Promoting Character Education through Children’s Literature

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ABSTRACT
This study is urgently developed to provide new insights of teaching English for young learners, particularly by incorporating the moral values of character education. Referring to the elementary students’ need on “represented” materials for English instruction which cover authenticity and the demand of need analysis, this study is conducted. Further topic-based writing as the basis material are chosen since, this materials are suitable with the need of the elementary students at primary or beginner level of learning. The materials are needed since the students should be well introduced with English as foreign language they require to master. In other words, the elementary students’ interest in English will be determined by their first impression in English at school instruction, particularly with the materials (books) as the supplementary instruction in their classroom. The English instruction which is conducted in the elementary classroom using theme-based instruction aimed to achieve the following objectives: first, to raise the students at the beginner level interest and to reduce their fear of learning English. Second, to enhance the children’s basis in English including the four language skills, grammar and vocabulary. Finally, to provide a comfort and ‘friendly’ experience for the children to learn and practice their English.

KEYWORDS: character, education, young learners, children’s literature

HOW CHILDREN LEARN LANGUAGE

To make the teaching of English for young Learners is successful and effective; some considerations should be taken into account. The basic consideration has to be the priority is related to the psychological aspects. In language learning, understanding the psychological development theories proposed by some theorists will help teacher develop teaching strategies appropriately. In addition, the psychological orientation is very effective to know how young children learn which finally lead to the better
learning outcome. Therefore; the following section will be discussed thoroughly the relation among the points to achieve best practices in teaching EYL done by the exemplary EYL teachers.

The prominent psychologists whose big contributions on the understanding the cognitive potential and capabilities children bring into the learning setting are Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. McCloskey (2002), clearly described his knowledge of the each psychologist concerning with their view on children. The French psychologist Jean Piaget (1970) gave us a view of the child as scientist, as the active learner accomplishing developmental milestones along a predictable continuum by conducting experiments on the environment. He sees thought as deriving from action. Thought is action internalized and carried out in the mind of the learner. He also describes categories of cognitive development: assimilation, in which the child takes in new experiences without any transformation in the way the information is processed; and accommodation, in which the child adjusts to features of the environment in some way. Initially assimilation and accommodations occur as behavior, shown by what children do; but eventually assimilation and accommodation become more clearly thinking processes. Another of Piaget’s important contributions was his description of a series of stages through which children’s thinking progresses, from the sensory motor stage—in which an infant interacts physically with the environment, building a set of ideas about how things work in reality—through the formal operations stage, in which preadolescents and adolescents can think abstractly and logically.

Another psychologist is Lev Vygotsky (1962), the Russian theorist. He contributes a view that gives much more importance to language and to the role of others in the child’s world on child learning. He addresses the early speech of infants
and its development into language, and discusses the differences between outward talk and what is actually happening in the child’s mind. He sees the child’s learning as developing through interaction with more knowledgeable others, who mediate learning by talking while playing, reading stories, and asking questions. With the help of adults, children can do more than they can do on their own. He developed a concept called the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), which is what the child can nearly do, but cannot do alone. Mediation gradually moves this ZPD outward as the learner is able to do more and more independently.

The other one is Jerome Bruner (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976 in McCloskey 2002) also places strong emphasis on the role language plays in children’s cognitive growth and explores the nature of mediation. He offers the label of “scaffolding” for the all-important talk that adults use to mediate the world for children, and to support them in solving problems. In Bruner’s research with North American mothers and children, parents who supported children by scaffolding tuned into the needs of children and adjusted to make tasks more difficult as the children became more capable. Bruner also places emphasis on the value of formats and routines, features of events that permit scaffolding to occur. He described the routine of parents reading bedtime stories to their children from babyhood onwards. At first they share a large picture story and turn the pages together, naming pictures in the book.

Understanding of the psychological stages of child is important for young learners’ teacher to execute the teaching learning process. It is assumed that adopting the development of psychology in the field of education philosophy makes teaching and learning very effective and scientific (Patel and Jain 2008).
WHAT IS CHARACTER EDUCATION?

Character education is described as curriculum specifically developed to teach children about the quality and traits of good character. One means in which children can learn about good character is through the pages of high quality children’s literature. Good character education is simply good education. It helps solve behavioral problems and improve academic achievement. Comprehensive character education addresses many tough issues in education while developing a positive school climate. It can be effective in any schools that have transformed their school cultures; reduce discipline referrals, increased academic achievement for all learners, developed global citizens, and improved job satisfaction and retention among teachers.

Character education includes and complements a broad range of educational approaches such as whole child education, service learning, social emotional learning and civic education. All share a commitment to helping young people become responsible, caring and contributing citizens. Since students spend so much time in school, our schools offer critically important opportunity to ensure that all student get support and help they need to reach their full potential. School that embrace character education become people want to be because they bring out the best in everyone. To be effective in school character education must involve everyone-school staff, parent, student, and community members-and is part of every school day. It must be interrogated into the curriculum as well school culture. When this happen and school communities unite around developing character, school see amazing result.

Character education describes curriculum developed to teach children about essential traits needed to build good character. It is a deliberate effort to develop noble character and cultivate core virtues that are worthy for the individual and society as a whole. It requires careful, calculated planning for success (Prestwick, 2004; Tyra,
2012). It deals with teaching students to develop the ability to decide how to behave in an appropriate manner in various social situations with the purpose of developing individuals who are capable of understanding moral values and who choose to do the right thing. Hoge (2002) defines character education as any overt or conscious attempt to effect the development of desirable individual traits or qualities. Although a number of definitions and interpretations of character education are found in the literature, the content of programs typically align with the core principles and values of generosity, kindness, honesty, tolerance, trust, integrity, loyalty, fairness, freedom, equality, and respect of and for diversity (Bohlin, Farmer, & Ryan, 2001; Brooks, 2001). Government recommend implementing a character education curriculum in the Junior and senior school years which includes the aforementioned traits to help students become responsible, respectful, contributing members of our democratic society.

The benefits of character education are multifaceted going beyond the apparent outcomes of being a good person and responsible citizen. Ryan (1999) found that instruction centered on character development helped improve students’ academic achievement and communication skills thus promoting a stronger sense of independence and self-confidence. He suggested these outcomes of character education lead to the creation of trusting learning environments where students feel good about themselves and others.

Schools have an important role to play in the development of children’s social and emotional growth. Teacher should find ways to infuse the curriculum with character building (McElmeel, 2002). Schools with successful character education programs expected less absenteeism, fewer discipline problems, decreased referrals for misbehavior, a lower dropout rate, and higher performance scores on standardized achievement tests (Wynne & Ryan, 1997).
Character education appears to provide students and teachers with many benefits in the classroom setting and beyond. One way to bring character education into a crowded curriculum is to make it part of the literacy program by embedding character lessons in reading and language arts instruction encouraging older children to read on their own, and discussing the books with children will help them absorb and develop the values of strong character. An acquaintance with and an understanding of literary characters is one of the first ways a young child has of making sense of what it is to be human.

**WHY DO CHILDREN READ LITERATURE?**

We all come to know more clearly who and what we are while reaching out, imaginatively, for what we might become. As the child dwells in and wonders at the lives lived in story, she comes to know both herself and the world and begins to see that world as something over which she, as a character in life, might exercise some control. The events of story are a means of exploration of the world, helping her to confirm, to illuminate, and to extend her own life experiences, in ways that give her power over them. Story gives public form to private meanings and thus helps those who receive its messages to reach out to other human beings in the world, knowing that they share some of the same concerns and feelings. Informational narratives are also important forms of children's literature and ways for young people to understand and appreciate their world and those who share it with them.

**Character Trait**

Good literature with character development themes has the power to develop, shape, and reinforces dispositions essential for instilling in students important core ethical values. Creating character themed lessons that combine high quality appropriate children’s literature with character education. Expertise in character
education ranked character traits and recommended the following character traits essential to include in a literacy-based character development curriculum: (1) caring, compassion, kindness, and empathy, (2) citizenship, (3) courage, (4) fairness, (5) honesty and trustworthiness, (6) integrity, (7) leadership, (8) perseverance in establishing and attaining goals, (9) respect, (10) responsibility, and (11) teamwork and cooperation.

Caring and kindness is manifested through helping others unconditionally and expecting nothing in return. It means a person has empathy for and shows compassion to others. A caring individual is one who is concerned about or interested in another person, animal, or situation. Individuals who possess this trait identify with and are concerned about others' feelings and needs. Be understanding and tolerant of different points of view and beliefs. Children who learn empathy, caring and compassion mature into adults who realize their actions affect others in both positive and negative ways. They understand that if they do something that is not in the best interest of another, they can cause that person unhappiness or pain. The books annotated in these lists were examined to ascertain which contain content suitable for inclusion in a character development program.

The research-based literacy activities are designed to promote and reinforce positive character traits and teach students specific life skills.

**The Steps in the Process are as Follows:**

1. The teacher will share the topic with the whole or small group.

   The teacher read aloud two stories *sangkuriang* and *malin kundang* in front of the class. The two stories are ancient Indonesian story. The *Sangkuriang* story from West Java and *malin kundang* from West Sumatra. Folktales are stories which have been passed down generation to generation through many years in the oral tradition.
The authors are unknown, but the stories hold universal truth and timeless appeal and often address and reflect the values of a group of people.

The first story: *Sangkuriang*

A long time ago, lived Dayang sumbi. She had a son, his name was Sangkuriang. Because of disobedience, Dayang sumbi cast away Sangkuriang. After many years in exile, Sangkuriang met a beautiful girl, and wanted to marry her. But he didn’t know that girl was Dayang Sumbing. But she realize that he was Sangkuriang before wedding day. So, she wanted to prevent the marriage, she asked Sangkuriang to build a dam on the river and a large boat to cross the river before sunrise. When Dayang Sumbi knew that his tasks almost completed, she asked her workers to spread silk clothes east of city to impression sunrise. Sangkuriang was fooled, and upon believing that he had failed, kicked the dam and the unfinished boat, resulting in severe flooding and the creation of Tangkuban Perahu from the hull of the boat.

The second story: *Malin kundang*

Long time ago, in a small village near the beach in West Sumatera, lived a woman and her son, Malin Kundang. Malin Kundang's father had passed away when he was a baby, and he had to live hard with his mother. Malin Kundang was a healthy, diligent and strong child. He usually went to the sea to catch fish, and brought it to his mother, or sold it in the town.

One day, when Malin Kundang was sailing as usual, he saw a merchant's ship which was being raided by a small band of pirates. With his brave and power, Malin Kundang defeated the pirates. The merchant was so happy and asked Malin Kundang to sail with him. Malin Kundang agreed.

Many years later, Malin Kundang became a wealthy merchant, with a huge ship, loads of trading goods, many ship crews, and a beautiful wife. In his journey, his
ship landed on a beach. The villagers recognized him, and the news ran fast in the
town: Malin Kundang became a rich man and now he is here. His mother, in deep
sadness after years of loneliness, ran to the beach to meet her beloved son again.

When the mother came, Malin Kundang, in front of his well-dressed wife and
his crews, denied to meet that old, poor and dirty woman. For three times she begged
Malin Kundang and for three times yelled at him. At last Malin Kundang said to her
"Enough, old woman! I have never had a mother like you, a dirty and ugly peasant!"
Then he ordered his crews to set sail. Enraged, she cursed Malin Kundang that he
would turn into a stone if he didn't apologize. Malin Kundang just laughed and set sail.
In the quiet sea, suddenly a thunderstorm came. His huge ship was wrecked and it was
too late for Malin Kundang to apologize. He was thrown by the wave out of his ship,
fell on a small island, and suddenly turned into stone.

The teacher also gives the paper story to each student. The teacher will ask students to
share their ideas about how the characters in the story showed. How is the character in
both stories.

2. They will participate in a group activity, students will take turns sharing their
feelings and idea about the topic under study. Only one person will speak at a time
and others are listening and waiting for their turn. Each group has opportunity to
do so. In this strategy there is no right or wrong answers – just lots of sharing and
discussing the topic in a trusting environment. Students are assured that what they
say will be heard and accepted without criticism from their teacher or peers.
Classmates are asked to listen in nonjudgmental manner to the speaker. Students
who do not choose to share are informed ahead of time that silence is an acceptable
response. No one is pressured at any time to contribute, instead students respond
"pass.
3. As each event is recalled, the teacher must coach students to avoid comments that put down others, such as I do not think anyone will agree with your idea…, or words like good or excellent are also forms of judgment. Teacher will emphasize the importance of showing others kindness no matter their status or position in life.

4. After this discussion, the teacher will hold another discussion about being kind to people regardless of their relative affluence or poverty, focusing that every person, regardless of their position in life, should be treated with kindness.

CONCLUSION

Literature is another way in promoting character education for children both inside or outside classroom setting. Literature is a means of exploration of the world, helping her to confirm, to illuminate, and to extend her own life experiences, in ways that give her power over them. Literature gives public form to private meanings and thus helps those who receive its messages to reach out to other human beings in the world. Learning and getting good character through fun activity.

REFERENCES
