

## **COMPASSIONATE TEACHING IN RICHARD LAGRAVANESE *FREEDOM WRITERS***

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**Abstract:** This study aims to reveal how the main character in the film "Freedom Writers" by Richard La Gravanese teaches and educates her students who are full of racism with compassion. This study uses a qualitative research method because the authors collect data in the form of film scripts from Freedom Writers to be processed into a study. The author also uses a psychological approach and uses the theory of Muhtadi, and Maman Abd Jahlil who supports this research because it studies how to understand and study motives from the side of human psychology. The results of this study indicate that the main character in the film Freedom Writers uses various methods and goes through various processes to unite her students in her class which are full of racism. The result of this research, we can make an example that work as a teacher not only focuses on the students score, but also the value of life is no less important that must be given to students with compassionate

**Keywords:** *Compassionate, Teaching, Freedom Writers, Richard La Gravanese, Psychology.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Garrison (2010) "Compassionate Pedagogy / Compassionate teaching are intended in part to relieve suffering". Students want to be seen, heard and known. Therefore one of the greatest acts of compassion we can give to others is the art of listening to the holy. Compassionate teaching is very important because students are whole people trying to balance various identities in addition to being students. Everyone knows that every student has a different background, a different economic level, a different family, a different upbringing and a different mentality. But they are united in one room, which is the school, and their status is made the same, namely "students". Teacher is very important, because teachers are parents

when students are at school. Not only teach students about education, but teachers also have to teach students about ethics, the way they mingle with other people, respecting others, and of course it requires very sincere compassion to educate students. In general, many people expect something extraordinary to be obtained at the place where they goes to school, so many parents send their children to school, with the hope that their children can gain knowledge and also find new families at school, such as teachers and friends and their children can go to school quietly and happily, and when they enter the world of education, it is the responsibility of the school so that students can study in peace. However, in reality, there are some areas where students do not find peace in school due to several factors that they encounter, for example incompetent teachers, being insulted by fellow classmates, and also problems with racism or injustice in the classroom. In this work, there is an inconvenience in education, where there is a film that tells the situation that occurs in the world of education in a school full of racism, gang lifestyle, and always fighting. But once upon a time there came a very extraordinary teacher, they came and was able to unite her students who were full of racism, and also they made the grades of the students in his class which initially got a lot of low grades, became satisfactory grades. That is why, researchers will find out about the kindness that this teacher does so that her students can become good people and not be bound by racism anymore. This study is expected to be useful for many people, for the example for teacher or lecturer, in order to improve their professionalism in teaching. The film can be a reference in developing learning scenarios. It also useful for students who want to become teacher or lecturer to understand and know how to deal with the character and attitude of students later.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This study used qualitative research. According to Saryono (2010:1) 'qualitative research is a study used to investigate, describe, explain, find quality or privilege from unexplained social influences, measured or described through quantitative approaches'. In this study, researchers focused on researching

describing, finding about the quality or privilege of Mrs. Erin Gruwell. The approach that the researcher uses is a psychological approach, which is trying to understand or study the motives, responses, reactions from the side of human psychology (Muhtadi, and Maman Abd. Djalil, 2003: 122). In this study, researchers used a psychological approach and focused more on the main character in the film namely Mrs Erin Gruwell, researchers sought to understand or study how the main character of the Freedom Writers film in the face of students in her class.

### ***Data Collection***

The source of data will be used as primary data is movie script of Freedom Writers by Richard LaGravanes. The secondary source for collecting the data is searching for articles, magazines, webs that selected research to these the topic.

### ***Data Analysis***

To collect data, researcher uses a library technique that is by analyzing the contents, researcher also used psychological approach. On this analysis the researcher beam and noted the documents drawn from primary data relating to the problem and purpose of the study. The data is the movie script text of Freedom Writers Film by Richard LaGravanes which is analyzed by Muhtadi, and Maman Abd. Djalil theory and the data analysis thecnique is as follows :

1. Preparing the data. In this step, the author prepares the data in the form of the Freedom Writer film script.
2. Reading and understanding the Data. In this step, the writer tries to understand and re-read the contents of the manuscript.
3. Mark the conversation section. In this section, the author codes the conversation section that supports this research
4. Presenting Data. At this step, the writer will present the data that has been found in the previous stage, Draw a conclusion. this is the last step in this research, the author draws the conclusions that have been obtained in the research.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this explanation, researcher will explain about Compassionate Teaching of Mrs. Erin Gruwell who united her student who full of racism. The data were analyzed

through a psychological approach based on the theory of Muhtadi, and Maman Abd. Djalil (2003) in order to study motives, responses, reactions from the human side. In this study, the researcher focuses more on the main character in the film *Freedom Writers*, how the main character in the film faces the students in her class.

### ***Finding Out What Students Like.***

*Erin: "i have this idea, we're gonna be covering poetry. Who here likes Tupac Shakar?"*

*Erin: "2Pac Shakur. Excuse me, raise your hand. Realy? I thought there'd be more fans. I have the lyrics to this song print out. I want you to listen to this phrase I have up on the board, it's an example of an internal rhyme. What he does is very sophisticated and cool, actually" (20.06)*

In this sentence, Mrs. Gruwell has started to enter into their lives and find out what they like and start an approach with them but in this situation the students are still not very accepting of Mrs. Gruwell arrival but this is Mrs. Gruwell attempt to win the hearts of the students. Mrs. Gruwell didn't see this as an obstacle for her but Mrs. Gruwell kept trying to find a way to get herself accepted into her class.

### ***Uniting the Students***

*Erin: "I want you to move to this front seat right here now."*

*Erin: "All right, you know what? I want you all to move to this side of the room. You in the back up here, Sindy and all of you move to the back. Come on! Let's Go! Now!" (21.03)*

This sentence came out in class when Mrs. Gruwell already knew the condition of her students who had very high levels of racism, so they always sat in groups. Whites and blacks sat separately. And Mrs. Gruwell began to arrange their seats, and began to make the white students and black students sit close together so that they would not sit in groups again. This is one of Mrs. Gruwell strategies to keep them from grouping up. Although they initially did not agree with Mrs. Gruwell idea, but they followed Mrs. Gruwell orders with displeased faces and showed an unfriendly attitude between students.

### ***Advising the Student***

When Mrs. Gruwell was teaching, there was a commotion and it turned out that the students were laughing at something, and the thing they laughed at was

the drawing made by Tito, Tito drew a big nose and mouth, which aimed to insult Jamal, to be more precise, to insult Jamal's physical origin, From Africa, black skin and has a big mouth and a big nose. *Erin: "Tito? Would this be funny if it were a picture of you?"(00.29.55)* in this sentence, Mrs. Gruwell is teaching Tito to admit a mistake he has made, because he has insulted black people, and it is not good if we insult someone physically. Because Physical is God's creation, and everyone created by God is beautiful and handsome.

### ***Asking For Support from the School***

*Mrs. Gruwell: "Mrs Campbell? They know they get these because no one thinks they're smart enough for real books"*

*Margareth: "well, I don't have the budget to buy new books every semester when these kids don't return them"*

*Mrs. Gruwell: "So, what do I do? Buy their books by myself?"*

*Margareth: "Well, that's up to you, but you'd be wasting your money" (38.03)*

In this conversation, Mrs. Gruwell was convincing Margaret of Mrs. Gruwell student abilities, but unfortunately Margareth didn't care about Erin and didn't help her, even Margareth said that she couldn't help her because she didn't have the money to buy the book that Mrs. Erin meant. In the end, Mrs Gruwell planned to buy the book with her own money.

### ***Playing Games***

*Mrs. Gruwell: "we're going to play a game, all right? It's a lot of fun. I promise. Look, you can either sit in your seats reading those workbooks, or you can play a game. Either way, you're in here till the bell rings"*

*"Okay. This called the line game. I'm gonna ask you a question, If that questions applies to you; you step onto the line, and then step back away for the next question. Easy, right"*

Mrs. Gruwell is trying to make the class atmosphere more fun and exciting, because the atmosphere of the previous class was not fun, therefore, Mrs. Gruwell got an idea to make them fun, Mrs. Gruwell started to make a game which in the game could add insight and also to the students liked the class she made. In this game, Mrs. Gruwell begins to practice honesty from the students.

### **Writing Diaries**

*Mrs. Gruwell: "thank you all very much. Now I have something for each of you. Everyone has their own story, and it's important for you to tell your own story, even to yourself. So what we're going to do is we're going to write every day in these journals. You can write about whatever you want, the past, the present, the future. You can write it like a diary, or you can write songs, poem, any good thing, bad thing, anything. But you have to write every day. Keep a pen nearby, whenever you feel the inspiration. How can I give an A or B for writing the truth right? And I will not read them unless you give me permission. I will need to see that you've made an entry, but I'll just do this, skim to see that you wrote that day. Now, if you want me to read it, I have. Excuse me. A cabinet over here, it has a lock on it. I will keep it open during class, and you can leave your diary there if you want me to read it. I will lock this cabinet at the end of every class. Okay? So, you can each come up, one by one, and take your own journal. Whenever you're ready." (00.45.26)*

Each student has their own problems and stresses; they come from different families, and face different things in life. The way of thinking and how to deal with problems is different from each student, in fact there are many who start to suppress all their feelings, what they feel is not related to people, so they become closed people and have a lot of mental impact. At this moment, Mrs. Gruwell explained about the idea she got, she wanted the students to start writing about whatever they felt, Mrs. Gruwell started to explain about the book she was going to share with her students, the students were free to write anything in the book, and Erin didn't want to read it unless the students allow it. Erin explained about the Rules she made, if the students wanted Mrs. Gruwell to read them, they could leave the book in class. On the other hand, Mrs Gruwell began to test her students' trust in her.

### **Buying books for students**

*Scott: "You're going to sell bras at a department store"*

*Mrs. Gruwell: "Just part time. I am having a little trouble getting books and things for the kids. So, a little extra money will give me a little more freedom to do what I want. And this way you can play tennis with Evan after work"*

*Scott: "Okay, let me get my head around this. You're going to get an extra job to pay for your job"*

*Mrs. Gruwell: "It's just temporary. I promise. Once this kids grades go up, I'll get a little more help from the school. And I get an employee's discount. Isn't that great? Want a new TV?" (00.55.12)*

In this situation, Mrs. Gruwell asked her husband for permission so that her husband would allow Mr. Gruwell to work part time and the money made would buy books for his students, because she didn't get help from the school to give books to her students but Mrs. Gruwell husband didn't seem to want to accept Mrs. Gruwell good intentions. But Mrs. Gruwell is trying to convince her husband that this is only temporary, Mrs. Gruwell is doing all this for the benefit of her students even though she knows she will not be allowed by her husband but she still tries to do the best for her students by convincing Scott that this is only temporary.

### ***Inviting Students to Meet Characters Involved in the History of Racism in Books***

Mrs. Gruwell invites all students in her class to meet directly with the people involved in the book given by Mrs. Gruwell, namely the Holocaust, it can be seen in from one of the student who said *"Mrs. Gruwell had a beautiful dinner for us at the hotel where she works. She invited real Holocaust Survivors from the museum to meet us. There was Elizabeth man"* (1.06.14) Mrs. Gruwell invites them to have dinner where Mrs. Gruwell works, there are Elizabeth mann, Gloria Ungar, Eddie Liam, Renne Firestone. These great people began to tell their stories, how they were at that time, and they began to share experiences with each other, they began to tell how their life was bleak, how they lost their loved family, the people they loved so much, how they lost their loved ones they survive on minimal money.

### ***Toast For Changed***

*Mrs. Gruwell: "Okay guys, listen up! This is what I want you to do, I want each of you to step forward and take one of these borders bags, which contain the four books we're going to read this semester"*

*All: "all right"*

*Mrs Gruwell: "They've very special books, and they each remind me, in some way, of each of you. But, before you take the books, I want you to take one of these glasses*

*of sparkling cider, and I want each of you to make a toast. We're each going to make a toast for change. And what that means is, from this moment on every voice that told you "you can't" is silenced. Every reason that tells you things will never change disappears. And the person you were before this moment, that person's turn is over. Now, it's your turn" (1.10.42)*

Mrs. Gruwell held a toast for change activity to make changes in the class, every student who wanted to talk about themselves, would come forward and tell their experiences, tell their every story, tell everything they went through, and tell every change that happened within them. And finally one by one from Mrs. Erin's students came forward and the atmosphere began to be emotional. This was one of Mrs Gruwell's ways of bringing them together.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on what was discussed in the previous chapter, using a psychological research approach based on the theory of Muhtadi, and Maman Abd. Djalil (2003) in order to study motives, responses, reactions from the human side. It is understandable that Mrs. Gruwell uses various means to unite all her students who are full of racism. She went through various processes, starting from when she entered the class she was not well received by the students in her class, until she had to find a way so that she could be close to her students and they could feel comfortable in class, comfortable in learning, and full of peace. Until she finally found a way, she had to sacrifice looking for a backup job to carry out her mission as a teacher and their mother in the classroom, she also did not get the support of the principal and her fellow teachers to carry out her mission, but she kept trying. In fact, she even had a fight with her husband because he felt that Mrs. Gruwell was not paying attention to him anymore. From this incident we can draw the conclusion that, this is what is called a qualified teacher. Because the current state of the education world is not doing well, the teachers only focus on the student's grades, only focusing on what they have achieved, at this time, it's hard to find the teachers care about the students' condition, starting from the economic situation, student situation, how their families are, and everything that might disturb the students' mentality. So that many students feel uncomfortable when they go to school, a



school that should be their place to seek knowledge, they can have a new friends, get a new family, but in fact that is not what happened. There are some children at school who are bullied because of differences in ethnicity, differences in religion, differences in economic level, differences in skin. As happened in the Freedom Writers film.

## **SUGGESTION**

In this study, researcher only focuses on the main character, namely Mrs. Erin Gruwell, the researcher hopes that in future studies there will be someone who will dig deeper into this film, and not only focus on the main character, but can also focus on other things. Researcher realizes that this research is still not perfect, there are still many shortcomings. But researcher hopes that this research can be a lesson material for further research

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