthy anti-bullying comic in Bitstrip format that motivated me to do so.

In October 2018, an advertisement by UNICEF appeared on my Instagram timeline. The advertisement was about a comic contest and a #ENDViolence campaign where UNICEF is asking young people to help them create a superhero that can fight against The Silence, a supernatural being that can suppress its victims to speak up against injustice. UNICEF launched its #ENDViolence in and around schools campaign to raise awareness, shift social norms and change

behaviours to challenge the culture of violence. I did not have any intention to participate because the winner will have to work from January to June 2019 with the team from UNICEF and DeCheser Media, which between those months I have to prepare for a National Examination and 2 Joint Entrance Selection of State University (abbreviate SBMPTN). Eventually, I have gotten overwhelmed by studying and decided to join the contest.

At the end of October, I submitted my original character design along with a summary of my character to the contest's website. At the end of November, my submission made it to the final voting along with the other nine contestants from the United States, Philippines, Egypt, Ecuador, Greece, India, and Serbia. The finalists were given a chance to withdraw from the contest for whatever reason. Few days during the voting week, India withdraw from the contest. I was about to follow India's step. But I was confident that I would not get many votes but then baffled when UNICEF contacted me on December that my submission received more than 20.000 votes and thus became the winner.

On January 11, UNICEF officially announced the winner of the contest. I had my first video call meeting with the comic team from UNICEF and DeCheser Media, where we exchanged pieces of information and planning our schedule. UNICEF provided me with a guideline to help me with the story. I started writing on the account and ended up drawing the whole script instead due to language difficulty and I was more confident using illustration to represent my idea. I tried to make the story and illustrations enjoyable, but the ending was a bit rushed due to the limited pages.

As I finished the storyboard, I realized that I did not read the keynotes carefully. One of the rules was not to make any physical violence appearance too obvious in the comic book, which I made one explicitly. The team reviewed and revised most of the story then turned it into a simple and child-friendly script. Back then, I disagree with the revised script that they made because of lots of my favourite scenes and characters got changed. I felt that perhaps adults perceive schools violence differs from children. It took me a while to finally agree with

their decision as I noticed why they tried their hardest not to show any sign of violence: the story aimed for children and all ages, and without triggering any reader.

Violence in and around schools can take on many forms, including corporal punishment, bullying, cyberbullying and sexual harassment. Therefore, the team and I decided to put cyber-bullying as the conflict of the story after two months of numerous revisions. The story turned into more school life fantasy-themed, appropriate action comic for children, and the message is clear. The plot was Cipta with her superpower, she can turn her drawings into objects that she can use to help those who in needs to speak up. However, the plot had changed a little bit, but it still has the same meaning from the first. I was satisfied that we finally over with the writing part. However, due to the limited pages, I found the story is missing something, but I could not figure out what it is. What I liked about the story is how the supervillain managed to interpret our fear to speak up against injustice where we ended up being silenced and insecure by yourself. For me, I think Cipta is an interpretation of how some people find it difficult to speak up verbally but having the strength to speak up in silence throughout writing or drawing.

In July 2019, my comic book entitled "Cipta, Create!" presented to leaders from government, business, civil society and UN agencies, as well as 100 children and young people, at the annual United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, held in New York. As corny as it might sound, anti-bullying comic has made a big impact on me although I still despise those Bitstrip comics from the past, I have learned a lot from their flaws.

My new experiences of working with UNICEF and DeCheser Media for six months was quite challenging ─ Dealing with different time zones, national exams, language barrier, and restless nights to meet the deadlines. Therefore, making a comic to speak about bullying allowed me to be not afraid to stand up for myself or anyone else.

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