

TEACHER IDENTITY EXPERIENCED BY MR. BARTHES AS DEPICTED IN *DETACHMENT* MOVIE

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Abstract

This paper investigates teacher identity which exists in the main character in a movie called *Detachment*. Mr. Henry Barthes (Adrien Brody) who is a substitute teacher and now he is teaching in a high school. While he is teaching, he has to encounter some distractions from Erica (Sami Gayle) a prostitute, one of his students, Meredith (Betty Kaye), and his colleague Ms. Madison (Christina Hendricks). While he faces the distractions, he has to deal with his childhood memory about the suicide of his mother and the death of his grandfather. All of distractions he faces at the end of the day he is able to handle the distractions and his teacher identity is a proof that his students adore him. The analysis data of the method is data analysis by watching the movie and the findings can be found in the movie in a form of how the teacher explains the material to the students, the teacher's thoughts, and the teacher's actions.

Keywords: *Detachment* movie, Mr. Barthes, teacher identity

Introduction

This study aims to describe the process of the main character in “*Detachment*” movie in shaping his identity as an English literature teacher. Recently, the research on teacher's identity is scarce. In the other hand, teacher's identity is a topic which needs to be investigated more since it gives the insights for the teachers in supporting them in their development of being agentic professionals (Kayi-Aydar, 2014). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) stated, the teacher is not “a neutral player in the classroom, but on the contrary, her positionality in relation to her students, and to the broader context in which the teacher was situated” (p. 22) is vital, without teacher or somebody who can guide the students will be lost or if the teacher cannot come up with the idea of fun learning, I am sure the students will find it boring. Teacher is the important key for students' learning as the students will need guidance for the learning purposes and how they maintain their performance in class. As teachers, it is also important to develop the identity besides the skills. It is corresponding to Singh and Richard had stated.

Teacher-learning involves not only discovering more about the skills and knowledge of language teaching but also what it means to be a language teacher.

Identity seems to play a special role in teaching, as compared with other professions (Singh and Richards, 2006: 155).

The study also uses the movie to investigate the process of identity development. Through the process of teaching and learning experiences, the teacher experienced his identity as a teacher is developed. And by watching the movie, the author believes that it is one of the ways of people in entertaining themselves. Not least from society who got inspired from watching movies. Therefore, this study will give insight to the novice teachers or any experienced teachers that they can learn how to be a well-developed teacher in more relaxed or entertaining way, in this case, watching a movie.

According to Pennington (2015) identity can be defined as the unique set of characteristics associated with a particular individual relative to the perceptions and characteristics of others. Identity is moreover the sense which a person has of the self as an individual, including the person's self-image and self-awareness as may be captured in the stories which the person tells about her/himself and also as this is projected to and understood by others (Richards, 2015b: 117–19). The formation of identity is a major aspect of growing and maturing as a human being and of defining one's place in society. Negotiating one's position and identity in different context is an ongoing process which involves interaction and sometimes struggle in relation to the roles and positioning of others (Norton, 1997; Varghese et al., 2005), as people accept, reinforce, downplay, or challenge the classifications and categories that are available or ascribed to them. Yoon (2008) claims, "whatever the positions teachers take, that positioning guides them in their interactive approaches with students in classroom settings" (p. 499).

Characterization is also used to analyze the description of the character. Henkle (1977) noted that characterization enable authors to communicate their human qualities and guide us to an understanding of the human themes of the novels (p. 87). Moreover, according to Murphy (1972), there are nine ways in which an author attempts to make his characters understandable to, and come alive for his readers (p. 161).

One of the writer's ways to analyze the character is by describing personal description. Murphy (1972) states that the author can describe a person's appearance and clothes (p. 161).

Besides describing a character directly from the personal description, the author can describe him through the eyes and opinions of another. The reader gets, as it were, a reflected image (p. 162).

The character in the novel can be analyzed with the speech. The author can give us an insight into the character of one of the persons in the book through what that persons says, whenever a person speaks, whenever he is in conversation with another, whenever he puts forward an opinion, he is giving us some clue to his character (p. 164).

By letting the reader learn something about a person's past life, the author can give us a clue to events that have helped to shape a person's character. This can be done by direct comment by the author, though the person's thoughts, through his conversation or through the medium of another person (p. 166). The author can also give us clues to a person's character through the conversations of other people and the things they say about him. People do talk about other people and

the things they say often give a clue to the character of the person spoken about (p. 167).

The author can also give us a clue to a person's character by letting us know how that person reacts to various situations and events (p. 168). Direct comment of the person by the author can also describe the character in the novel. According to Murphy (1972), the author can describe or comment on a person's character directly (p. 170). With the person's thoughts, the reader can analyze the character's emotion and feelings. Murphy (1972) states that the author can give us direct knowledge of what a person is thinking about. In this respect he is able to do what we cannot do in real life. He can tell us what different people are thinking (p. 171). Person's mannerism also the author's way to make the characters understandable to, and come alive for, his readers. Murphy (1972) states that the author can describe a person's mannerisms, habits or idiosyncrasies which may also tell us something about his character (p. 173).

This paper attempts to resolve the following question: How does the main character shape his identity as a teacher in "Detachment" movie?

Method

The research is a qualitative research which uses a document analysis as the method. The study uses movie as the source. The movie is titled Detachment. The story of the main character in the movie is the source of data which will be analyzed. The study investigated the identity of the main character as the substitute teacher for one month. The main character's name was Henry Barthes. He taught English in 11a class. He was taking a long time assignments (teaching) in Lock and McArthur. He came to the recent school as highly recommended substitute teacher. He had one month time as an English substitute teacher.

This study saw a literary work as its object. the author would like to analyze the main character in the movie titled Detachment, released in 2011 and directed by Tony Kaye. The movie won several awards such as Tribeca Film Festival, Tokyo Film Festival and Deauville Film Festival. The movie told about Henry Barthes (Adrien Brody) who was an English substitute teacher in 11a class. Detachment is the source of data used in this study to analyze the teacher's identity shaped by the main character. It is an American drama film about the high school education system, starring Adrien Brody. It tells a chronicle of one month in the lives of several high school teachers, administrators and students through the eyes of a substitute teacher named Henry Barthes (Adrien Brody). Barthes' method of imparting vital knowledge to his temporary students is interrupted by the arrival of three women in his life — the damaged and naive prostitute Erica (Sami Gayle), a fellow teacher (Christina Hendricks) and a troubled teen named Meredith (Betty Kaye). These women all have profound effects on Barthes' life, forcing him to both re-discover aspects of his own personality, and to come to terms with both the tragic suicide of his mother and the impending death of his grandfather. The film is punctuated with flashbacks of scenes of Barthes' young childhood and his mother's suicide. Through the experiences in meeting those women, he discovered his identity as a teacher although he was just a substitute teacher, when he was about to leave the school, all of his students did not want him to leave. That is a proof that the students loved him and demanded him to

stay. In this study, the author was focusing on teacher's identity experienced by the main character, Henry Barthes and how he discovered his identity as a teacher.

This study used document analysis to gather the sources. The author used two kinds of sources, namely primary source and secondary source. The primary source was taken from the movie itself: *Detachment* directed by Tony Kaye as the main source of this study. This movie was used as the main source of the study and the evidence for the thesis analysis.

The secondary source was taken from the books related to the teacher identity and some journals related to teacher identity as references. These journals gave me clues and the relation between the teacher identity, the movie and the main character in the movie.

There were some steps that could be used to describe the teacher identity in the main character toward the character's personality. As the first step, the writer watched the *Detachment* movie and then tried to understand the content and concentrated on the main character's reaction and action, so the author understood the character's personality better. Then the writer quoted some important points of the related events and linked it to the analysis and then showed the description of the main character.

As the second step, the author gathered some books and journal which contained relevant theory of teacher identity of the novel. The author focused on the teacher identity, and the author implemented it into the character of the movie. As the last step, the author tried to find out the possibilities of teacher identity theory that can be applied in analyzing whether the teacher's identity really exist in the main character characteristics. The author also used the theory of characteristic to analyze the main character's characteristics in order to break down the main character's background.

As the last step, the author tried to relate the teacher's identity to the education nowadays especially in Indonesia. Because teacher's identity is something that teacher should have to guide the students. And to position the teacher that the role of teacher is important especially in a matter of education and as an educator outside the school.

Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to understand how the main character in this case, Henry Barthes showed to the students that teacher's identity existed in himself and he was able to manage the classroom situation while he was having distraction by three women coming to his life, the death of his grandfather and the moment of his childhood that he had to deal with the suicide of his mother. He also related the distraction into the position of him as a teacher.

The first time Henry Barthes came to the class and taught there were two students who acted inappropriately; one (Marcus) was insulting another student (Meredith) so he decided to kick him out. Another student (Jerry) threatened him angrily by throwing Mr. Henry's briefcase to the wall and he reacted calmly and not by violence. And it worked quite well toward Jerry.

Mr. Barthes: Everyone pull out a piece of paper. I'd like to assess what your individual writing skills are

Jerry : What if we ain't got no paper?

Mr. Barthes: Okay, here is the situation. You're dead. Alright, write a brief but detailed essay about...

Jerry : Hey jackass! I asked you a fucking question!

Mr. Barthes: ...about what a friend or a parent might say about you during your funeral, ok? You have 30 minutes.

Jerry : (approaching Mr. Barthes) I asked you a motherfucking question, didn't I? (Picking up Mr. Barthes' briefcase and then throw it against the wall)

Mr. Barthes: Anything else?

Jerry : You'd better back the fuck up before I fucking rock ya shit!

Mr. Barthes: That bag, it doesn't have any feelings. It's empty. I don't have any feelings you can hurt either, ok? I understand you're angry. I used to be very angry too, ok. I get it. You have no reason to be angry with me, because I am one of the few people that's here trying to give you an opportunity. Now I am going to ask you to just down, and do your best and I'll give you a piece of paper. How's that? (Taking his book and pull out a piece of paper and then gave it to Jerry)

Jerry : Can I get a fucking pen too?

Mr. Barthes: (Took his pen and gave it to Jerry)

From the conversation between Jerry and Mr. Barthes, the author concluded that Mr. Henry Barthes did not do anything violently to Jerry to make him obey what he ordered; instead he said something that made him understood. He said that he understood that Jerry was feeling angry and he used to feel that way. So he asked him to go back to his seat and he gave him what he asked which are a piece of paper and a pen.

After what he did to Jerry, Meredith, a student who got assaulted verbally, asked him how strong he was and she wished she was too. Mr. Henry Barthes replied that she did not need to be strong, she needed self-awareness because sometimes people lack of it and tend to forget it.

Meredith : Why'd you throw Marcus out of class but not Jerry?

Mr. Barthes : Well, I had to make an example out of somebody anyway. Marcus verbally assaulted you, that's not allowed in my classroom. And what they say to me is immaterial. What's your name?

Meredith : Meredith. So you really don't care what the kids say to you?

Mr. Barthes : Perhaps I've gotten used to it.

Meredith : I wish I could be that strong.

Mr. Barthes :It doesn't take strength, Meredith. You gotta understand that unfortunately most people lack self-awareness. You should really keep that in mind as you head into the trenches of second period. You'll meet them again at every age.

From this conversation, the author concluded that the teacher, Mr. Henry Barthes told Meredith to have self-awareness and always not to lose it and always keep it in mind because people tend to forget it. Through this conversation, Mr. Henry Barthes was giving her an example that Mr. Henry Barthes positioned himself as a role model that she could look up to.

After he met Erica, a prostitute that he met in the bus on his way home from visiting his grandfather from the nursing home, he took her home to his apartment and she lived with him temporarily. He saw somebody disrespected her because she was being a prostitute. In the class when he was teaching, he related what Erica has experienced to the material that they learn at that time.

To deliberately believe in lies, while knowing they're false. Example of this; in everyday life oh, I need to be pretty to be happy. I need surgery to be pretty. I need to be thin, famous, fashionable. Our young men today are being told that women are whores, bitches, things to be screwed, beaten, shit on, ashamed. This is a marketing holocaust. 24 hours a day for the rest of our lives, the powers that be are hard at work dumbing us to death. So to defend ourselves and fight against assimilating this dullness into our thought processes, we must learn to read to stimulate our own imagination; to cultivate our own consciousness, our own belief system. We all need these skills to defend, to preserve our own minds.

From the explanation that he gave, the author conclude that Mr. Henry Barthes tried to relate what Erica has experienced and remind the students that we must be smart and have self-awareness so we will not be dumbed by other people or people take advantage of us. Mr. Henry Barthes cared for all the students that is why he did not want to see his kids humiliated or disrespected like Erica has experienced.

As a teacher, he felt responsible that he must be the guidance to guide the students so they will not fail. He had a big responsibility to put them to the top. He wanted the students made it through high school. He poured his thoughts when somebody interviewed him.

“We have sort of responsibility to guide our young so that they don't end up falling apart, falling by the way side, becoming insignificant”

From what he thought, the author concluded that Mr. Henry Barthes was sad that as so many teachers that actually abandoned the students and the teachers just doing their job as a formality. He sounded sad and as a teacher he had a big responsibility to not disappoint them, to not fail them, and to make them successful people.

When the moment of Mr. Henry Barthes was about to leave the school, some students were sad and they did not want him to leave the school but he explained that he was just a substitute teacher and there would be a permanent teacher who will fill the position.

Mr. Barthes : Good morning

All : Good morning

Mr. Barthes : Before we take roll, I want to tell you that umm... today will be my last day with you. You're gonna have a permanent teacher on Monday

Jerry : Where are you going Mr. Barthes?

Mr. Barthes : I'll go to another school

Jerry : I'm gon miss you, man. I fucks wit you

Mr. Barthes : Yeah?
Jerry : All other teachers in this place... they're dickheads
Tanya : So you don't you get tired of moving around all the time?
Mr. Barthes : It'sahh... it's my job works, Tanya. I... I come in here for... a period of time, so you don't have twenty subs in and outta here and then you have a permanent teacher come in and I leave.

From the conversation between Mr. Henry Barthes and the students, the author concluded that Mr. Barthes really showed that he positioned himself as a dedicated teacher and his teacher identity really made the students were willing to listen to him. He showed that he cared for them although he only taught for a month as a substitute teacher. In one of his interview, he mentioned that he cared for them and to show that he was motivated to make the students more excited. "Kids don't have any attention span; they're bored so how are you supposed to reel them in with classic literature, if they don't believe that you have something meaningful to share?"

From his thoughts, the author concluded that although he was only a substitute teacher, he cared very much of his students and he had teacher identity in himself. He was motivated to make the students more excited, he was a dedicated teacher, and he had vision that a teacher should have real responsibility of student education and able to guide the students so that the students do not end up falling apart.

Conclusion

Those findings found above, indicated that Mr. Henry Barthes showed high dedication to his students. He was aware that he was just a substitute teacher and he could not do anything to change the curriculum or change what was there but instead he tried to find a way to excite the students and motivate them. He was aware that the students needed guidance because without guidance, the students will be lost they will be falling apart. He did not want that to happen. At the same time, there were distraction came from outside, a prostitute named Erica, whom he ended up looked after, a low self-esteem student of his own named Meredith and a little affection from his colleague named Madison. With all the distraction he encountered, he managed to give his best to his students. At the end of his day as a substitute teacher most of his students were sad and did not want him to leave. One of the students, Jerry said that he would miss him because the first impression that he got from Mr. Henry Barthes. He said something awful to him and even threw his briefcase against the wall and he responded very calmly. Mr. Henry Barthes was a proof of there was teacher identity in him and he gave his best to his students and the students adored him for that. As stated by Yoon (2008), "whatever the positions teachers take, that positioning guides them in their interactive approaches with students in classroom settings" (p. 499). The author concluded that what Mr. Barthes taught when he was teaching the students, he made them comfortable so they believed in Mr. Barthes wholly.

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