

GRUWELL'S GREAT POWER TO REACH HER INTERESTS: A HEGEMONIC STUDY ON FREEDOM WRITERS MOVIE

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Abstract

This research is aimed at analyzing how Erin Gruwell, as the major character in this movie, reaches her interest amidst the rejection of her boss and colleagues. Type of the study is qualitative one by applying library research. Object of the study is the way Gruwell takes to gain her interest. There are two data sources, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data consist of the texts of the movie concerning with the ways Gruwell takes to achieve her interest. Secondary data cover another data that support the analysis. Technique of the data collection is carried out through examining the text of the movie, selecting the texts relating to the main issue and determining the proper texts for the analysis. Technique of the data analysis is done by applying the theoretical framework of Hegemony by Antonio Gramsci. Based on the result of analysis, it can be drawn as follows. Gruwell approaches some persons having higher authority to back up her interest, that is to teach, to educate, and to guide her students to find out a solution of their complex life problems. In relation to AEC, the figure of Gruwell can be a good teacher model in the Asia region, in which the implementation of teaching through multicultural background of the students is absolutely needed.

Keywords: *power, authority, interests, hegemony, inequality of power.*

I. Introduction

Teacher needs power to gain her/his interest in their teaching programs. Teaching program is a set of lesson plan carried out by the teacher in their teaching learning process. The process of teaching learning done by the teacher should be in line with the curriculum determined before. In implementing the curriculum, sometimes the teacher faces some handicaps coming from their bosses, like the principal, the Department Head and also Head of the School District, having a higher position in power. The creative teacher often has a different idea in their teaching strategy to gain their teaching purposes with their bosses. They have conflict in reaching their interest. Thus more power is indeed needed by the teacher to gain what they want to teach, educate and guide their students to study.

Such kind of power conflict is also experienced by Erin Gruwell, the major character in Freedom Writers movie. Gruwell is hard enough to make her teaching program to be implemented. She has many creative programs for their students to study but her principal, department head and colleagues do not support her. Although she has explained that to them, they reject. Gruwell does not give up and she approaches some people having higher position in power. She has a purpose in order to get support from the highest officials in authority. By their support, she might be smooth to implement her teaching programs.

The paper is aimed at analyzing the power Gruwell has to gain her interest in her teaching program. In the context of power, an appropriate perspective to apply is Hegemony theory of Antonio Gramsci. According to him, hegemony is that a class and its representatives exercise power over subordinate classes by means of combination of coercion and persuasion (in Simon, 1991). In addition to this, Simon (1991) explains that a subordinate class can only become a hegemonic class by developing the capacity to win the support of other classes and social forces. Based on the proposition, the paper analyzes the web of power in the education institution reflected in the movie.

The problem of this study is Gruwell's power to gain her interest in her teaching programs. Based on this problem, the research questions can be broken down as follows.

1. What's handicap faced by Gruwell in reaching her interest?
2. Why such handicaps appear?
3. How does Gruwell solve the handicap?

Looking at the research questions, objective of the study is to explain the handicap faced by her, to analyze some causes of the handicap and to examine some solution done by Gruwell.

The significant of the study is theoretically to accumulate the research on Freedom Writers movie. By doing so, we get many perspectives on literary study. Practically the study can give many advantages for the reader in understanding some obstacles faced by the creative teacher to implement their teaching program.

II. Method

Research method of the study can be explained as follows. Type the study is qualitative one with descriptive approach. Object of the study is Gruwell's power to gain her interest in her teaching programs. Type of the data consists of primary and secondary data. The primary data are derived from the texts of the movie focusing on Gruwell's power to gain her interest in her teaching programs. The secondary data covers some data that support the analysis. It can be criticism of Freedom Writer movie, Journals of the movie and what not. Technique of the data collection is done through library research with the following steps: to watch the movie, to sort the texts of the movie that relate with Gruwell's power to gain her interest in her teaching programs. Technique of the data analysis is carried out by applying the theory of Hegemony by Antonio Gramsci.

III. Result and Discussion

There are some phenomena of inequality of power reflected in this movie. The inequality of power shows how far the position of the characters in the education institution gives impact on the implementation of classroom programs done by the teacher. The higher position of the characters is the bigger authority they have. The followings are some findings concerning with power relation among characters.

Gruwell vs Ms. Campbell

Gruwell as teacher proposes to Ms. Campbell to lend her students reading books. Gruwell wants them to get a good book to read. Ms. Campbell as The Department Head disagrees with her proposal. They argue each other about that case.



Fig.1. Gruwell and Ms. Campbell are arguing in the school library.

The following is their dialogue.

Campbell (Camp): *“So, what do I do?”*

Gruwell (Gru): *“Buy their books myself?”*

Camp : *“Well, that's up to you, but you'd be wasting your money.”*

Gru : *“Is there someone else I can speak to about this?”*

Camp : *“Excuse me?”*

Gru : *“I'm sorry, but I don't understand.”*

“Does the Long Beach Board of Ed agree that these books should just sit here and not be used at all?”

Camp : *“Let me explain.”*

“It's called site-based instruction. It means that I and the principal each have”

“the authority to make these kinds of decisions without having to go to the Board”,

“who have bigger problems to solve. Do you understand how it works now?”

Gru : *“I'm sorry.” “I didn't mean to overstep your authority.” “I would never do that. I just..” “I don't know how to make them interested in reading with these.”*

Camp : *“You can't make someone want an education.”*

“The best you can do is try to get them to obey, to learn discipline.”

“That would be a tremendous accomplishment for them.”

Gruwell vs Brian Gelford

Gruwell as junior teacher wants to get support from senior teacher in the school. She talks to Brian Gelford about Anne Frank compared to Rodney King. From their conversation, it seems that Brian is inconvenient to hear what Gruwell says. Brian is angry with her and finally she does not get support from him.



Fig. 2. Gruwell is trying to get support from Brian about reading materials for her students.

The following is Brian's response toward Gruwell's opinion.

Brian Gelford (Brian): *"This was an A-list school before they came here."*

"And look what they turned it into."

"I mean, does it make sense that kids who want an education should suffer because their "high school gets turned into a reform school?"

"Because kids who don't want to be here, and shouldn't be here, are forced to be here by" "the geniuses running the school district?"

"Integration's a lie. Yeah, we teachers, we can't say that or we lose our jobs for being" "racist. So, please, stop your cheerleading, Erin. You're ridiculous. You don't know the" "first thing about these kids. And you're not qualified to make judgments about the" "teachers who have to survive this place."

Gruwell vs Dr. Carl Cohn

Gruwell, as a teacher, persuades, Dr. Cohn having a higher authority in Long Beach Unified School District to back up her ideas that have good impact on her students' improvement.

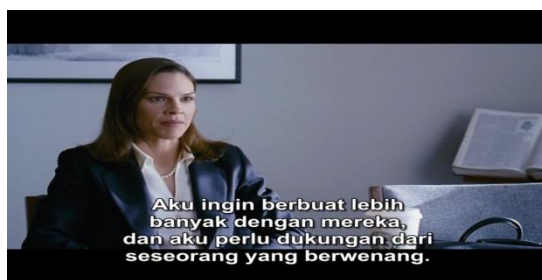


Fig.3. Gruwell is persuading Dr. Cohn to back up her.

Dr. Cohn (Cohn): “What can I do for you?”

Gru : “*I want to do more with them, and I need the support of someone in power.*”

Cohn : “*You have to take this up with your department head and your principal.*”

“*I can't get involved in inner school policy.*”

Gru : “*My principal only listens to my department head, And she's not very supportive.*”

Cohn : “*You'll have to find a way to deal with it.*”

Gru : “*No, I'd rather just deal directly with someone in power.*”

Gruwell and the Mass Media Power

Although Gruwell does not ask the Local Media to cover her class room programs but the Local Media publishes Gruwell classroom programs. The influence of mass media coverage is so massive that the stake holders in that district know Gruwell’s classroom programs. The articles published in the local News Paper are as follows; Local Long Beach Restaurants to Help H.S. Students Fundraiser, what are Public School Funds Funding, if Not Our Students? Cathartic Writing Course Chronicles Students’ Lives, Wilson Students Hold Money for Guest Speakers, Woman who hid Anne Frank is guest to Wilson High.



F.4. Dance Concert to Raise Money for Guest Speaker

A movie or a film is a fictional creation and is also one of the literary works. As literary work, the movie might show many social phenomena of human life. This is called mantifact. The mantifact reflected in film is universal. Being universal means the phenomena in the movie can happen everywhere in the world. In relation to this, Freedom Writers movie also reveals such kind of phenomena. So movie as an art, movie transcends mere description and objective scientific analysis, penetrating the surface of social life, showing the way in which men and women experience society as feeling (Laurenson and Swingwood, 1972).

The creation of Freedom Writers movie was inspired with a true story of Erin Gruwell's life experience as a teacher at Wilson Senior High School in Long Beach California. In the movie, it exposes many angles of Gruwell's life. One of them is Gruwell's power to gain her interest in educating her students. Besides being smart and creative, Gruwell is a never-giving up woman. This mental evident is very crucial to examine in order that people can get benefit of best practice of a strong teacher. Hoggart (in Laurenson and Swingwood, 1972) says that without the full literary witness, the students of society will be blind to the fullness of a society. So by analysing Freedom Writer movie, people can know and understand what has happened in their society in a certain period of time.

Gruwell is very concerned with the behavior of her students in classrom 203 and also outside classroom. It seems to her that they have a very complex problem in their lives. To help them, she creates some fruitful class activity, such as reading books relating to their life problems. Besides, Gruwell also plans a picnic to a museum to open up their mind about Holocaust. What Gruwell plans is not permitted by the principal, Mr. Banning, the Department Head, Ms. Campbell, and also her colleague, Brian. She realizes about that and has no power to carry out her plans. As a teacher, she has a lowest position and lowest power.

Viewed from Gramscian perspective, Gruwell belongs to lower class or subordinates class. It is very hard for her to force her plans into reality. It does not mean that it is impossible to make it real. It is possible. According to Gramsci, the subordinate class can be a hegemonic class by developing the capacity to win the support of other

classes and social forces. In this movie, it is delineated how Gruwell as the lower class tries to gain support from Dr. Cohn, as the Head of Long Beach Unified School District and also Karin Polachek as Head of the School Board. The following is their dialogue.

Dr. Cohn (Cohn): *“What can I do for you?”*

Gru : *“I want to do more with them, and I need the support of someone in power.”*

Cohn : *“You have to take this up with your department head and your principal.”*
“I can't get involved in inner school policy.”

Gru : *“My principal only listens to my department head, And she's not very supportive.”*

Cohn : *“You'll have to find a way to deal with it.”*

Gru : *“No, I'd rather just deal directly with someone in power.”*

From the conversation, it shows how hard Gruwell influences person with a greater power. All she does is for gaining the support from person of the upper level of power to back up her interest. Finally, she gets permission from Dr. Cohn to carry out picnic activity for her students. She explains to Dr. Cohn that picnic activity for them is very important to brush up their vision of humanity. They visit the museum of Holocaust. The following is the way Gruwell explains to Dr. Cohn to get his permission.

“I'm thinking trips. Most of them have never been outside of Long Beach.”

“They haven't been given the opportunity. To expand their thinking about what's out there” “for them. And they're hungry for it. I know it.”

To reach her wider target, unconsciously she makes use of mass media power, namely local newspaper to get support from other stake holder as social forces. The local newspaper covers her programs with her students such as some articles published in the local News Paper with the head line as follows; Local Long Beach Restaurants to Help H.S. Students Fundraiser, what are Public School Funds Funding, if Not Our Students? Cathartic Writing Course Chronicles Students' Lives, Wilson Students Hold Money for Guest Speakers, Woman who hid Anne Frank is guest to Wilson High. The impact of mass media coverage is beyond her prediction. Her students are very enthusiastic to do their classroom programs and support Gruwell's planning.

Gruwell also uses her students' power to place their journal into a book. She asks them to type their life experience in the computer program. After finishing it, Gruwell asks them to entitle their writing and finally Gruwell gives the title of it with The Freedom Writers Diary. This diary is eventually in the hand of Karin Polachek as The Board of Education. Looking at Gruwell's achievement, the board with its power agrees that she still teaches her students to the next grade for junior and senior years together.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, Erin Gruwell faces some handicaps coming from her principal, department head, and colleague in Wilson High School. They disagree and reject almost all Gruwell's programs. The main handicap is that persons with a higher position and power are not hand-in-hand with her. As a result, she is very hard to carry out her classroom program with her students.

The handicap is caused by their distrust on Gruwell's capability to teach her students. She is a new teacher in that school. She has no experience to teach them. The other reason is that they are jealous with her creativity when educating, teaching and guiding her students. In short, they underestimate her.

In facing those handicaps, Gruwell does not give up. Knowing that she lacks of power to make a decision, she approaches person in higher power than her principal, department head and colleague. She meets Dr. Cohn as Head of Unified School District. She explains logically about her plans to improve her students' quality. By doing so, Dr. Cohn and also the Board of Education, Ms. Karin Polachek agree what she plans with her students. She succeeds to implements her classroom programs. She is smart to pursue her interest and also to fulfill other parties' interest. In this case, Gruwell still gets together with her students for junior and senior years and she also supports the success of Dr. Cohn's and Polachek's interest, namely integration program in the school.

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