



A Decade of Growth: From Social Media to Academic Friendship

Yeyentimalla^{1*}, Yuyun Christyanni¹, Sri Suryawati²

1. Department of Nursing, Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya, Palangka Raya, Indonesia, 73111;

2. Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Faculty of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 55281.

*Corresponding author's e-mail: yeyentimalla@polkesraya.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Background: Friendship is a safe relationship in which individuals can express various facets of themselves. A true friend allows another to be fully themselves in their presence, resulting in personal growth and progress -- not only for individuals, but also for institutions, society, and the nation. A friendship that began as a student-teacher relationship and has lasted a decade (2015-2025) was lived, observed, and reflected upon.

Aims: This photo essay aims to explore how an initially asymmetric relationship between student and teacher gradually grew into an academic friendship. It is intended to inspire readers to nurture safe and trusting connections within their own circles.

Methods: This case study investigates a student-teacher friendship relationship, highlighting learning points worth sharing publicly. The relationship consciously incorporated emotional communication -- emotional intelligent interaction that engages feeling-based expression and empathetic simulation.

Results: A bond that began between two strangers on Facebook evolved into an academic friendship, then into a student-examiner relationship during doctoral study. After the doctoral journey ended, the connection reverted to a stronger friendship. This relationship yielded collaborative works and programs that have benefited both Indonesian and global communities.

Conclusion: This case study offers several takeaways on building meaningful friendship that foster personal growth and benefit the wider environment.

Keywords: *Friendship; Emotional communication; Emotional animation; Emotional simulation; Emotional crescendo.*

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1. Introduction

Abraham Maslow (1975) stated that human beings need to be recognized for their potential and developed toward self-actualization -- to become fully human. In reality, however, not everyone grows. This can be seen in how a person communicates -- especially when their communication shows little desire to connect with others. Within academic systems that are burdened with heavy workloads, students often struggle to express their inner selves, while lecturers may find it difficult to perceive students' latent potential through formal classroom encounters alone. This is where emotional communication becomes essential, bridging interpersonal gaps through two key strategies: emotional animation and emotional simulation.

This photo essay presents a real-life story of friendship between two women from different backgrounds: a Dayak Ngaju doctoral student from Central Kalimantan and a Javanese professor. They are nineteen years apart in age, with vastly different cultural roots. Their connection began through social media and evolved into face-to-face meetings and eventually academic collaboration. Such friendship is rare in Indonesia, a country steeped in feudal values, especially in higher education. In such a culture, students are expected to "know their place," (*tahu diri*, in Indonesian) while lecturers are to be honored, obeyed, even loved. This friendship did not render their roles equal in hierarchy, but it created a learning relationship grounded in mutual respect and rooted in culturally resonant care.

What makes their bond even more distinct is their shared commitment to practicing emotional intelligence in communication -- a model developed by the student in her doctoral research at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta. The dissertation revitalized emotional communication within families of drug addiction survivors. This research later formed the basis for a Digital Emotional Communication training module co-authored by both student and professor during the COVID-19 pandemic. The module was delivered in an online workshop for 45 rehabilitation mentors across five Indonesian cities: Palangka Raya, Yogyakarta, Singkawang, Medan, and Manokwari (Yeyentimalla & Suryawati, 2021).

This intergenerational and intercultural partnership shows how hospitality in human relationships fosters a safe space for growth and transformation. Michelle Hershberger (1999) emphasizes that hospitality is an invitation into vulnerability and trust. Within such spaces, deep transformation becomes possible. The friendship between student and teacher in this essay reveals that emotional communication is not only an academic skill, but also a spiritual encounter, where values are passed down and embodied heart to heart.

2. The Journey of Friendship

Naturalistic observation and reflection were conducted on a relationship that was initially informal between a doctoral student in psychology, Yeyentimalla, and her external examiner, Prof. Sri Suryawati, a senior professor at the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). The relationship began informally on a social media platform, namely Facebook. The online friendship began in February 2015. Not much personal information is known. Even the professor did not use her real name, but posted a profile picture of herself. Included in the initial data that was known was the age difference that allowed for the role of student-teacher to be played between two people from different generations, namely generation X meeting the baby boomer generation. The interaction was conducted on Facebook in writing using Indonesian.

Several months later, the teacher took the initiative to give her contact number, and their conversation moved to WhatsApp -- synchronous and fast-paced. In the same year as the beginning of the friendship, December 10, 2015, the teacher invited the student to lunch meeting at Bumbu Desa, a restaurant in Yogyakarta. The first meeting lasted two and half hours in a cheerful atmosphere. They both enjoyed the time together; the entire conversation flowed spontaneously yet remained respectful and filled with warmth (Yeyentimalla, 2020; Yeyentimalla, 2025).

Next, there was a second, third, fourth lunch meeting, and so on at the same or different restaurants. The topics of conversation varied, generally the topics were not agreed upon beforehand. One interesting thing, the student never shared stories about her dissertation journey, it was a kind of taboo to talk about it with a professor who was an online friend at first.

In 2016, to be precise on July 16, 2016, part of Yeyentimalla's doctoral study journey was to have the experience of being a speaker at a national seminar. She discussed it with Director of Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya, head of the institution where she worked. The leader initiated a national seminar, giving Yeyentimalla the opportunity to be a speaker with the promoter, namely Prof. Tina Afiatin, and Prof. Sri Suryawati who at that time served as First Vice President of the International Narcotics of Control Board (INCB), and Dr. Antar Sianturi from the National Narcotics Agency (Badan Narkotika Nasional). The first national seminar held by the Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya managed to attract 750 participants, the majority of whom came from nursing professions from all over Central Kalimantan and participants from other provinces. The seminar went well, smoothly, and was beneficial for all participants, as expected (Figure 1).

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Figure 1. The First National Seminar of the Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya, July 16, 2016

The internal benefit of the national seminar for the speaker team was that they got to know each other and learned about each other's competencies. When determining the examining team for Yeyentimalla's dissertation in 2017, Prof. Tina Afiatin as the promoter approved the proposal of the examined student that Prof. Sri Suryawati be her external examining professor. When she became an examiner, the good relationship between the student and her examiner continued to develop into friendship. Lunch meetings were often held, either alone or together with students supervised by the examining professor. Likewise, fingertip communication on the WhatsApp and Facebook platforms was carried out almost every day.

On January 31, 2018, Prof. Sri Suryawati acted like an eagle who saved a student from a situation of almost dropping out due to stagnation in the dissertation process. She gave an order to Yeyentimalla to write her dissertation in the same room as her. The order, which felt gentle, was very well received by Yeyentimalla. The process of writing the dissertation lasted one month. In March 2018, Yeyentimalla advanced to the comprehensive exam. Because of her achievements, Prof. Sri Suryawati was given the nickname Professor Eagle (Professor Rajawali, in Indonesian). After completing her doctoral studies with honor on July 29, 2019, Yeyentimalla continued to work at Eagle Nest (Petarangan Rajawali) and began writing the book "Pede Bersama Professor Rajawali: Jurus Jitu Menyelesaikan Studi." The writing process took four months. The next four months were the publishing process by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. This book contains the journey of a dissertation that was brilliantly successful thanks to the communication skills with everyone met along the way.

On October 18-19, 2018, Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya -- through its staff member Yeyentimalla, who was then pursuing doctoral studies at UGM -- once again invited Prof. Sri Suryawati to serve as a speaker for a workshop organized by the Department of Midwifery. The participants were 40 clinical practice supervisors for midwifery students, consisting of midwives from various parts of Palangka Raya. The workshop focused on training midwives to serve as peer counselors in their clinical roles. On the following day, a Guest Lecture was held for all students of the Midwifery Department, featuring Prof. Sri Suryawati along with a speaker from the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN). During these two days of activities, Yeyentimalla acted as the moderator (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Workshop of Midwifery Department:
Prof. Sri Suryawati as speaker, Yeyentimalla as moderator

During the dissertation period, the student spent three semesters working the same room as her mentor at the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). The first seven semesters of her doctoral journey were based in Faculty of Psychology but the final three semesters were spent in what they called the 'Eagle Nest' -- a space for intensive research, writing and heart-to-heart conversation.

The Eagle Nest was open to all doctoral mentees of Prof. Sri Suryawati (widely known as Professor Rajawali). It was a nurturing space where students wrote their dissertations, discussed ideas, practiced presentations, and occasionally went out for lunch -- always in the spirit kinship. Among all the mentees, however, Yeyentimalla was the most frequent presence. She often found herself alone there, or sometimes just two of them -- student and professor -- sharing the room. The student experienced her professor at close range, not just professionally, but in deeply human ways, as though sharing a nest of life. Many of her most meaningful memories were born in that space. One such moment was when the professor came down from the second floor one afternoon and went to the faculty canteen to buy gado--gado for them both. At that moment, the student felt as though her teacher had become her mother -- someone who cared for her nourishment and wellbeing (Yeyentimalla, 2020).

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Figure 3. Book Review "Confidence with Professor Rajawali", September 3, 2020

This book review activity (Figure 3) is the first book review held by the Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya Library, attended enthusiastically by around 400 participants from all over Indonesia. Because the book review is during the COVID-19 pandemic, the series of activities were held online via Zoom.

In the same year, precisely on November 9, 2020 (Figure 4), the Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya held its first international seminar in collaboration with several institutions, including the Global Health Management Journal (GHMJ). The good relationship between the personnel of the Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya and the GHMJ management played a major role in supporting the success of the international seminar. Yeyentimalla and Prof. Sri Suryawati were speakers from Indonesia along with three other speakers from Taiwan, Philippines, and Canada. Seminar participants came from several countries in the world. The total number of participants was 1088 people (Yeyentimalla, Sera, Sinaga, 2022).

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Figure 4. The First International Seminar of the Poltekkes Kemenkes Palangka Raya

The good relationship between Yeyentimalla and Prof. Sri Suryawati continues to produce intellectual works. In 2021, the two of them compiled a digital emotional communication module, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The module was used in communication training for drug shelter mentors which was enthusiastically attended by 45 mentors (Yeyentimalla & Halajur, 2020; Yeyentimalla & Suryawati, 2021). In 2021, institutional cooperation began, namely Poltekkes Palangka Raya with Universitas Gadjah Mada. Good relations between people have become cooperative relations between institutions.

In November 2021, the module (Figure 5) successfully entered the final round of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia Health Innovation Competition. The module is seen as supporting the acceleration of the transformation of Health Human Resources. Although in the end the module did not win the competition, the journey of producing work that is beneficial to the community remains an extraordinary and soul-affirming experience.



Figure 5. Module by Yeyentimalla and Prof. Sri Suryawati



Figure 6. Online birthday celebration of Prof. Sri Suryawati, May 27, 2025

On May 27, 2025, Prof. Sri Suryawati celebrated her 70th birthday with a meaningful online gathering. The celebration was initiated and thoughtfully organized by one of her former students, who led the event with heartfelt care and reverence. Despite her busy schedule -- as the same day marked her official retirement from the Faculty of Medicine at Universitas Gadjah Mada -- Prof. Suryawati graciously made time for this special moment.

In Figure 6, two authors -- both former students of Prof. Sri Suryawati -- are seen expressing deep gratitude and joy as they reunite with their beloved teacher, even if only through a Zoom call. Though separated by nearly 1,000 kilometers, the teacher and her student remained closely connected at heart.

To mark this milestone, one student composed an anthology titled *Professor Rajawali: Soaring High Together*. The book was published in April 2025 and sent from Palangka Raya to the professor's home in Yogyakarta. It arrived on May 17 -- ten days before the special day -- and was warmly received. A decade has passed, and yet the student remains unwavering in her devotion: reverent in spirit, tender in love, and deeply cherishing the teacher who once guided her with wisdom, dare, and care (Yeyentimalla, 2025).

Their friendship continued digital conversation, collaborative training, and joint reflection sessions. The experience of interacting not only through academic discourse but also through 'emotional communication' made the bond more resilient and healing. The friend-teacher figure was not always gentle -- sometimes strict, sometimes unpredictable -- but always meaningful. The student stayed, learned, and grew.

The photos in this essay are not just visual documentation -- they are fragments of stories, moments of growth, echoes of struggle and gratitude. Each photo is an anchor of memory that illustrates that friendship, when nurtured with honesty and emotional intelligence, does not merely -- it transforms both souls involved.

3. Reflection

Friendship is a type of relationship that extends any relationship, including informal relationships between social media users, into formal student-examiner relationships, and develops into relationships in a sense of security, having a positive impact on the growth of the soul and the welfare of society. The relationship between friends is not the only role played, but rather alternates with other paired roles, such as student-teacher, that is also an eternal role. In certain aspects, students do not surpass their teacher.

The motor for true friendship is communication that is able to embrace the heart. In the student-teacher relationship here, what is faithfully developed together is intelligent communication. There are two communication techniques based on intelligent feeling, namely emotional animation (Yeyentimalla & Suryawati, 2021), and emotional simulation (Yeyentimalla, 2022). Emotional animation is arousing positive valence emotions such as liking, happiness, joy, respect, gratitude, pity, empathy, and various other positive emotions. What about negative valence emotions? Negative emotions are recognized to be controlled. The second finding in this ten-year friendship is emotional simulation. This technique requires recognition of the emotions that arise. Thinking about the chronology and consequences of acting in line with those emotions is usually negative. Based on this review, and then consciously chosen to display actions that are different from those emotions. For example, feeling angry. So, recognizing and accepting anger, but responding kindly so that bad things don't happen.

Let us remain faithful in building and tending bridges of friendship -- metaphors of connection -- for a world made warmer and safer by shared humanity.

4. Conclusion

Friendship is a gift, and when lived with awareness and care, it becomes a powerful force for good. What began as a digital connection between two strangers evolved into an academic friendship, then a mentorship, and eventually into a creative and intellectual partnership. This journey of shared growth and mutual respect reached an emotional crescendo in a moment of deep celebration and gratitude -- proof that enduring bonds can be formed when hearts listen and respond across boundaries of role, culture, age, and distance.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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