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SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNSELING THROUGH MULTIPLICATIVE
APPROACH IN FREEDOM WRITERS MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

Students often face social injustice issues such as discrimination, racism, bullying, and marginalization. These issues hinder the teaching and learning process and negatively impact students' mental health. However, teachers and counselors often focus solely on individuals without considering the support of their environment. Therefore, a more multiplicative approach is needed to resolve student issues and prevent similar problems from occurring in the future. This article will analyze the multiplicative approach used by Erin Gruwell in the film "Freedom Writers." A descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis methods was used to identify a total of 11 scenes and dialogues that represent social justice practices and the application of Erin Gruwell's multiplicative approach. These were then analyzed by linking the scenes and dialogues to relevant theories. The results of this study found that the film displays several multiplicative social justice strategies, such as expressive writing, history education, student advocacy, and building an inclusive environment. Through this approach, students can integrate with people of different races and regain their previously neglected rights. The implications of this research for guidance and counseling are expected to serve as a reference for counselors to implement in school counseling services. A multiplicative approach is well suited to addressing social justice issues among multicultural students, allowing them to gain empowerment and advocacy.

Keywords: multiplicative approach, social justice, freedom writers, counseling.

INTRODUCTION

Social justice is the right of all people on earth without exception, including in the field of education. Social justice itself is justice that is based on values and standards recognized by society (Sirait in Umar et al., 2023). In Indonesia itself, the concept of social justice is one of the main values in the nation's ideology, namely Pancasila, more precisely in the fifth principle which reads "Social justice for all Indonesian people". This principle emphasizes that every citizen, regardless of their background, has the same right to obtain welfare and fair treatment in various aspects of life, including education. Not only that, the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution also emphasizes the purpose of the founding of the Indonesian nation, namely "... to protect the entire nation, advance general welfare, and educate the life of the nation". Furthermore, Article 28C paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution states that "Every citizen has the right to develop themselves through fulfilling their basic needs, has the right to receive education, and to obtain benefits from science and technology, art, and culture, in order to improve the quality of their life and for the welfare of humanity". However, in the context of education, social justice is defined as equal treatment, access, and learning opportunities for all students without discrimination (Siregar et al., 2025). This is in line with the principles of educational equality as stated in the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 20 concerning the National Education System (SPN) of 2003, which states that "Education is organized democratically and fairly and without discrimination by upholding human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national diversity." (Tunisa et al., 2024)

Although education is a safe and equal place for all students, the reality is that social injustice is still rife in everyday life, and some of us may have experienced it directly. According to Sukanto in Ardiono et al. (2019), social injustice can manifest in various forms, including stereotyping, marginalization, subordination, domination, and human rights violations. This phenomenon is not only a local problem but also a serious global challenge. A UNESCO report shows that nearly 32% of students worldwide have experienced bullying at least once in the past month. At the same time, more than a third of students aged 13-15 have experienced bullying, and the same proportion have been involved in physical fights at school (UNESCO, 2019). A similar situation also occurs in Indonesia. The results of a 2022 national assessment showed that 36.31% of students were at risk of bullying, 35% were at risk of sexual violence, and 27% experienced some form of corporal punishment at school (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2023). These data confirm that social injustice in education remains a pressing issue that requires significant attention.

The urgency of this research can be seen in the crucial role played by school counselors as active agents of social change. According to a study by Singh et al (2010), social justice-oriented counselors employ strategies such as fostering critical awareness, building intentional relationships, and advocating for the use of data as a tool for change. Tarhan (2022) adds that counselors recognize experiences of discrimination in schools, such as favoritism and unfair assessments, and then record students' emotional reactions to these injustices. Furthermore, an article in *Frontiers in Education* (Reese, 2021) emphasizes that school counselors should be advocates for systemic change, developing data-driven programs to eliminate structural barriers for marginalized students. Collaborative school-family-community efforts have also proven effective in strengthening educational equity, as reviewed by Betters-Bubon & Schultz

(2018). However, Winter et al (2024) despite this, found that counseling practitioners' involvement in public policy remains very limited despite the importance of broadening the influence of social justice in education. Thus, this study seeks to explore how this strategy is represented in the film *Freedom Writers* and how a multiplicative approach to social justice counseling can be translated into counseling practice in Indonesia.

While the social injustices faced by students worldwide are depicted not only in statistics but also in popular culture, including the film industry, the film *Freedom Writers* offers a powerful example of how the realities of discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalization in schools are clearly reflected in students' experiences. As a teacher, Erin Gruwell faced significant challenges in dealing with students who had long been trapped in a cycle of racism, violence, and social injustice. By using creative writing and creating a safe space for information exchange, Gruwell successfully helped students regain purpose and motivation in their learning. From a guidance and counseling perspective, this story highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that focuses not only on academic aspects but also on the social and cultural contexts and personal experiences of students. Therefore, *Freedom Writers* can be an inspiration for educators and counselors designing counseling strategies based on social justice, as it is based on the teacher's true story.

The story told in the film *Freedom Writers* demonstrates that each student brings diverse social, cultural, and life experiences, necessitating a multidisciplinary approach to the counseling process. This is consistent with the philosophy of a multidisciplinary approach to counseling. The story of "*Freedom Writers*" explores the need for a multidisciplinary approach, where educators use a variety of approaches based on the students' needs, rather than relying on a single, universal approach. This aligns with the theory of pluralism proposed by Cooper & McLeod (2007), which encourages flexibility in interventions based on the client's needs and goals. Furthermore, multicultural mentoring and social justice (MSC) emphasizes the importance of mentors as social catalysts who intervene at multiple levels, including individuals, institutions, and even governments (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). This kind of advocacy can be achieved through education that integrates real-world experiences (Fickling & González, 2016) and new models of thinking aimed at realizing real social change (DeBlaere et al., 2019). In the context of social injustice in schools, this approach allows counselors to be more flexible and responsive in addressing issues of discrimination, marginalization, or stereotyping experienced by students. In other words, a multidisciplinary approach serves as a framework that helps counselors incorporate social justice-based interventions, such as student empowerment, the creation of safe spaces, and the integration of creative practices like expressive writing, as demonstrated in the film *Freedom Writers*.

The social injustice experienced by these students impacts not only their academic achievement but also their mental health, motivation, and self-discipline during the learning process. Therefore, theories based on a social justice perspective and a multiplicative approach can provide more appropriate and flexible intervention strategies to meet the diverse needs of students. The main purpose of this study is to analyze how the multiplicative approach is expressed in socially realistic writing, as seen in the film "*Freedom Writers*," and to analyze its relevance to school guidance and counseling. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate how the film can be used as an analytical tool to explore social issues in education

and how the concepts of the multiplicative approach can be applied in school practice. Unlike previous research that primarily focused on sociology or case studies, this study offers a new perspective by examining popular culture and research theory. This study is expected to contribute to the development of guidance and counseling services that are more sensitive to students social realities.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research type because it allows a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied [Creswell, 2014]. The method used is content analysis to better understand, categorize and interpret communication messages objectively and systematically (Sofwatillah et al., 2024). In this content analysis, a descriptive approach is used because it can provide a detailed explanation of a message or text to provide a summary and nature of the message contained in the research object (Octaviani & Purwanti, 2024). The object of the study is the film *Freedom Writers* which was released in 2007. This study focuses on scenes that show social injustice and the multiplicative approach used to address these problems. The data collection instrument used a documentation study guide containing instructions on relevant document types (films, dialogue scripts, and scene notes), data collection strategies (by repeatedly watching the film, transcribing dialogue, and taking screenshots of relevant scenes), and aspects to consider (themes of social injustice, teacher strategies for addressing problems, a multiplicative approach) in analyzing the documentation data. (Merriam in Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024)

This research was conducted by observing the film through available streaming access and searching for supporting literature. The data collection technique used was documentation, involving data from the film **Freedom Writers** in the form of film recordings, dialogue transcripts, or scene notes as primary data. Secondary data included collecting literature reviews on social justice theory in counseling and relevant previous research. The documentation study provided insight into the historical context, policies, events, and developments related to the phenomenon under study [Creswell, 2014]. After data collection, analysis began with data reduction, which included summarizing, coding, exploring themes, and categorizing. Afterward, the data is presented in narrative text and tables, reflecting the results of the documentation study guidelines. Drawing conclusions or verifying the data presentation is the final step after all steps have been completed (Sofwatillah et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

"The Freedom Writer" examines racism in Long Beach, California. The film begins with the Rodney Rowe riots that erupted in Los Angeles in 1992. It focuses on Eva, a young Latina woman who suddenly loses her boyfriend. Police then arrest her father, who is trying to help her boyfriend in jail. In Long Beach, society is divided into Asians, African Americans, Latinos, and whites. They kill each other based on their race, values, and backgrounds. Their lives are complicated because they can compete with other classes at any time and in any place. Each of us has unique characteristics and experiences that influence our character. People come from different communities that have adopted different customs, values, philosophies, and social classes. Differences between communities create the risk of individuals not

understanding the expectations of others. Therefore, social awareness in communication must contribute to effective intercultural communication. A lack of social awareness can lead to misunderstandings that hinder the development of relationships between members. These misunderstandings can focus on behavioral tendencies among members, such as bullying, disrespect, intimidation, and isolation. They persist in these conditions because of previous experiences of disrespect. This situation causes many students to become delinquent. They show no respect for other students in the class and often bully and criticize each other. They become overly selfish within their groups, which often leads to conflicts with other delinquent students. (Listiyana & Baron, 2021)

From there, a negative stigma emerged from the teachers and staff at the school, where they considered class 203 to be just naughty children who tarnished the good image of the school that was once named a favorite school. The students experienced social injustice from the school such as facilities such as broken desks and chairs, they were even not allowed to read or borrow books from the school library because the children had damaged books and the school was reluctant to spend more budget to buy new books.



Figure 1 Inadequate classroom facilities

As a result, the children are often neglected and do not receive attention from the school, even many teachers have given up on this class. However, Erin Gruwell, a new teacher, did not give up despite the very unfavorable classroom conditions, starting from inadequate facilities in the classroom, students who are reluctant to mix with people of different races, forming groups according to race, bullying of other races to the attitude of some students who do not want to listen to and make fun of her.



Figure 2 Unconducive classroom conditions

She strives to connect with all the students in the class through various approaches to better understand their true desires. Not only does she help the students come to terms with the challenges they face, but she also fights for justice for these children so they can receive a decent education. All of Erin Gruwell's efforts bear fruit, as all the students ultimately develop a passion for learning and are willing to mingle with the diverse racial groups in the class.

Table 1 Analysis the application of multiplicative approach to addressing social justice in scenes in the Freedom Writers movie

No	Scenes in the Film	Social Injustice Issues	Intervention by Erin Gruwell	Relation to the Multiplistic	Approach Facets of Social Justice
1	Students are hostile towards each other based on race (white, black, Latino, Asian).	Stereotypes and Racial Discrimination (Sukanto in Ardiono et al., 2019)	Invite students to discuss the Holocaust and discrimination.	Integrating historical, reflective and open discussion approaches.	Cultural Justice. Building cross-cultural awareness and anti-racism. (Peters & Luke, 2020)
2	Minority students feel ignored at school.	Marginalization (Sukanto in Ardiono et al., 2019)	Providing a safe space in the classroom, encouraging students to write personal journals (expressive writing).	Using creative techniques (writing) that are tailored to students' needs.	Emancipatory Justice. Freeing students from feelings of marginalization through increased self-awareness. (Peters & Luke, 2020)
3	Other teachers and the school underestimated the abilities of class 203 students.	Subordination (Sukanto in Ardiono et al., 2019)	Erin continues to provide challenging material, such as reading The Diary of Anne Frank.	Combining academic and counseling approaches.	Distributive Justice. Ensuring equal learning opportunities, even for students deemed "disabled." (Peters & Luke, 2020)
4	Gang violence dominates students' lives outside of school.	Domination (Sukanto in Ardiono et al., 2019)	Connecting students with inspirational figures and activities outside the classroom (e.g. inviting Miep Gies).	Demonstrates integration of counseling, character education, and social advocacy.	Restorative Justice & Transformative Justice. Helping students heal the wounds of violence while changing the culture of violence in the community. (Peters & Luke, 2020)
5	Many students become victims of violence, some even lose friends/family due to gang conflicts.	Human Rights Violations (Bullying & Violence) (Sukanto in Ardiono et al., 2019)	Give students the opportunity to tell and write about traumatic experiences.	Applying traumatic, reflective, and empathetic approaches simultaneously.	Retributive Justice and Restorative Justice. Supporting victim recovery and creating healing-based justice. (Peters & Luke, 2020)

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of the film Freedom Writers not only depict the social realities experienced by students but also provide a space to see how the principles of social justice in counseling can be applied in real-life practice. To understand the relevance of this phenomenon, this discussion will analyze five forms of social injustice that appear in the film: stereotyping, marginalization, subordination, domination, and human rights violations. Each point is analyzed based on specific scenes, linked to social justice theory, and reviewed for its relevance to counseling practice in schools, particularly in the context of implementing a multidisciplinary approach.

1. One of the key scenes in Freedom Writers that showcases stereotyping occurs when students tease each other based on their racial and ethnic differences. This scene illustrates how strong social prejudices, formed early in life, can create tension between groups within the classroom.



Figure 3 Bullying Scene

From a social justice perspective in counseling, this scene demonstrates the urgency of cultural justice, namely justice that focuses on recognizing and respecting students' cultural identities. In the film, the teacher, Erin Gruwell, attempts to address these stereotypes by providing historical insights, such as introducing the Holocaust and Anne Frank's diary. This strategy not only broadens students' understanding of the suffering caused by discrimination but also builds empathy between groups. This aligns with the perspective of (Singh et al., 2010) which emphasizes the importance of a cultural justice-based counseling approach to counter racial bias and create safe spaces for marginalized learners.



Figure 4 Erin explores her students' talents

The multiplicative approach is seen when Erin uses not only cognitive strategies (historical knowledge), but also emotional strategies (expressive writing) to facilitate student reflection.



Figure 5 Erin invites her students to write journals

In this way, students have the opportunity to express their personal experiences without fear or judgment, allowing for social-emotional healing. The implication for counseling in Indonesian schools is the importance of counselors implementing a dual strategy that combines values education, empathy building, and providing a space for personal expression to counter persistent stereotypes in the school environment.

2. Scenes reflecting marginalization in *Freedom Writers* are evident when students feel that their existence is not valued by either the school or their social environment. Many of them come from poor families, experience violence on the streets, and are considered "failed students" who are not worth fighting for.



Figure 6 Eva's low school spirit

Students from minority communities often experience marginalization in the education system, both in the form of low teacher expectations and limited access to learning facilities. A similar phenomenon also exists in Indonesia. According to a 2020 UNICEF report, children from poor families are three times more likely to drop out of school than children from wealthy families, demonstrating a form of structural marginalization in education.



Figure 7 Teachers' perceptions of class 203 students

From a social justice perspective in counseling, this condition is closely related to distributive justice, namely how resources, opportunities, and support are distributed fairly. In the film, Erin Gruwell attempts to break the chain of marginalization by providing equal opportunities for all her students to speak, write, and participate in class activities. By introducing expressive writing methods, she transforms the classroom into an inclusive space where marginalized students' voices are recognized. This strategy aligns with the perspective of Lutfiyah et al. (2023) which emphasizes the importance of an inclusive approach in guidance and counseling to accommodate the diversity of student backgrounds.

Erin's multifaceted approach is evident in the way she combines academic, emotional, and social methods to address her students' needs. She focuses not only on the subject matter but also on psychological and social aspects, which are often overlooked. The implication for guidance and counseling practice in Indonesia is the need for counselors to develop programs that are more responsive to the needs of marginalized students, for example by providing group counseling services for students from low-income families or those at risk of dropping out. Thus, guidance and counseling serves not only as an academic support service but also as an agent of social change that combats marginalization.

3. Subordination is clearly depicted in *Freedom Writers* when the students' voices are not considered important by the school, and even other teachers view them as a group that cannot be saved. The students are placed in a low position, without the opportunity to demonstrate their potential. This situation reflects a form of subordination, namely a condition where certain groups are placed as

"inferior" in social relations. Subordination in education often arises through teachers' low expectations of minority students, which has implications for limited academic access and weak motivation to learn. Subordination in education often arises through teachers' low expectations of minority students, which has implications for limited academic access and weak motivation to learn. (Banks, 2016).

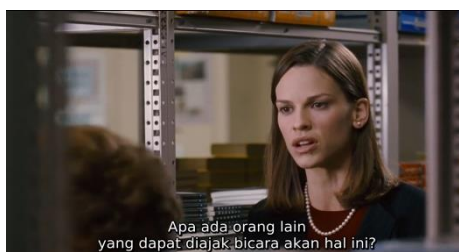


Figure 8 Erin tries to ask for support

From a social justice perspective in counseling, subordination is closely related to associational justice, namely how individuals or groups are given the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Erin Gruwell, in the film, shows that overcoming subordination means giving students space to become actors in their own education. Through expressive writing, students gain a voice to share their personal experiences, which were previously marginalized. This strategy aligns with the perspective of Singh et al. (2010) which emphasizes the importance of empowering students through active involvement in the counseling process so that they feel they have control over their lives.

Erin's multidisciplinary approach is evident in the way she combines literacy learning with emotional and social empowerment. She not only teaches language and history but also emphasizes that every student has a story worthy of respect. The implication for education in Indonesia is the importance of counselors breaking down subordination in schools by providing equal opportunities for all students to participate. For example, counselors can create student aspiration forums or provide participatory counseling sessions that provide space for students to express their ideas and experiences. In this way, counselors act as facilitators, restoring students' voice and position within the education system.

4. Domination in Freedom Writers is evident when the school system and most teachers refuse to fully support Erin Gruwell's students. They prefer to maintain authority and outdated systems rather than create space for innovation that can help students. This form of domination is evident in how schools prioritize bureaucratic rules over students' real needs. More broadly, domination in education often emerges through authoritarian, discriminatory practices, or policies that close critical spaces for students.



Figure 9 Erin tries to ask for support

Structural domination in schools usually perpetuates social hierarchies, where elite groups remain in power and students from marginalized backgrounds are increasingly marginalized. (Apple, 2019).



Figure 10 Class 203 conducting fundraising

From a social justice perspective in counseling, domination is closely linked to procedural justice, namely how procedures or policies are applied fairly to all parties. Erin Gruwell, in the film, attempts to counter this domination by creating a democratic classroom. She engages students in discussions, gives them the opportunity to choose reading material, and allows them to express their experiences without fear of punishment. This strategy reflects that counseling and education should not only be a means of transferring knowledge but also a platform for combating structural injustices that often arise from the dominance of those in power.

A multifaceted approach is evident in Erin's strategy: she doesn't simply rely on her authority as a teacher, but combines humanistic, cultural, and reflective approaches to build equitable relationships with her students. The implication for education in Indonesia is the importance of school counselors in creating a counseling system that doesn't get bogged down in bureaucratic domination. For example, counselors can promote student voice policies in the development of guidance and counseling programs and review disciplinary procedures to be more educational than punitive. Thus, the role of counseling goes beyond academic support to ensuring fair processes within the educational environment.

5. Human rights violations in *Freedom Writers* are evident as students grow up in environments rife with violence, racial discrimination, and legal injustice. Many have lost family members to gang violence, while schools fail to provide a safe environment. Students also frequently experience discrimination from other teachers, who blatantly refuse to provide them with quality teaching materials. This phenomenon reflects that education is not only a place of learning, but also a reflection of social injustice that violates children's basic rights.

From a social justice perspective in counseling, human rights violations are closely related to restorative justice and retributive justice. Restorative justice emphasizes the restoration of

victims' well-being, while retributive justice emphasizes the need for consequences for unjust practices. Erin Gruwell strives to bring justice to her students by providing a safe space in the classroom. Through expressive writing, students can express their traumatic experiences, which have previously been unheard.



Figure 11 Erin takes her students on a study tour

Furthermore, Erin also presents literature on the Holocaust to help her students understand that discrimination and violence are forms of human rights violations that must be combated. Erin's multifaceted approach encompasses academic, emotional, social, and historical aspects, so that students not only learn theory but also internalize human values. The implication for education in Indonesia is that counselors need to develop human rights-based guidance and counseling programs that emphasize the importance of schools as safe spaces. This can be realized through conflict mediation programs, trauma counseling, and education on human values in guidance and counseling sessions. This way, counseling is not just an individual service, but also an instrument in fighting for students' rights as dignified human beings.

According to the American Association of Counseling (ACA), social justice-based counseling is understood as a holistic approach. This practice focuses not only on individual development but also on the common good by addressing the challenges arising from injustice. Social justice counseling emphasizes the importance of empowering clients while combating discrimination and inequities that impact their lives, both personally and within the broader system. The ultimate goal is to ensure that everyone, regardless of background, has an equal opportunity to develop their abilities and reach their full potential. (Bastomi, 2020)

In practice, social justice-oriented counselors need to recognize that the problems clients face are often not just individual issues, but also influenced by oppressive social structures. Therefore, counselors and clients are encouraged to jointly explore how social, cultural, and political factors influence personal development. To achieve relevant counseling, counselors typically employ culturally based assessments that take into account clients' lived experiences within personal contexts, interpersonal relationships, and socio-political contexts. (Bastomi, 2020)

A social justice counselor is required to have a number of important skills, including: (1) being authentic, (2) showing empathy in relating to clients, (3) building relationships of mutual respect, (4) approaching clients with humility without feeling like they know best, (5) understanding the dynamics of healthy two-way relationships, (6) working together in setting goals, (7) assessing the effectiveness of interventions carried out, and (8) being aware of one's own

limitations, especially regarding cultural knowledge, issues of privilege, and existing forms of oppression (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the film *Freedom Writers* shows that social injustice in schools, such as stereotyping, marginalization, subordination, domination, and human rights violations, is a real challenge that needs to be addressed through social justice counseling. The multiplicative approach proves relevant because it is able to integrate various counseling perspectives to address the complexity of students' problems in an inclusive and equitable manner. The expressive writing depicted in the film is an effective medium for students to voice their experiences, build critical awareness, and gain strength in facing discrimination. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of the role of guidance and counseling in Indonesian schools as agents of social change, not only to support individual development but also to prevent bullying, combat discrimination, and ensure student participation in education policy. Future research is recommended to test the actual application of the multiplicative approach, particularly through expressive writing, to strengthen more adaptive, equitable, and transformative guidance and counseling practices.

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