

## THE URGENT NEED TO INFUSE LITERATURE CLASSES' SYLLABUS WITH CREATIVE INDUSTRY-ORIENTED COMPETENCE

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the importance of infusing literature classes' syllabus with creative industry-oriented competence. In general, the objective of this measure is to keep literature relevant and matter to today's generation, who grow up immersed by gadgets and technology. It is a part of an ongoing research on developing teaching material for literature classes (poetry, prose and drama) which is compatible with creative industry, a recent trend in the global economic development. It is also an effort to respond to a preliminary research finding by Delvi Wahyuni (2014), in which students believed that studying drama (a genre in literary works) is important but it is not relevant in preparing them to enter the work force once they leave college. This paper consists of three main parts. First, it examines some classical advantages associated with literature as well as the practical benefit which students can get from studying literature and how they help them in getting a niche in the job market. Second, it discusses what literature class syllabus must contain to be deemed creative-industry-oriented. Third, this paper will provide a brief review on a working example of a success story on creative industry and literature. All in all, the strengthened syllabus is expected to result in students seeing some congruity between what they learn and what is needed in to be able to compete in the ever increasingly competitive labor force, which most of the time not the case in the traditional literature syllabus. Finally, creative industry-oriented syllabus is effective in conforming the long held notion about literature and why it must be taught that it is *dulce et utile* (Sweet and useful).

*Key words: Literature, creative industry, syllabus, teaching material*

### Introduction

This paper is a part of an on going R & D research aiming at developing a teaching material which is strengthened with creative industry oriented competence for literature classes (drama, poetry and prose). This study is conducted to improve the existing teaching material which have been used for several semesters in the English Study Program, the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang. A preliminary study (Delvi Wahyuni, 2014) shows that students in Drama class believed that it does indeed culturally enrich them; however, they found it irrelevant when it comes to preparing them to enter the workforce. For that reason, it is safe to say that there must be some actions taken to make literature classes relevant to today's generation, who grow up immersed by gadgets and technology. Therefore, the most prudent step taken is to infuse the existing syllabus and, subsequently, the teaching material with competence which will prepare them well to compete in the ever competitive industry and job market. In the context of literature courses, one of the ways in which students see the practical benefit of the course they take is by introducing them to creative industry since basically both of them are grounded on the same premise that is creativity.

### Literature: The discussion of its function and pedagogical implication

Once in while one must have ever wondered why people turn to literature? Or why literature stays from the start of time until now and will endure until the time of the future? Why people keep making (read: write and create) literature? Melani Budianta (2002) lightly answers this question: "because human needs literature! (p. 19). A fine example to support this claim is what Showalter (2010) tells us about the spontaneous resurgence of poetry after the tragedy of 9/11 attack starting from poems encrypted in the attack memorial, to people exchanging poem via the cyber space, to ordinary people writing poems about the attack (p. 63). Long before Melani Budianta found that literature is need by human, in his *Ars Poetica* (19 BCE), Horace, the Greek poet, declared that poetry (a genre in literature) *dulce et utile* (sweet and useful). Echoing Horace, Hake (2001: 1) believes that "anything which is genuinely entertaining has values." To put it in plain terms, literature provides human with both pleasure and education. Therefore, it is useful, and anything beneficial to human is worth studying.

Lukens (2007) further explores that literature is rewarding to readers in several ways:

1. Pleasure. It is rewarding to readers because it gives pleasure, and it may take many forms, from "rollicking laughter to sheer delight to awe or even titillating shock (p. 3)."

2. **Understanding.** Literature provide readers with understanding. According to Lukens, this notion of understanding stems from the exploration of the human condition, the revelation of human nature, and the discovery of human kind in the work of literature (p. 4).
3. **Human motives.** Lukens believes that literature is able to show human motives. This ability invites readers to identify with or react to a fictional character (p. 5). In reality, we can never know what is in the mind of a person, but reading literature equips us with this new ability to see what in the mind of a fictional character is and to see its motives which influence her action.
4. **Form for experience.** Literature is able to provide form for experience (p. 6). Life is a series of random happenings in which there are no beginnings and endings. Literature then gives form to that experience: the beginning, the development and the ending.
5. **Life fragmentation.** Literature is also a powerful tool to reveal life's fragmentation (p. 6). To borrow from Lukens's words, in our life, we are often pulled to different direction after one and another at the same time. In this case, literature serves this fragment of life for "close observation (p. 6)".
6. **The essentials.** Despite it shows us how fragmented life is, literature also helps us to focus on essentials (p. 6). Because literature gives form to experience, we can re-experience it with different intensity and new understanding on parts or fragments of life.
7. **The institutions of society.** Institutions are "a group of people which urge and coerce people into conforming into standards (p. 7)". In the work of literature, readers will see the numerous institutions existing in the society and the numerous ways people "give in to or struggle against them (p.7)."
8. **Nature as influential force.** Despite we seem to never realize it, human is not only
9. **conflicting with each other or institution but also with nature.** In literature we see how human deal with this influence. Often we find it that nature is too powerful for human to challenge, yet that is where we see human's will which deserve to be applauded.
10. **Vicarious experience.** To make it simpler, literature can take readers to the past, to the future, to places they have never heard or seen or imaginary time and planet. Literature can take readers to so many life experiences or other lives as many as the number of stories or poems or dramas available in the library or in book stores.

In general, the rewards readers can get from reading or learning about literature proposed by Lukens proof that aside from being entertaining, literary works are actually instructing. In other words, literary work is able to broaden the reader's horizon and insight. For example, readers can see other alternative views of the world by understanding the motive of literary characters do what they do in the story. For that reason, literary courses syllabus are designed to make students able to analyze the work and train them to identify meanings or working ideas which underlay the work they are reading. Moreover, a common learning experience in literature classes mainly involves students read the work (a drama, short story or a poem) and being asked what broad themes the work have to offer and how students get to such a conclusion. Consequently, because literary classes demands students to be analytic, its learning has been long believed to be pivotal in training students to think critically.

Graham (2014) states that critical thinking, an ability to pose an effective question and formulate innovative solution and answers for those questions, is a skill that one must acquire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In other words, these days various organizations whether commercial or non-profit which need personals with keen ability to solve ensuing problems the face. So, literature classes are, theoretically speaking, compatible with the labor force and industry, and students of literature programs are actually well prepared to compete in the job market.

However, reminiscing the previous study (Delvi Wahyuni, 2014), students of literature often fail to see that the skill they have already been trained in to be useful for their career or livelihood because critical thinking is an ability which is intangible in nature, unlike one's ability to fix engines or bake cookies. In the long run, if this issue is not addressed properly, literature classes or programs are in danger of standing accused of being elitist or void of any benefit. Therefore, pedagogically speaking, a measure must be taken to design a literary class syllabus which stays true to the classical rationale why literature matters and yet relevant to today's realities.

### **Creative Industry and Literature: the artistic expression and the need to make a living<sup>3</sup>**

Economic stagnation, global warming, and the rapid decline of fossil fuel reserves are some reasons why the world's economy is eyeing on creative economy, in which creative industry is a part of the parcel. A United Nation's report (2013) on creative economy mentioned that it is "not only one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the world economy, it is also a highly transformative one in terms of income generation.

<sup>3</sup> The wording for this subtopic is partly inspired by an article written by Richi Davis published by The Recorder Online on May 15, 2015 entitled "Creative Economy workshop urge acceptance of artistic expression and need to make a living



job creation and export earnings." In other words, creative economy relies on creativity, so it is inexhaustible that it is very likely to become a sustainable economic force. For this reason, world's leading economies like the United Kingdom and South Korea have been taking defining measures to develop and exploit it for the well being of their nation. Responding to this latest development, the Indonesian government issued Presidential Decree Number 6 Year 2009 grounding the legal basis for the development on creative economy oriented activities in the country. Moreover, as a precursor for the decree, the Ministry of Commerce and Creative Economy launched a manual book "Buku Rencana Pengembangan Ekonomi Kreatif 2009-2015 in 2008. Aside from discussing the importance of creative economy to the nation, the document serves as an official manual for Indonesian creative economy development including definition and specific areas which are counted as within the sphere of creative economy, which are: (a) advertising, (b) architecture, (c) art market, (d) craft, (e) design, (f) fashion, (h) video, film and photography, (i) interactive games, (j) music, (k) performing arts, (l) publishing and printing, (m) computer and software, (n) television and radio, and (o) research and development (p. 15-17).

Before going further into the discussion of creative industry is actually complementary with literature, there is must some ground clearing necessary to be done to see a clearer picture about two closely related terms: creative economy and creative industry. In Buku Rencana Pengembangan Ekonomi Kreatif 2009-2015 (2008), it is said that creative economy focuses on the creating of goods and service by which creativity is highly prized (p. 9). In the same light with the previous statement, Togar M, Simatupang (2010) asserts that creative economy is a system which include the process of creation, production, distribution, exchanges, and consumption of goods and services which have artistic, cultural, aesthetic, and emotional values for the customers (p. 1). In this area, what becomes the ultimate resource is creative persons ( Howkins, 2002, Florida, 2005, dan Lauter 2009). In this case, creative industry serves as one of the forms of creative economy. According to United Kingdom Department of Culture, Media, and Sports (in Carr, 2009), creative industries are "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have a potential for wealth and job creation to the generation and exploitation of intellectual property and content (hal. 4). All in all, all the statements above lead to a common conclusion that this economic sector's main aspect is creativity. Therefore, since every person was born with some degree of creativity, everybody can thrive in this field let alone students who studied literature in which they are immersed with works which exist because of the creativity and innovation of their creators.

To serve this purpose of strengthening the already existing syllabus with creative industry oriented competence, teachers of literature can use a model developed by Sri Sumardingsih et.al (2013) in their research entitled "Creative Economy Education Model as a Bridging Course for Entrepreneurial Class." According to their study, a creative-industry-oriented-class teaching material must comprise of at least (1) topics which will generate creative ideas, (2) topics which will create products, and (3) topics which will enable them to develop creative design. In the context of literature class, to cover these topics teachers are supposed to be not challenging at all because those topics are most of the time inherent part literature. However, teachers should be creative enough in pointing out to students about creative ideas, products or design which they can create out of the literary work. One strategy that I have tried out is to invite one of my students who owns a clothing store of which design is drawn from various literary work. I ask him to give a mini lecture on his experience as a literature student, a writer and a business man.

#### **Mesin Hujan Literary Clothing Company: a Working example of Creative Industry inspired by Literature**

Mesin Hujan Clothing is founded by Arif Rizki, who graduated from English Department, Universitas Negeri Padang in 2011. In its early years, this store mainly focused on selling t-shirts with quotations derived from poems, stories, or novels, movies and philosophy. Since Arif is also a writer, some of his t-shirts bear his ideas and thoughts. He confided that his choice to use literary quotations in his product serves as a marketing differentiation, a strategy to compete with other producers of t-shirts who traditionally focus on funny designs or pictures. Despite its tender age, Arif claimed that his products have already had a fanatic fan base in which patrons and customers and orders come from many cities in Indonesia and abroad. The following pictures are some samples of products sold at Mesin Hujan Clothing Company:



### Conclusion

Literature is highly esteemed in terms of its merit of being both entertaining and instructing. For that reason, literature has always been a staple course in education institution since antiquity to modern times. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century sees the rapid development of technology and the internet which somehow makes literature less relevant as a source of wisdom and entertainment. Therefore, teachers of literature need to rework their syllabus in order to keep students being exposed to good things which are traditionally credited to literature such as critical thinking ability, and the same time prepare them to be competitive in the job market or industry. The plausible alternative teachers can choose from is to infuse the existing syllabus for their literature class with creative-industry-oriented competences. Creative industry and literature is indeed a very likely communion because both heavily rely on creativity and innovation. This move is important in a way that it shows students the practical benefit of studying literature. Therefore, the creative-industry-infused syllabus confirms the premise that literature is *dulce et utile*, sweet and useful.

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