

‘DON’T HATE ME BECAUSE I AM BEAUTIFUL’: A CHALLENGING CAREER IN SPA FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

People with disabilities faced numerous challenges as they leave school with lack of skills or qualification which results in unemployment. It is critical that these people are well prepared, to make the transition work successful, by effective assistance in making a good start in the world of employment which positively affect them professionally and gives personal success in the future stages of life. Since interest in physical wellness increases, spa therapy became popular and emerged as important profit centres for beauty salon, resorts and hotels. Many people have overlooked the potential of people with disabilities in this field. The purpose of this study was to fill the gap by identifying different and more challenging market segments for people with disabilities. This research was carried out using case study involving 15 students with disabilities in Panji Secondary School. The participants were observed during their training and the way they carried out the task of performing the facial treatment, hand and foot spa at the site. This research paper revealed some interesting facts about the skills in spa field that can enhance an individual’s self-confidence. Out of 15 participants, 8 students have been equipped with the skills needed in spa services. Most people assumed typical people are expertise in beauty line, but with training, encouragement and commitment, people with disabilities do show equivalent qualities and talent. The results of this study support the effectiveness of the spa skills amongst the people with disabilities focusing on practical, hands-on learning, with more direct relevance to their career aspirations. It also supports the findings that people with disabilities can overcome barriers successfully.

Keywords: disability, spa therapy, self-confidence

Introduction

Beautiful. What does it mean? Many have concluded that, "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder". Although this saying does contain truth, the definition of beauty is more specifically influenced by history, cultural norms, and universal standards. Each classification has contributed to the overall definition of beauty.

‘Don’t Hate Me because I Am Beautiful’: A Challenging Career in Spa for Students with Disabilities is a paper describing the talent of students with disabilities in spa. Students with disabilities are beautiful and could be even more beautiful than others if we equipped and trained them in beauty knowledge. There are so many fields that we could train them, but to train them in beauty line is something extraordinary. It is not an

easy task but it is possible. Nothing is impossible in this world. If there is a will, there is a way!

Brief Introduction to Spa

Spa has certainly played an important part throughout the centuries not only in recreation but also in restoring physical and mental health. The word spa originated from the Latin acronym *sanitas per aqua*, or 'health through water' and is broadly defined as water-based and non-water facilities offering a range of health/medical/beauty/relaxation treatments.

There are many types of spa. Each kind of spa offers a variety of different services. The different types of spas give you the opportunity to diversify your skills and gain a wide portfolio of experience. Another benefit is that the continually growing spa industry gives you more opportunities to move or relocate. There are a few spa facilities classification in the market as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Spa Facilities Classification

Types of Spa	Definition
Day	A day spa offers a variety of spa services, including facial and body treatments on a day-use-only basis.
Resort/Hotel spa	A resort/hotel spa offers a spa, fitness and wellness services, and overnight accommodations within a resort or hotel
Destination	The destination spa's primary purpose is guiding individual to healthy lifestyles.
Medical	A spa on site licensed health care professionals provide medical and wellness care in an environment that integrates spa services.
Club	A facility for fitness and offers a variety of professional administered spa services on a day-use basis besides sauna, steam or whirlpool bath.
Mineral Springs	A spa offering an on-site source of natural mineral, thermal or seawater used in hydrotherapy treatments
Cruise ship	A spa aboard a cruise ship providing professionally administered spa services, fitness and wellness components.
Cosmetics	A spa that primarily offers aesthetic/cosmetic and prevention/wellness procedures and services such as facials, and other non-invasive procedures.

Source: International SPA Association (2010)

Why Spa for Students with Disabilities?

Steps to challenging careers in spa for students with disabilities give varieties of choices for them to participate in relevant work experiences to a career position.

This research aimed at providing a starting point for students of disabilities involving in a spa market by establishing training at school, transition to work and performing job task at site. Transitions to work is a normal process whereby people with disabilities will surely experience as they leave school, consolidate skills, develop a sense of job readiness and make decisions about life and career.

It is critical that we help these people with disabilities, who are mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds, for their transition to work before they lose all hope of anything more than a life on benefits. People with disabilities are also human beings that could contribute to the development of the country.

We are witnessing an economic recession where even the able-bodied people have problems in finding jobs. Unemployed disabilities people are the hidden victims of this recession. Many people with disabilities left school with a few skills or qualification and no work experience. This will make them impossible to find a job.

The aim of the research is to convey a global thinking in upgrading a challenging career for the special educations future generation with full of confidence and trust in the talent of the people with disabilities. Due to this, people with disabilities should equip themselves with better knowledge and skills, to ensure they are equivalent to others in the job market. They face numerous challenges when entering the labour market particularly in developing economies. Not only do they need to find a job, and preferably one that corresponds to their level of qualifications, they also want to develop a foundation for a lasting, stable employment relationship that helps them to progress in life. To better characterize these challenges, the Special Education Unit of Panji Secondary School has developed an intensive training in a challenging Spa career.

Spa for Students with Disabilities in Panji Secondary School

I include spa as a subject for Special Education because I am equipped with spa knowledge and I had experience in managing a beauty salon. I would like to share the skills with the students with disabilities. I feel the skills would be a great waste if I do not share it with the others. When I proposed the idea, some rejected it as a waste of time, such as:

“You cannot train the special kids in doing facial treatments because they cannot master it easily.”

“It is impossible for them to be a beautician! Imagine, a mentally retarded as a beautician?”

“Why don’t you just focus in teaching handicraft or arts for the kids rather than in beauty line?”

I always like something new and challenging which makes life more interesting. Since I spend most of my time with students with disabilities at school, I feel this is a great opportunity for me to pass on the skills on facial treatment plus hand and foot spa. I have never seen people with disabilities involved in spa business before, except the visual impaired who are trained as masseurs. Maybe there are hearing impaired people involved in beauty line because they only have hearing problems.

My focus is solely on students with disabilities who are having delay development since they rarely are given the opportunity to be employed, let alone as a beautician. It came to my mind, to experiment with them. In 2008, I started with my first spa class consisting of 28 students with disabilities. During physical hygiene lesson, I included the facial treatment procedures. I used facial cleansing milk and taught them steps in cleansing their face. For them, it was something new and they enjoyed it so much. They kept asking me if they could repeat the procedures again. They always looked forward

to physical hygiene lesson. From then on, I felt it is a wake-up call for me to introduce spa from vocational syllabus into their lesson.

I observed that some students cannot master in facial treatment but could do well in hand and foot spa. More than 40% of students could do well in both facial treatment plus hand and foot spa. The other 60% could only master in hand and foot spa because facial treatment needs fine motor skills in cleaning the pimples, whiteheads and blackheads; although they were good in cleansing and scrubbing processes.

From then on, the spa subject is continued until now. We got the support from the school administration in terms of budget allocation and freedom to expose the students to the outside world. Anyhow I prefer to concentrate on students who have severe problems and not perform well in academic because we do have students who could do well in academic. For me, those students have better chances of getting a job after they leave school.

Contextual Framework

The study is a case study involving 15 students with disabilities in Panji Secondary School. It involves observation during their training and the way they carried out the task of performing the facial treatment, hand and foot spa at the site as well as observation on customers and students response. Three sites were established and were surveyed at different times to ensure the students with disabilities were qualified to carry the task. Fifteen students who have Mild Mental Retarded, Delay Development, Down Syndrome, Autism and Fragile X-Syndrome were chosen for this study. These students were given intensive training in facial treatment plus hand and foot spa.

Introducing Students to Spa

During the first year, I began to explore all career fields that people with disabilities attached to when they completed the secondary schools. There are not many choices due to lack of knowledge and skills. Introduction of spa career were exposed to the students to search for the talent and to create interest in the students. Awareness in beauty programme was introduced to give an input to the students on the importance of taking care of their health and beauty. In facial treatment, I introduced equipment, utensils and products needed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Equipments for Facial Treatment

No.	Equipment	Utensils	Products
1.	Facial Bed	Towel	Cleansing milk
2.	Steamer	Spatula	Cleansing gel
3.	Magnifying Lamp	Bowl	Scrub
4.	Vacuum	Brush	Massage Cream
5.	Trolley	Gauze 8"x8"	Mask
		Cotton buds	Cold Mask
		Face mask	Hot Mask
		Hair cap	Pigmentation Mask
		Antiseptic	Gold Mask

They were taught about the functions of the equipment and utensils and how to operate the equipment. They were informed on products that should be used in the process of the treatment. Videos regarding facial treatment processes shown were from different famous spa destinations such as in Bali, Indonesia and Thailand. Charts of steps in cleansing, scrubbing and massaging were pasted on the wall all the time so that they could refer to them in case they forget the steps.

We have several equipment for hand and foot spa treatment as shown in Table 3. In hand and foot spa, I showed the students the video of the treatment so that they could gain some information and bring interest to them in doing it. Videos and pictures of hand and foot spa processes from several venues were shown to the students to motivate them.

Table 3 - Equipments for Hand & Foot Spa

No.	Equipments	Utensils	Product
1.	Rattan Chair	Towel	Bath salt
2.	Stools	Bowl	Oil
3.	Basin	Kettle	Scrub
4.			Mask
5.			Lotion

Demonstration on how to perform hand massage was shown and students got first-hand experience on how to do it themselves. At first only two steps were introduced. Students massaged themselves first. Then they have to massage the teacher's hand to ensure they have mastered the steps. Later, they massaged their friend's hand. Other steps were introduced later on when the students had mastered the earlier steps. Hand chart with steps on how to massage were shown to guide them to perform the hand massage. The chart was hung on the class wall all the time for students' reference.

In the second year, the training became more serious to equip them with knowledge and skills. They practised amongst themselves to sharpen the skills under teachers' guidance. Everybody loves to be beautiful. People with disabilities are not exempted from this feeling. Involving in spa will give them knowledge and experience in beauty line and it made them happy to be a part of it.

'Spa Experience at School'

On 24th May 2012, school stage was set up like a Bali style with decoration and spa equipment to launch 'Spa Experience at School'. It took two hours to decorate the stage to give a romantic touch of a spa environment and instrumental music was played to create the mood. At the site, 7 students were involved to give their spa services to teachers and students of the school.

Services provided were facial treatment, hand & foot spa, head massage, hair wash and hair cutting. Teachers and students from the academic classes were surprised of the students with disabilities talent in spa and praised them for their skills. They could not imagine how these students with disabilities could master in spa treatment. There are 20 teachers and students received the treatment in 4 hours. Anyhow, many teachers complained that the time allocated for the program was too short as they were not able to participate in it because they had classes to attend to.

After our success in school, we felt, we should go further. There should not be a full stop. Many more opportunities are waiting ahead, and we must grab it. It was a suitable time to expose the students to the real world! Society should open up their eyes regarding these special kids' talent. Students' self-confidence in providing services to the public should be increased and communication skills should be sharpened. They must be trained to socialise with the public. Students were encouraged to practise and master the training despite their disabilities and reducing their inferiority complex. The effectiveness of training would be shown at the site.

'Spa Experience with the Community'.

On 6 Sept and 27 September 2012, we had a program called 'Spa Experience with the Community'. We contacted beauty salons and invited them to cooperate with us in this programme. Students were brought to the beauty salons and were given special price and some salons even gave free treatment to the students. They experienced spa treatments at the beauty salon from professional beauticians which gave them enjoyment and readiness in learning new skills.

Spa Booth Entrepreneurship Training

Kubang Kerian Hypermarket Mydin Mohamed Holdings Berhad in Kota Bharu Kelantan with pleasure and trust gave these students the opportunity to set up a spa environment at the entrance of the hypermarket. On 25th October 2012, a spa booth was set up at the area of 15' x 10' with no cost due to the kindness and trust of Mr. R Naidu, manager of the hypermarket. At this site, 8 students were involved to give services to the customers of the hypermarket. There are 48 customers that received hand and foot spa treatment and 10 customers received the facial treatment. The crowd were astonished with the spa services given by the students. Surprisingly, a beauty salon owner visited the spa booth and offered the students to work at her salon!

University Science Malaysia Kubang Kerian, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia was the next target for the students to expose their talents. They invited us to open the booth after they have read our success in the newspaper. It was set up in the main hall on 3-5th October 2013. There was an overwhelming support from the crowd. Hand and foot treatment were given to 165 customers with 32 customers undergo facial treatment whereby the total number was 197 in two days. For the two days programme, the students received two sets of new costumes for them to wear during the programme and it made them excited to try on their new dresses. It was a very hectic day for everybody but at the end it was very satisfying.

'I am Beautiful' the 'make-over' programme

On 19 April 2014, we organised 'I am Beautiful' the 'make-over' programme that was very interesting whereby they experienced themselves being touched up by the professional make-up artist. Eye shadow, blusher and lipstick were used to create their new appearance that made them surprisingly more beautiful and attractive. Beautiful costumes added the touch and that was unforgettable moments for them.

Since the students were so interested in beauty, we requested from Giat Mara Kubang Kerian, Kota Bharu Kelantan, an organisation that train society in beauty, to teach our students in a make-up workshop. A make-up class was organised on 6 July 2014 whereby the students were taught by teachers who are experienced in beauty line. The students seemed to be so excited and enjoyed the class very much. They were

taught the technics of makeup and later they ended up by putting on make-up on each other. Before they started, photos were snapped to see the difference before and after the make-up session so that they can see the differences. We even let them put the make-up on us to boost their self-confidence. It was such a surprise to see that these students really have the talent in the beauty field despite of their disabilities.

In the third year, the training became more intensive. That was the year to value what they had gained from their previous experiences, including enhanced communication skills, greater confidence and motivation to study and work towards a career, job-related skills, and an understanding of how to cope with the job task.

Observation from the study

From the observations during the training, the students showed great interest and gave full attention to the teachers' instructions.

During the 'Spa Experience at School' the students enjoyed the support of the teachers who attended the programme. The stage was crowded with teachers who were excited to participate in the programme by allowing themselves to be treated by the students who gave them treatment in hand and foot spa. Normal students tried the facial treatment given by students and were satisfied with it.

'Spa Experience with Community' brought the students to experience the treatment given by the professional beautician and made them feel closer to the community. Through this experience they could imagine themselves as a beautician and offer the same services in the future.

'Spa Experience in Mydin Mall' gave enjoyment to the students because they were at the mall with the crowd surrounding them. The public was surprised to see a spa booth were set up at the mall and even asked where our next venue would be!

At University Science Malaysia (USM), the students were fully occupied giving treatments to the customers. We were lucky because the students of USM helped us with the registration of the customers. Doctors from USM also registered for facial treatments and even male doctors also received facial treatments from our male student! From this observation, it showed that the public gave full support to the students despite of their disabilities.

Make-up workshop that were organised to equip the students in make-up skills were enjoyed very much by them. It was amazing to see that these special kids were very interested in it!

It was a very good employment preparation experience for the students which provide them opportunities to develop interest, communication skills and discipline. By experiencing it themselves, the student showed that they are able to carry the task efficiently and their disabilities could not be a reason for them not to pursue a career that they are able to master.

These people with disabilities learn better in mastering the skill by doing it themselves. Hands-on experience was a very valuable method for these students. Practical, work-based learning alongside experienced trades people and being treated

like an adult can transform the motivation and aspiration of the people with disabilities who have struggled in school, helping them to achieve more than they ever thought they were capable of.

Problems encountered during the study

During the facial treatment lesson, the students were having difficulties in adjusting the pressure of their hands on doing the facials. They did not apply the correct pressure when they were doing it on the teachers' face. That was how we knew whether the students had mastered the skills.

At the site, during the extraction of pimples, blackheads and whiteheads process, the students were not confident since needles and vacuum were used. Teachers helped them out in this process. This skills need to be fully trained before you let the students administer them on others.

In hand spa, we taught the students in hand massage, hand scrub and hand mask. Anyhow, in foot spa we only focused on foot bath whereby bath salt was added in the basin of hot water. The customers just soaked their feet in it. At the site, customers requested for more. They asked to be given foot massage whereas they were not taught the skill. To satisfy the customers, the students willingly gave them the foot massage by using the hand massage techniques. We just let them explore their creativity, talent and style in doing it. We were amazed that the customers were really satisfied with their services and even offered them to do the services at their premises.

The products used such as bath salt for the foot bath were packed individually to ensure the correct quantity will be used. This method is to ensure that the products were economically used.

Coloured towels were used in the spa treatment. Dark brown and light brown towels were for the facial treatment, yellow towel was for the hand spa and white towel was for the foot spa. This was to avoid the students using the wrong towels for the wrong treatment for hygienic purposes.

Sponges were not used in the facial treatment unlike most of the beauty salons. We used muslin cloth instead to ensure cleanliness. For each customer, a piece of muslin cloth was used and disposed afterwards.

Conclusion

This paper revealed some interesting observations about the skills in spa field that can be acquired by students with disabilities. While many people automatically assume the normal people have a distinct advantage in the beauty line, many of these same people might not realize that the people with disabilities actually have the same advantage. Given the correct training, encouragement and commitment, people with disabilities can show equivalent qualities and talent.

The findings reveal important revelations regarding the qualities and talents. One important assertion is that people with disabilities also have a high interest in physical attractiveness and they are proactively compensated on their disabilities through other means such as spa education.

This finding demonstrates skills that are seen as creative and difficult task to master, are much more likely could be carried out perfectly by students with disabilities. It is a good future job prospect and promotes self-confidence in people with disabilities. They have the potential to improve the skills, job prospects and life-chances in creating a better future. This will help to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and void to be trapped in unemployment in future. The result of this paper supports the effectiveness of the spa skills amongst the people with disabilities and creates an understanding for this promising market segment. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate the interest of people with disabilities to be involved in the spa business and encourage the beauty industries to include them into employment.

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