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Raising Students' Executive Cognitive Function through Students-Centered Learning Approach in Teaching Creative Writing

Emanuella Christine Natalia Mau, M.Hum

Abstract

Aristotle once said that art is the imitation of life. Therefore, art production is similar to mimic society and life itself. Writing, one of art productions, needs to also mirroring human life and society. Revolution Industry 4.0 has demanded human to be more creative and digitally literate. It also demands a shifting paradigm to teach the millennial students in the 4.0 revolution industry. The millennial students, according to *Millennials Go To College* (2003) by Neil Howe and William Strauss, shows characteristics as follows: *special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional*. Those characteristics need to be supported by good skills of **Executive Cognitive Function** in their learning to survive the 4.0 revolution industry. Thus, this paper is written to see the contribution of **Student-Centered Learning** in facilitating the millennial students' through **collaborative and co-operative** learning in raising the Executive Cognitive Function skills in creative writing course.

Key words: *Executive Cognitive Function, Student-Centered Learning, Collaborative Learning, Co-operative Learning*

I.1 Introduction

Millennial students are the students that were born within 1981-2000 which means that they are now in their 20s. Therefore, they are now in their college ages. According to *Millennials Go To College* (2003) by Neil Howe and William Strauss, their characteristics are as follows: *special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional*. These characters influenced the teaching and learning environment. Lecturers need to see beyond their characteristics and try to use their characteristics as their strength. This Creative Writing Course is then designed to accommodate the students' character as well as to advance their learning process. The students' profiles in UKRIDA Creative Writing Class 5th Semester is less motivated to learn creative writing and in doubt that learning creative writing mainly will not be able to earn living. By looking at the millennial students' characteristics and the creative writing's learner profiles, it is

necessary for the lecturer to use a different approach in teaching creative writing. Thus, also due to the limited time and the massive theory as well as research that they will have to do, it is necessary that the lecturer will have to enhance the teaching techniques that are used in the classroom. According to David Nunan, it is important to involve the students in making decision on the materials that they decide to learn. Our traditional curriculum has not yet facilitated the Millennial needs; therefore it is important to develop our traditional curriculum and insert collaborative learning into the traditional curriculum. David Nunan also believe that the collaborative between learner-centered has a strong collaborative effort from the teachers and the learners. It is one of the very important focal point for teaching and learning activity whereby the learners decide the materials, the process of the curriculum and how it is taught. (Nunan, 1988:2)

Therefore, it is important to understand that successful learning needs to accommodate

students' collaboration and cooperation in understanding the materials and project given. In order to achieve that, students will have to expand and stretch their horizon by enhancing their own interest. Lecturer will have to guide them to be engaged to their learning itself. This will start their button in doing autonomous learning. The writing course will try to facilitate the autonomous learning through teaching techniques and various approaches.

II. Literature Review

II.1 Students Centered Learning

Student-centered learning is a teaching approach which enables lecturers to stretch students' skills through collaborative and cooperative learning. This learning design was promoted due to the learners changing characteristic which actually based on the changing of the era. Thus, student-centered learning model enables lecturers to work together and divide the role as information source with the learners. Learners are also taking controls of the materials that they wish to learn. They give contribution toward the learning-teaching process. This ambience forces the learners not only to collaborate and cooperate with the other learners but also to work collaboratively and cooperatively with the lecturers as well. Thus, this approach is suitable enough to be implemented within the classroom within the 28 meetings. Experts as Collins & O'Brien also has described Student-Centered Instruction as an instructional approach that allow the students to influence the content, materials, pace of learnings from the designed materials. The teacher is giving opportunities to the students to have independent learning process. At this point, the students are free to manage the information that they get in the previous lessons. The information will help them to

finish the assignments that the teachers' assigned. Thus, in doing so, they will have to collaborate with another students in the form of discussion and peer instructions. This learning model includes techniques as Collins and O'Brien defines : '*substituting active learning experiences for lectures, assigning open-ended problems and problems requiring critical or creative thinking that cannot be solved by following text examples, involving students in simulations and role plays, and using self-paced and/or cooperative (team-based) learning.*' (Collins & O'Brien, 2003).

This approach has seven principles that will help the students to build their new understanding upon the materials given through several models that are explained in the methodology and teaching strategies. The principles of this approach are as follows:

The first principle is that the students should have good relationship with adults and peers who cares to one another and have the same believe which enable them in holding high expectation during the teaching and learning process. Second, students to feel that they are safe biologically and physiologically. Third principle, students feel that they are fully embrace for who they are and therefore they are able to develop a sense of positive identity and belonging. The fourth principle, students are free to choose teach interests which positioned teachers as a guide and facilitators. Fifth, students solve real-life problems and able to learn skills which will be useful for the upcoming life. The sixth, students are able to demonstrate mastery and receive support as needed. The seventh principle is that students needs to learn in community, at the internships, weekends, extracurricular and or other public or social community/room.

National Research Council (1999) has given influential report on the importance of synthesizing the learning process into four focal points, they are : knowledge-centered, learner-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. Amongst the four, the first one is going to be the frame of this paper. The knowledge-centered learning stresses on developing the learners background knowledge so that they are able to use the background knowledge in learning new context and apply the new understanding context into open-ended challenges such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and design. McCombs and Whistler (1997) also state that — learners which are guided and treated as co-creators will recognize the learners' prior knowledge as the modals to understand the upcoming context. Thus, this will influence future learning and attempt to build on prior knowledge. Therefore, this approach is in line with the characteristic of education itself (empiric). The students-centered learning can be seen under these several teaching approach as follows:

II.1.1 Collaborative Learning

Gerlach argues: "Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves (Gerlach, 1994). Thus, learning process needs more than one participants that working together to solve problems, complete a task, or create a product. Smith and MacGregor states the approaches to collaborative learning. Firstly, learning is defined as an active process whereby students assimilate the information and relate this new knowledge to a framework of prior knowledge. Secondly, because it is viewed as an active process therefore it requires a challenge that opens the door for the learner to actively engage

his/her peers. This engagement is an open door to process and synthesize information for the learners. Thirdly, learners get the benefit when they are exposed to diverse paradigms from various backgrounds. Thus, learning is viewed as a social environment where conversation between learners takes place, these conversations are actually the focal points whereby learning process finally takes places and internalized. We can summarize that the learning process by using collaborative environment has challenged the learners both socially and emotionally so that when they learn different perspective; they are able to articulate and defend their ideas. In doing so, the learners then begin to create their own unique concept. Therefore, this approach has facilitated the students to not only to *converse with peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks, and be actively engaged.* (Smith and MacGregor, 1992)

Smith and MacGregor argue that the collaborative learning processes can be implemented through a typical 50-minute class in a various activities. Some collaborative learning include a process of long preparation such as a long-term project, while others may varied into posing a question to be discussed with their own classmates in pairs. Note taking activity are not lost during these process but instead it complements the collaborative learning process. The goal is clear : to shift learning from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model.

II.1. 2 Cooperative Learning

Johnson & Johnson Jacobs and Power, & Loh has argued the definition of cooperative learning first, it is functioned as the instructional use of small groups that works together to maximize their own learning and

enhances each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1993, p. 9). Secondly, this principles and learning techniques helps the students to work together more effectively. (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002, p. 1). Based on the points above, the core of cooperative learning is not merely on involving the students on working together as a group but lecturers also demanded to have conscious thought to help and facilitate the students to make the experience as successful as possible.

II.2 Executive Cognitive Functions in learning

Najdowski and Kung defines *executive functions* as the 'brain's chief executive officer'. It refers to the hypothesized brain processes that control other brain processes. It includes inhibition, memory, attention, flexibility, planning, and problem solving. Although most researchers agree that the term refers are critical to everyday functioning in life, the consensus of the definition remains various. People who are struggling to have skills such as in remembering things, planning and problem solving, will also have problems in social as well as in the academic capability. The most important things is that the Executive Functions will also influence a person's social interactions, emotional, intellectual, and organizational. (C. Najdowski, ... Evelyn Kung, in *Evidence-Based Treatment for Children with Autism*, 2014)

Based on the explanation above **executive cognitive function** in a person can be categorized as follows:

1. Working Memory

Executive cognitive function can be seen when a person is able to keep information in mind and then to use it in some ways. A student uses it to gain information and keep

it in mind whereas in time it will be the background of answering a problem at hand.

2. Cognitive Flexibility (flexible thinking)

Executive cognitive function can be seen as a person thinks about something more than one way to solve a problem. A student might use it to find relationships within concepts when he/she tries to answer a problem.

3. Inhibitory Control (self-control):

Executive cognitive function can be seen when a person is able to ignore distractions and resist temptation. A student might use it to keep the information as to use it in the correct circumstances.

Therefore, **Executive Cognitive Function** is responsible for these five skills in learning:

1. Paying Attention
2. Organizing and Planning
3. Initiating Tasks and Staying Focus on the task
4. Regulating Emotions
5. Self-Monitoring (keeping track of what you're doing)

Furthermore, it is also important to understand the skills that are related to the Executive Function of the brain so that we are able to understand the contribution in our daily life. There are learning skill that closely related to this executive function such as the **Hot Executive Function** which arises when the emotions of the learners are neutral. This skill helps to manage learners' emotion so that they are able to use the executive function in performing the task at hand. Learners also use the skill to control one-self in order to get higher reward. Then, the **Reflection** skill help learners to notice challenges, pause, thinks about alternative to solve the problems. The more they practice this easier and faster the process becomes.

Learners need to undergo the reflection process quickly and efficiently in order to solve the problems on time. Next, learners need **Processing Speed**. This skill is actually the generator which helps learners to identify problems and solve the problems to achieve the goals. Based on the explanation above it is necessary to formulate two research questions that is written in the chapter below.

III. Research Questions

Based on the explanation above, there are two formulated questions as follows:

1. In what way does the Student Centered Learning approach facilitate the creative writing class to enhance their collaborative, cooperative, and toleration skills?
2. In what way does the Student Centered Learning approach helps the class improve the cognitive executive functions?

IV. Methodology

The objective of the creative writing course is to make the students write expressively in various forms. Students will have the opportunity to explore several different types of poetry, prose styles, as well as responding to literature, art mediums, quotes, and music. Based on its nature, Creative Writing Course has become the anchor of building students creativity not only focusing on their writing but also on the art media so that they will be able to express themselves uniquely.

Therefore, the lecturer decided to integrate technology in their writing process to address this instructional facts. Creative Writing course, then, is designed to facilitate this group of students with creative writing skill as one of their strength in the future professional path.

In order to gain the aim, the students are also equipped with understanding art and culture in the form of social critics such as comic

strips and stop motion movie techniques. Previously, they have joined a day seminar on journalistic, photography, and comic strips. They also had practiced the hands on skills. Thus, this opportunity had created a new relevancy to then stretch their capability to the higher level. The students were asked in group to make

Based on this policy, then the class is designed:

1. To improve students to write creatively
2. To give students opportunity to engage their skills in technology through stop motion as the writing media
3. To motivate and equip students in writing by providing reading text theory.

The methodology then implemented as follows:

Step 1

The class is given a task in the group of four where they will have to complete in a month. The project is to transfer their ideas in creative writing into comic panels as a storyboard, then, they will have to create a movie by using stop motion technique based on **12 Disney Principals**. This task is given in a group of four.

Step 2

The class then is given a time to collaborate with their friends, through talking about task and think of alternative ways in solving the problems given.

Step 3

The class is asked to present their work in the classroom, per group.

Step 4

The class is asked to give their own reflections in an open discussed class, where all the classmates attend and they are able to give feedbacks and questions toward the presented materials. The classes also have to answer the guided questions from the lecturer as follows:

- How do you feel in the beginning of the project?
- How do you feel after the project is done?
- Do you find difficulties during the project making?
- What are they?
- How do you overcome it?
- What are the things that you learned during the making of the project?
- What do you think that you will change if you are assigned of the same project in the future?
- What score will you give yourself over the projects?

IV.1 Class Descriptions

The creative writing class is given two meetings of three credits in a week with the total of 28 meetings. The 28 meetings is then divided into two parts. The division is based on the social issues that they will encounter during learning and teaching activities. The first issue is about ecology which they will have to make a storyboard and short movie about ecology issues. They have decided to encounter the issues by using the theme of reduce, re-use and re-cycle.

After the classes have decided the theme based on the issue, they go on by writing a storyboard. The storyboard is made in the form of comic strip. This is to quickly help them brainstorm the ideas and form it into a story. Next, they start to make short movie by using stop motion techniques. This technique has allowed them to take as many pictures as possible in order to create a two to three minutes movie. While the other half of the meeting is to cater the social-politic critique toward the Indonesian government from 1970-1998 era (New Order Era). The 5th semester students will have to learn techniques of making movie. They will have to learn the theory

and principles of stop motion techniques. Therefore, in order to make them understand the theory fully, the lecturer had asked their friend who had formal background about stop motion principles. This '*teaching buddy*' is explaining mainly on the *12 principles of Disney Motion Pictures* while the lecturer explained mainly on the basic cinematography theory.

IV. Approaches and Teaching Strategies

Creative Writing is a course which focuses on expressive writing in many different forms. Students will have the opportunity to explore several different types of poetry and prose styles, as well as responding to literature, art mediums, quotes, and music. Originality and writing that shows thought will be emphasized. Therefore, in order to support the writing course objectives, the lecturer had designed a mid-test that combines the students' background knowledge, cognitive skills as well as their collaborative skills. Throughout the semester, the lecturer has asked the students to read and do a research on some social-critics issues. The theme that has been chosen by the students is the eco-critic theme. They urge to criticize community practice in reduce, re-use, and recycle.

Based on the choice of the theme, the lecturer has designed a project which includes all skills. They will have to make a 5 minutes duration of short movie by using the stop motion techniques. The lecturer also has chosen the combination of three approaches to be done in the learning process. They are: peer teaching, students centered learning and blended learning.

The lecturer decides to design the teaching strategies based on the students centered learning. Thus because students-centered learning is able to accommodate *collaborative learning* and *cooperative learning* as well as *peer instructions*.

Students-centered learning also provide the various teaching techniques that makes students various knowledge and skills' can be assessed in turn. Therefore, it creates the holistic knowledge of the lecturer to assess the students' ability. Lecturer is able to see the students' skills from various angle of learning points. On the other, students will feel confident enough to show the area that she/he knows best during the teaching learning process. It is a way to create a good learning atmosphere in the creative writing class. This teaching model is needed to answer the students' problems in the classroom.

IV.2 Teaching Procedures

There were several steps the lecturer had implemented in the classroom. They are as follows:

1. Brainstorm topic ideas that are related to green environment: re-use, reduce, and recycle

The classes sit down in a group of four and try to determine what issues that they want to set as the project topic.

2. Make a story based on the topic above

After a theme is set, the group divide the member into smaller group consists of two members. Each smaller group will work in team to make storyboard.

3. Draw the story into various comic types panel in A3.

Each of the smaller group will present their ideas in comic drawing panels. The amount of the panels depends on the length of the storyboard. Since it is made into motion picture, duration will be the anchor of the panels. It should not exceed 3 minutes.

4. Choose a story to be made into stop motion

The smaller group merges into the discussion with the original group of four; they then discussed the ideas that has been drawn into comic panel. Then, they will present it into a larger discussion to seek for class feedback at the story.

5. Make a stop motion animation for their story.

This step, they start to build in set and take pictures for their short movie. The start taking pictures and editing by using stop motion technique.

6. Do a reflection on their teamwork based on scoring rubric.

At the 14th meeting, they will have to present the project to the class and also will have to conduct a series of class' discussion with the lecturer and classmates. They will have to evaluate themselves based on a set of rubric questions that the lecturer has prepared. Score were taken based on how well they can collaborate, cooperate and being tolerate to their group mate in the scale of 1-5.(see appendix)

IV. Findings and Discussions

The approach and the methods along with the learning strategies had been applied through 14 meetings out of 28 meetings schedules. Since the second period of the class had different assignments, this assignment precede the final test as the mid test assignment. Thus, the assignment is based under the approach of postmodernism. Therefore, the test is mainly to evaluate and criticize their own work based on the items that the lecturer had decided.

Based on the test above, the lecturer had found these items which are divided into evaluation results that shows improvement in the exclusive function of the cognitive areas. They are as follows:

**IV.1 Executive Cognitive Areas Function:
IV.1.1 Students are more motivated to do reading and research.**

Students are eager to read the references and find information in the internet. The students are trying to build up ideas in order to write the storyboard. Writing storyboard activities has forced them to actually read and synchronize ecology critics. Therefore, they are making dialogue toward the issues themselves.

IV.1.2 Students are engaged to their learning process as well as the social issues and context.

The activities had made the students to get engaged and involved to the learning process. They are looking for the correct issues to be put into the dialogues and turn them into a good storyboard that might change everyone who has read it.

IV.1.3 Students learned to use various sources in their writing process.

In order to survive the task, the students will need to use their various researches upon the matters and try to put their various sources together. The storyboarding task is demanding them to collaborate within one and another. The storyboard assignment which is designed in the form of comic strips has made it quite a task force for the students to create dialogues with the issues which shows interplay within characters as well as the story itself. It is not only to have the story but also they need to draw them. The students also will have to use their knowledge in the photography and angles techniques in forming the storyboard. The group which consists of 4 persons at the most will have to use all the talent and resources that they have. This is one of the way to stretch students' skills and knowledge at the same time. They will have to cooperate and show good understanding of tolerance toward the group pace, knowledge, skills and schedules. Thus, had

made them also collaborate within each skills that they can donate to the group in order to make the task going.

IV.1.4 Students will hold an exhibition on their works; as one of the components for Final Test, where they will explain their artwork to their peers (non-English dept.).

Exhibition is meant for the students to enhance their English skills so that they can contextualize it in the daily life. The experience to explain their works to others are actually very good and beneficial practices which they will need in their upcoming life. This type of assessment has made them grown in their confidence of using English as well as their executive cognitive function.

IV. 2 Character:

IV.2.1 Students learns to be a professional by working in groups with deadlines

The class which is designed based on Production House corporate has brought different effect to the students. The students become more persistence and professional. They try to work as hard as they can to make the project succeeded.

IV.2.2 The students are more bonded

The class is more bonded. Before the program starts, the class was having problem with individual behavior in learning. Nobody cares to help others which has difficulty in understanding difficult materials. Through this collaboration and cooperation task that they had, they try to uplift their friends in group who has difficulties in understanding the theory as well as the task itself. Thus, it has made the task easier for them and also the result of the task is beyond the expectations.

IV.2.3 The students show better altruistic, responsibility, understanding and toleration.

The students show better care and responsibility toward the society. Some of the students are even concerned more in the political area because of the policy toward ecology that the government has taken. They also show a better understanding on ecology issues and make a dialogue with the issues. Furthermore, they realize that they can make movie that will have greater impact to the society.

IV.2.4 The students are now more mature in handling problems and differences.

The students understand their classmates better. Earlier the class has some crosswords with several students concerning on their learning behavior. After the class ends, those who are in the middle of crosswords, actually doing more understand to each other. They are more friendly to one another and more tolerant to people and their problem.

V. Conclusion

The class has shown excellent improvement in the three areas of Executive Functions after the project. They are as follows:

(The table is after the reference)

V.1.1 Working Memory

The students shows that they are able to make varieties in the storyboard by using the pre-knowledge of photography, angles, narrative theories given, and issues dealing with the environment. Thus, the learning context had made them able to create a story based on the updated topic. As the researcher explains in Finding and Discussion sections; students are more motivated to do reading and research, students are engaged to their learning process as well as the social issues and

context, and students learned to use various sources in their writing process

V.1.2 Cognitive Flexibility

Students are then having the flexibility in using their memory and previous knowledge to merge into another level of learning. They show it when they hold an exhibition on their works; as one of the components for Final Test, where they will explain their artwork to their peers (non-English dept.). They also use this cognitive flexibility when they learn as a professional by working in groups with deadlines. The deadlines were so tight they learn to think of another way to make the project finish on time.

V.1.3 Inhibitory Control

As the skill in inhibitory control; the students are more bonded. They show better resilience and show control to their behavior. They are showing better altruistic, responsibility, understanding and toleration. They cater their friends who were having difficulties in understanding the subjects given. These left behind friends were striving and able to increase the learning speed. The students are now more mature in handling problems and differences. As it is found in the discussion sections; students learns to be a professional by working in groups with deadlines, the students are more bonded, the students show better altruistic, responsibility, understanding and toleration, the students are now more mature in handling problems and differences.

As it is explained above, we are then able to answer the two questions above. Thus, Students-Centered Learning approach has definitely successful in raising students' executive cognition function through collaborative and cooperative learning which is proven to the discussion above. It is able to be done through collaborative and

cooperative way of teaching-learning process.

Appendix
MID TEST CREW 1
Final Test CREW 1

Students will have to conduct an exhibition of their work by using the terms as follows:

1. The exhibition will be shown publicly to the UKRIDA University Academic Civitas
2. Each student will have to ask at least 3 of their friends (non-English Department) to watch and explains their own work.

3. Each student will have to ask comment from each of their friends in the form of token (1000 rupiah each) if their explanation consider to be satisfying and fulfilling the needs of the audience. The collection of token will proof the best explanation after converted into normal scores.

4. Lecturer will also attend the explanation to give scores based on the attached rubric below.

5. The combination within the lecturer's score and the friend's token will be added to sum up a final grade.

Scoring Rubric

Score	4 (16-20)	3 (11-15)	2 (6-10)	1 (1-5)
Guidelines				
Theory	Great understanding of the theory and application. Student is able to explain the work	Good understanding of the theory and application. Student is able to explain the work	Adequate understanding of the theory and application. Student is able to explain the work partially	Irrelevant understanding of the theory and application. Student is not able to explain the work
Audience Reacceptance	Show a full understanding of the work	Show an adequate understanding of the work	Show a partial understanding of the work	Doesn't show understanding of the work
Project	Project is delivered and shown neatly, creatively and able to evoke emotion of the audience	Project is delivered and shown neatly, creative and clear objective message	Project is delivered and shown, a bit creative but showing less objective message	Project is not delivered and shown neatly, plain and doesn't show any message
Language Features	Show a good use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture	Show an adequate use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture	Show a partial use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture	Show less use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture

Lesson Plan

No	Components	Classroom Activities
1	Theory A. Introduction to crew course B. Theoretical inputs of theory of plot, technology, movies and stop motion	Lecture and Discussion
2	Techniques: Peer Teaching: Sessions on 12 principles of Disney's Stop Motion	Students learned on the Disney's 12 Principles: squash and stretch, anticipation, staging, straight head and pose to pose, etc.
3	Students' Center Learning Brainstorming Issues in Environment	Students are asked to discuss the project within group of 4 with the lecturer as to have a dialogue with the environment issues The brainstorming of the issues and putting it into their 3 strips of comic panels
4	Storyboarding in comic panels	Elaborate into 4 strips of comic panel
5	Photo shoots and framing for stop motion animation	Using the comic panels for making stop motion animation
6	Digitalization of the framing	Digitalized the framing
7	Time to Speak Up: Exhibition of the program	Assessment of the project

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Score Guidelines	4 (16-20)	3 (11-15)	2 (6-10)	1 (1-5)
Theory	Great understanding of the theory and application. Student is able to explain the work	Good understanding of the theory and application. Student is able to explain the work	Adequate understanding of the theory and application. Student is able to explain the work partially	Irrelevant understanding of the theory and application. Student is not able to explain the work
Audience Reacceptance	Show a full understanding of the work	Show an adequate understanding of the work	Show a partial understanding of the work	Doesn't show understanding of the work
Project	Project is delivered and shown neatly, creatively and able to evoke emotion of the audience	Project is delivered and shown neatly, creative and clear objective message	Project is delivered and shown, a bit creative but showing less objective message	Project is not delivered and shown neatly, plain and doesn't show any message
Language Features	Show a good use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture	Show an adequate use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture	Show a partial use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture	Show less use of blended diction, collocation, grammar and culture