



A FUTURE TEACHER TREND: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON FREEDOM WRITERS MOVIE

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Abstract

Purpose: An improvement of education quality and learning process to face the recent challenges involves many aspects of an education system. One of them is the teacher's quality. Multiculturalism quality of the teacher is a crucial factor because it enables them to hold and sustain the education well. The paper is aimed at analyzing a teacher with a wide vision of multiculturalism educating her students of complex problems reflected in the Freedom Writers movie.

Methodology: It is a qualitative paper. The data consist of two types of data i.e. primary data consisting of texts of the movie relating to the topic and secondary one covering the data that support the analysis. The technique of the data collection is carried out as follows watching and examining the movie, selecting the proper data suitable with the topic and presenting the data for the analysis. The technique of the data analysis is done through library research using descriptive method and applying the theory of Sociology of Literature of Laurensen and Swingewood.

Results: The result is a teacher with a great vision of multiculturalism can educate well students of a very complex problem and different social backgrounds.

Implications: Its implication on the Indonesian education is that in the movie, the teacher figure of Gruwell can inspire not only the Indonesian teachers but also all people involved in education to brush up their vision and knowledge of multiculturalism in the frame of increasing the quality of national education and in the end of the day it can strengthen the feeling of nationalism to the country, Indonesia.

Keywords: *Freedom Writers, Students' Need, Education System, Teacher's Quality, Multiculturalism*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, an education process involves two crucial sides. The first one is education quality and the other one is the teaching-learning process itself. The education quality provides the quality of person concerning with spiritual, emotional, social question while the teaching-learning process emphasizes on a transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Ideally, both an improvement of education quality and teaching-learning process go hand-in-hand in order that the quality of the Indonesian next generation is better. Thus the quality of education and teaching-learning process will determine the success or failure of the education in Indonesia.

Education in Indonesia involves not only the government but also its society. The society can take part to build the country through education. The education held by society can be various. They carry out the education that might be based on religion, ethnicity or belief. Therefore there are many educational institutions with different characteristics. The school with a specific characteristic will strengthen their students with a special program and they also follow the government policy of the national education program. Muhammadiyah Foundation, Nadhatul Ulama Foundation, Christianian Foundation and also Catholic Foundation and many others participate in the national education in the framework of helping the Indonesian government to improve the quality of education in the country.

Although the government and the society have taken apart to increase the quality of education, in reality, there are still much social frictions happening in Indonesia. The social conflict between the people of Dayak and people of Madura in Kalimantan ([Human Rights Watch. February 28, 2001.](#)) the religious conflict between the followers of Sunni and Shi'a in Madura, ([Detik News.2013](#)) radicalism based on certain religious teaching also happens in the country. A suicide bomber also occurred in Indonesia. ([DetikNews.2017](#); [Fiorino, Víctor Martín, and Amparo Holguín. 2018](#)) Social and political conflict also happened in the local leader election in DKI Jakarta. ([KOMPAS.com. 2017](#)) Looking at the phenomena, so what is wrong with education in Indonesia? All taken place is caused, one of them by education especially the teachers' knowledge and understanding of multiculturalism. Indonesia is a country with a difference in religion, belief, ethnicity, race, culture, and tradition. Based on nation foundation, Pancasila, the people should unite under the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or *Unity in Diversity*.

The above phenomena are not so different from those occurring in the movie entitled *Freedom Writers*. The major character, Erin Gruwell, is the teacher in Wilson High School in Long Beach. In the classroom, she teaches her students coming from different religion, ethnicity, race, and culture. They hate each other and often quarrel and hit each other not only in the classroom but also in the school yard. A small case can make them angry and make the class rowdy. Her students also hate Gruwell because she is a white woman. They hate white people. Looking at the phenomena, Gruwell does not give up. As a teacher, she tries to find a way out of the problem. Finally, with her creativity, she finally is able to guide, teach, and educate them on the right track of life. They become one family in the classroom.

The paper is aimed at analyzing the social phenomenon of a teacher with a great vision of multiculturalism to guide, teach, and educate her students through the right track of life. In relation to the aim, a proper theoretical framework to apply is Sociology of Literature by Diana and Alan. ([Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingwood. 1972](#); [Suleri, J., and Cavagnaro, E. 2016](#)) According to them, there are some basic principles of the theory consisting of firstly literary work as the social document, secondly literary work as the reflection of the social situation of the writer and thirdly literary work as the manifestation of the historical moment. The first principle means literature as the mirror of age. It indicates that literary work can explain the civilization of certain place in a certain time to the audience and it is like a picture that describes a historical moment of society and also delineates what happens in the society in a certain period of time. The second principle means that many of their works were influenced by the social phenomenon around them. In their opinion, there is a relationship between the set of crucial social factors and the complex situation of the writer and the character of his work: its genre, scope, content and at the time its subtleties and ambiguities. The third means that literary work attempts to trace the ways in which a work of literature is actually received by a particular society at a specific historical moment.

Furthermore, this paper examines multiculturalism of a teacher so that it needs to clarify a proper understanding of it. Joanna ([Joanna Herbert, Joanna et.al. 2006](#)) explains that the core aims of multiculturalism are to respect and value ethnic difference and protect groups from discrimination. ([Joanna Herbert, Joanna et.al. 2006](#)) In addition to this, understanding of multicultural education is also needed. Banks in Sabrina⁷ proposed five main dimensions that characterize multicultural education. They consist of (1) *content integration*—cultivating the curriculum with material from diverse groups, (e.g., new authors, new historical material); (2) *knowledge construction*—an awareness of and focus on the way that cultural frames shape the identification and interpretation of educational content (e.g., understanding that the “westward migration” was only “west” for one social group); (3) *prejudice reduction*—the extent to which the teachers and administrators in a school actively work to reduce prejudice and stereotyping by students in the school, such as through the inclusion of an explicitly anti-racist curriculum; (4) *equity pedagogy*—pedagogies designed specifically to increase the academic achievement of lower performing students and to create greater equity between students; and (5) *empowering school culture*—altering school structures and processes to be more empowering for all students, with particular attention to wiping out institutionalized racism in school practices. ([Sabrina Zirkel. 2008](#))

The focus of this paper is on the multiculturalism of a teacher reflected in *Freedom Writers* movie. Based on the focus, it is broken down into some questions as follows; 1. What problems are faced by Gruwell, a teacher, in the classroom? 2. What factors cause those problems? 3. How does Gruwell tackle the problems?

Considering the questions above, the objective of the study is to examine the problem faced by her, to analyze some causes of the problem and to examine some solution done by Gruwell.

The significance 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 multiculturalism by the teacher to eliminate the social gap among the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been studies related to *The Freedom Writers* movie. The followings are some researches done by previous researchers.

([Lukman Hakim. 2016](#)) has done research on anarchism movement as portrayed in *The Freedom Writers Diary*. Although the research made use of diary it has a close relationship with the movie. In his research, he finds that there are three important characteristics of anarchism. They consist of liberty or freedom, equality, and solidarity. Besides, there are eight indicators of anarchism characteristics. The indicators of liberty cover the absence of restriction and domination in society. Equality, according to him, is indicated with the existence of equal opportunity and condition, and the absence of diversity. The indicators of solidarity are the existence of the same cause, mutual aids, and mutual interest.

([AbdillahNugroho, 2016](#); [Ardakani, M. P., Lashkarian, A., &Sadeghzadeh, M. 2015](#)) in his research finds that the major character, Erin Gruwell, is one example of a creative teacher with great dedication to education. She dedicates and sacrifices her time and energy for education. Erin has shown her creativities in teaching her students with complex problems of life. She is very successful to teach, to educate and to guide them into a better understanding of life through her creativities. Her creativities consist of her efforts of fulfilling her students' need to good books, sharing discussion of students' life problems, line game, picnic to the museum, making a journal, fundraising, inviting a guest speaker and the like.

([DahliaSyahri, 2011](#)) examined *Freedom Writers* movie viewed from Semiotic perspective. She concludes that the denotative meaning of the movie is that Gruwell's behavior and empathy towards her students can grow her students' consciousness of respects and appreciation among them. The connotative meaning of the movie is that conflict of races has more negative effects and it is useless. The teacher's method of teaching can increase and improve students' motivation to study. The meaning of myth of the movie is that Gruwell is capable to teach her students the meaning of tolerance among races and improve the students' interest to study.

([SitiMaftukhah, A; 2012](#)) carried out research of a descriptive study on the teaching and learning process in the movie. She described a learning process as follows: firstly to recognize students living situations, secondly Erin uses a tape recorder media, thirdly to change seat positions, fourthly to invite the students to reveal their life experiences, fifthly to use games to explore the experience of life, sixthly Erin asks students to write down all of their life experience into a portfolio by writing diary, seventhly Erin reads the students' diary, eighthly to give the appropriate book to the students story as a tool to explore their personal, ninthly sharing together between the teacher and students, tenthly to make a book a titled of *The Freedom Writers Diary*. In addition to this, the role of the teacher in teaching and learning process in *Freedom Writers* movie can be described as follows: firstly the teacher as a motivator: The teacher must be able to give the push psychology and give spirit to their students in everything. Secondly the teacher as a problem solver: When the students have some problems, the teacher helps to solve the problem. Thirdly the teacher as an educator: The teacher must be an educator to the students and can give knowledge, motivation, spirit, and experience for the students. Fourthly the teacher as an instructional manager: The teacher can give the instruction to their students in the learning process e. The teacher as an inspirator The teachers must be able to provide inspiration for students, so the students can increase their thought, knowledge, new ideas, and creative.

While the present researcher focuses on analyzing a future teacher trend reflected in *Freedom Writers* movie based Sociological perspective. Thus the present research is different from previous researches.

METHOD

Considering the characteristic of the research object and the research data, the appropriate research method is a qualitative method. According to John, ([John W Creswell, 2009](#)) the qualitative method relies on data in the form of text and picture. Type of the data consists of primary and secondary data. The primary data derived from the texts of the movie focusing on Gruwell figure as a future teacher trend. The secondary data covers some data that support the analysis. It can be a criticism of *Freedom Writer* movie, journals of the movie and what not. The 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 figure as a future teacher trend. The researcher seeks to examine the phenomena in the movie concerning with a future teacher trend reflected in the figure of Gruwell. The material objects of the study are the texts or scripts of *Freedom Writers* movie relating to the focus of the study. The formal objects consist of 1. What problems are faced by Gruwell, a teacher, in the classroom? 2. What factors cause those problems? 3. How does Gruwell tackle the problems? The technique of the data analysis is carried out by examining and interpreting the meaning of the texts or scripts of the movie under the theoretical framework of Sociology of Literature by Laurensen and Swingewood.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The following are some results of the research findings that show the phenomena of what Gruwell has done as a teacher in the classroom and outside when teaching, guiding and educating her students to the right tract of life.

Gruwell becomes a teacher at Wilson High School.



Fig. 1. Gruwell is interested in teaching at Wilson High School because of the integration program.

The following is her expression of her intention.

Gruwell (Gru):

“Well, actually, I chose Wilson because of the integration program. I think what's happening here is really exciting, don't you? My father was involved in the civil rights movement. And I remember when I was the LA riots on TV, I was thinking of going to law school at the time. And I thought, “God, by the time you're defending a kid in a courtroom, the battle's already lost.” I think the real fighting should happen here in the classroom.”

Eva describes her school as a city of jail.



Fig. 2. Eva's school looks like a city as a jail.

Below is her narrative expression.

Eva:

“If it was up to me, I wouldn't even be in school. My probation officer threatened me, telling me it was either school or boot camp. Dumbass. He thinks that the problems going on in Long Beach aren't going to touch me at Wilson. My PO doesn't understand that schools are like the city, and the city is just like a prison, all of them divided into separate sections, depending on tribes. There's Little Cambodia. The Ghetto. Wonder Bread Land. And us, South of the Border or Little Tijuana. That's just the way it is, and everyone knows it. But soon enough, you have little wannabes trying to hit you up at school, demanding the respect they haven't earned. It looks like this, one tribe drifting quietly to another's territory without respect, as if to claim what isn't theirs. An outsider looking in would never see it, but we could feel it. Something was coming.”

Gruwell switches her students' sitting position.

Mrs. Gruwell switches the position of her students' sitting for reducing the social and racial gap among her students and also for breaking the demarcation border in their interaction.

The followings are their dialogues.

“Switch with Ben. Come on,” said Gruwell.

“I can't go back there alone.” Said Ben.

“It'll be fine.” Gruwell convinced

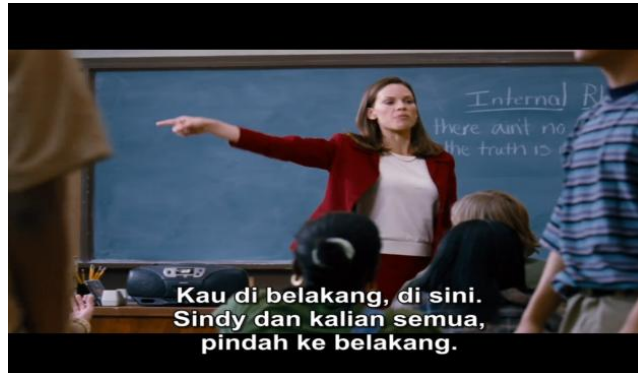


Fig. 3. Gruwell is giving instruction to her students to switch their sitting position.

The followings are her students' responses to Gruwell's instruction.

"No, it won't."

"I'm not sitting near him."

"I ain't going up there without my homey."

"I'm not sitting back there alone!"

"All right."

"Shut up."

"All right, you know what?"

"Get your ass back to China, all of y'all."

"You're all little midget-ass punks."

"Move before I stomp your peanuts."

"Boo!"

"Get your ass to the back, boy."

"Get off my desk."

Gruwell discusses the Holocaust with her students.

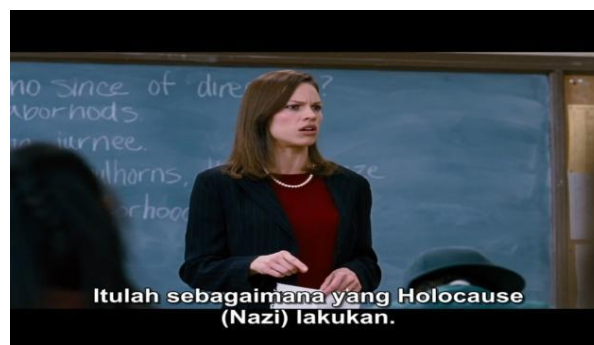


Fig. 4. Gruwell is debating about the Holocaust with her students.

Her discussion with her students is inspired by one of her students drawing a black man with big lips and a big nose. With this picture, Gruwell explains to them the event of the Holocaust by Nazi. Through a hot debate, Gruwell can make her students have a wide vision of humanity.

The followings are Gruwell's expression when explaining the Holocaust to them.

"This gang would put you all to shame." "And they started out poor and angry, and everybody looked down on them."

"Until one man decided to give them some pride, identity and somebody to blame." "You take over neighborhoods?"

"That's nothing compared to them." "They took over countries." "And you wanna know how?"

"They just wiped out everybody else." "Yeah." "Yeah." "Yeah, they wiped out everybody they didn't like, and everybody they blamed for their life being hard."

“And one of the ways they did it was by doing this.”

“See, they'd print pictures like this in the newspapers.”

“Jewish people with big, long noses.”Blacks with big, fat lips.”

“They'd also publish scientific evidence that proved Jews and blacks were the lowest form of human species.”

“Jews and blacks were more like animals.”And because of they were just like animals it didn't really matter whether they lived or died.”In fact, life would be a whole lot better if they were all dead.” “That's how a holocaust happens.”

Gruwell makes a game called Line Game.

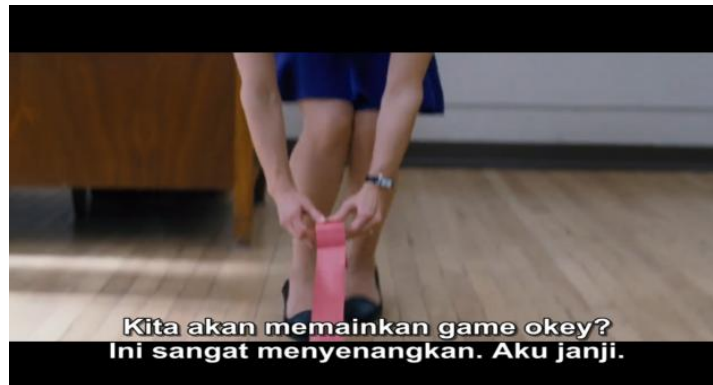


Fig.5. Gruwell makes a game called Line Game.

This game is inspired by an inappropriate interaction among the students at the school yard. They just interact with their group based on their skin color, ethnicity or race. Through this game, Gruwell intends in order that her students know and understand each other. The questions range from simple to serious questions. The simple questions Gruwell asks to them are how many of them have the new *Snoop Dogg* album and have seen *Boyz n the Hood*. Gruwell's next questions are deeper and more serious as follows.

“Okay, now I'm gonna ask you a more serious question.”

“Stand on the line if you've lost a friend to gang violence.”

“Stay on the line if you've lost more than one friend. Three,Four or more.”

“Okay, I'd like us to pay respect to those people now.”

“Wherever you are, just speak their name.”

“James.”

“Beatriz.”

“Thank you all very much.”

Gruwell asks her students to write their feeling and experience in the journal.

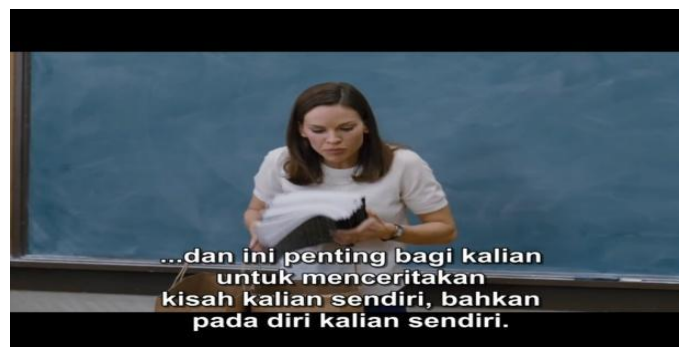


Fig.6. Gruwell is telling her students to write anything in the journal.

The next creativity is that Mrs. Gruwell asks her students to write everything about their ideas in a journal. Gruwell knows well her students so that she wants them to write down their feelings in it.

The followings are their dialogues.

"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 gonna 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, poems, any good thing, bad thing, anything."

"But you have to write every day."

"Keep a pen nearby."

"Whenever you feel the inspiration."

DISCUSSION

Historically in the USA, school integration began before the mid-20th century. It was an effort of the US government to end the so-called race-based segregation. The segregation was surely in opposition to the national constitution that says "All people are created equal." US government sees that integration school program is an effective way to lead the American society to unity. Through the integration program, public and private schools were willing to accept students of all races. This program is aimed at eliminating the segregation and supporting unity in US society. ([Marbán, José M., and Eddie M. Mulenga. 2019](#); [Iravani, M. R., & ShekarchiZade, A. R. \(2014\)](#))

Concerning with the school integration program, there is a true story of Erin Gruwell, the graduation of Law School, when teaching her students from different races. Her experience of becoming a teacher at Woodrow High School in Long Beach California becomes monumental all around the USA. Her teaching method becomes a national model for US teachers when teaching students of all races. Her success in teaching her students at room 303 inspired Richard LaGravenese and Danny DeVito to make a movie with the title *Freedom Writers*. The movie belongs to one of the literary works. Movie creation is fictional although it is inspired by a true story including *Freedom Writers* movie. The movie explores how hard Gruwell manages her class and how she opens up her students' mind with a new paradigm of life.

Gruwell acted by Hilary Swank sees her students' bad manner. They don't respect other friends from different race or ethnicity and even they hate each other. A small case can make them fight each other. Gruwell is also very concerned with their manner to her. They underestimate her as their teacher. The following is a dialogue between Gruwell and her student, Eva.

Eva: You see, I hate white people.

Gruwell: You hate me?

Eva: Yeah.

The dialogue can be interpreted that Eva as a Mexican female dislikes her teacher because of white people. She hates the white due to her father was accused as a killer and was arrested by the police. Eva believed that her father is not a killer. Her father helped the victim of race conflict in front of her house but he was accused by the police as the killer. She can do nothing and as a result of the arrogance of the white people, she hates them. The past event in her childhood creates a past traumatic experience that influences her perception toward white people.

In the school yard, they just interact with the same race or ethnicity. They make a demarcation border with another group. They get together with their own group. There's Little Cambodia, The Ghetto, Wonder Bread Land, and South of the Border or Little Tijuana. The unhealthy situation also happens in the classroom especially room 203. This condition inspires Gruwell to find out a solution to her students' problems and she realized that the condition is not good for them to study.

Gruwell creates some activities for them in the order they can integrate and respect each other. She changes her students' sitting position. She does this in the sake of eliminating the border of race and ethnicity among them. By such a sitting position, they can interact with their friends from other groups. It means that Gruwell as a teacher has tried to educate them on how to know each other. The other activity of Gruwell is motivated by one of her students drawing a black man with big lips and a big nose. From this drawing, she asks them to discuss Holocaust by Nazi. Through this activity,

Gruwell opens up her students' mind to the fact that as a human being living in the world, they should respect and tolerate one to the other. The next activity is making a game called *Line Game*. By this game, Gruwell has a deep purpose of understanding more their friends. They can know well what has happened to their friends. They can feel what their friends are feeling now. Thus this game can improve their sympathy to their friends. Her next activity is that her students are required to write everything in a journal. The form of writing can be a poem, essay, song lyric and what not. By the activity, Gruwell can understand well her student's feelings. Finally, she asks them to retype their journal into a computer. Finally, Gruwell published her students' journal into a book entitled *The Freedom Writers Diary*. The benefit of publishing their journal is not only for them but also for other people who want to know how the teacher and her students are able to change their lives from a bad condition into a better one. Finally, the students in room 203 become a family. They respect, tolerate and love each other.

Analyzing what Gruwell has done is in line with Banks in Sabrina⁷ that promoted five core dimensions that characterize multicultural education: (1) *content* (2) *knowledge construction* (3) *prejudice reduction* (4) *equity pedagogy* and (5) *empowering school culture*. One example of the implementation of the fifth dimension is what Gruwell has done by changing her students' sitting position reflects Gruwell's efforts to reduce social gaps among her students and it pushes the students to be closer to their friends in their social interaction. It means that Gruwell tries to empower the school culture.

From the above explanation, the role of the teacher is very crucial to deliver a concept of multiculturalism to the students. The teacher should have a wide range of knowledge concerning multiculturalism. The teacher as the agent of change should teach, educate, and guide the students into the right tract of life. The students should be able to respect, tolerate and love people from different ethnicity, religion or race. The success or failure of multicultural education for the students depends on the multiculturalism quality of the teacher.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded as follows. Firstly Problem faced by Gruwell in the classroom is her students' bad manner. They do not respect their teacher. They hate their teacher because she is a white woman. They also hate their friends from other race or ethnicity. Secondly, the students' bad manners appear in their day-to-day lives because of white supremacy at that time. The white people do everything to the other race and ethnicity as they like. The white people as the dominant group in the USA at that time cannot treat wisely the minority. Among the minority themselves, they cannot interact well. They hate each other. Gruwell's solution of the social problem in the USA is a good education for the USA's young generation. The teachers should have a good quality of multiculturalism. With this, the teacher can teach, educate, and guide the students into the right tract of life. They can live hand-in-hand with other people from different religion, race, and ethnicity.

Implication

The teacher figure of Gruwell can inspire the Indonesian teacher to teach, educate, and guide the students into the right tract of life. In reality, Indonesia is a pluralistic country. It means that people living in this country come from different religion, race, and ethnicity. They live together. Besides, there are millions of the Indonesian students. They are the next generation and the backbone of Indonesia. The role of the Indonesian teacher is very important for the future of the nation. The Indonesian teachers are pushed to understand well their roles. In addition to that, it is compulsory for them to have a wide range of multiculturalism knowledge. Seemingly the teachers with a good vision of multiculturalism will produce students with a better character for strengthening the existence of Indonesia in the near future under the national slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or Unity in Diversity.

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