



Language in the Online & Offline World

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the Online and Offline World 5:
The Amplitude**

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The Amplitude*

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CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: MAKING IT HAPPEN

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Abstract: Character education has recently emerged as the core issue of the national curriculum, and got much attention at both the central as well as district level. This new paradigm arises as a response to the growing moral crisis nationwide. Educators believe that literature can be a very powerful tool for character education to succeed. The use of children's literature as a pedagogical device is promising. And children's literature provides an effective vehicle for interweaving character education into existing curricula to address problems in everyday life. The research aims to explore how literature can be brought into the curriculum in helping to develop character traits in a meaningful, and substantial manner. It addresses some of the pertinent issues surrounding this important method of instruction. To accomplish the aim, a number of literatures on teaching literature were analyzed. The results of the research may add an additional academic data to the understanding of literature empowerment in language classroom.

Keywords: character education, teaching literature

Introduction

Character education has recently been viewed as the central issue of the national curriculum, and got much attention from educators, legislators, and parents at both the central as well as district level. This paradigm shift responses the current moral degradation that strikes nationwide.

Violence cases in education during 2015 was reported quiet high. Violence in a broader sense refers to actions or words which are intended to hurt people. From this point of view, a violence includes physical and mental aspects. In the context of education, the violence actors were not only students against students, but also teachers against students, and students and parents against teachers. For example, a girl student at one of Primary Schools in Padang was attacked collectively by her class fellows when learning activities is going on. Another case was that a girl student of Senior High School in Yogyakarta bullied mainly because of Hello Kitty tattoo. Moreover, a student in Surabaya cut off his friend's hands simply due to jealousy. (Republica.co.id, 15 January, 2016). A Teacher of SMPN 20 Kota Serang (Government Junior High School 20 in Serang City) committed sexual harassment over his 20th students. (Metrotvnews.com, 15 February 2016). A religious leader was arrested for his sexual abuses since 2009 against a young girl in Surabaya. (Metrotvnews.com, 15 February 2016). A 56 years-old man, a teacher of Islamic Studies at Primary School in Magelang was arrested after he was found guilty abusing six of his students sexually. (Kompas.com, 28 October, 2015).

The National Commission for Children Protection reports the increase percentage up to 50% of the students as an actor of violence or bully in school during 2015. Specifically, it was reported that there were 79 bullying cases and 103 brawl cases during 2015 in which the students play as an actor. Whereas in 2014 there were 67 bullying cases and 45 brawl cases in which the students play as an actor. Meanwhile, there were 147 bullying cases, and 87 brawl cases during 2015 in which the students were the victims. And, there were 159 bullying cases, and 113 brawl cases in 2014 in which the students were the victims. (Kompas.com, 15 January 2016).

The violence cases in education during 2014 and 2015

| Types of violence | 2014 | 2015 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|
| Students as bullying doers | 67 | 79 |
| Students as victims of bullying | 159 | 147 |
| Students as brawl doers | 46 | 103 |
| Students as victims of brawls | 147 | 87 |

The foregoing discussion confirms the number of students as bullying and brawl doers hikes significantly, whereas the number of students as the victims of bullying and brawl reduces positively. Another alarming report was released by the National Commission for Children Protection. The survey towards 4500 teenagers in 12 big cities in Indonesia showed that 97% of the respondents used to watch pornographic videos, 93% respondents experienced kissing his/her boy/girl-friend, 62.7% of the students of Senior High

School used to commit sexual intercourse, and 21% of them used to commit abortion. (antaranews.com, 19 March 2011). The recent survey towards the students of Junior High School in Bandung revealed that tenth of the respondents claimed to be commercial sex worker. Ironically, as Save the Children organization reports they were satisfied to get payment simply through top-up their mobile card.

The Ministry of Communication and Information reports that Indonesia ranks first in the world in terms of accessing pornographic web sites. Surprisingly, among the active browsers are the students of under thirteen. The research further indicates that 68% of the primary students used to access pornographic web sites. (<http://www.suarapembaruan.com/nasional/pornografi-di-kalangan-pelajar-mengerikan/4489126.2.2016>).

It is believed that a number of factors contribute to the present high rate of physical and sexual abuses. First, rapid development of information technology affects social behavior. With no systematic protection, the teens can easily access anything like pornography games, comics, images in which they are not supposed to. Second factor is liberal friendship. This might be a malign on the teens when no proper or lack of supervisions from the parents. Third, weak guidance and supervision from both social institutions like family and school. And finally, local government is less committed to implement laws and regulations on children protection such as Constitution No. 35 of 2014 on children protection, Presidential Instruction No. 5/2014 on National Movement of Anti Child Sexual Abuses, and Constitution No. 11/2012 on the System of criminal Court for Children. It is further deteriorated by society's lack of knowledge on the regulations for children protection. Moreover, Nitibaskara, a Professor of criminology at the University of Indonesia states three factors of sexual abuses against children. First, the doer suffers from pedophilia. Second, the doer is a psychopath. And the doer is conducting spiritual rites that demand him/her to commit sexual intercourse with a child of under thirteen.

Moral crisis has not only been experienced by the young generation but also by some corruptor leaders of the country. Corruption is the most dangerous malaise in the country so far. The Transparency International issued Corruption Perceptions Index 2015 of 168 countries in which Indonesia ranks 88 and scores 36 out of 100. (<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>).

To quote Mujiran as saying that education in Indonesia has contributed to the formation of corruption culture. Our education has failed to teach moral values to the learners as to make them become responsible and accountable. (2004: 5). A research has shown that educated people are not more intelligent than those who are not in which the former are supposed to be broad-minded, dedicated, creative, honest and the just, and love working. (Kompas: 2004).

All the above data reflect that education in this country is problematic. It needs serious solution. Morality is a mirror of a civilized nation. A nation is said to be existing when morality exists. It determines the existence of civilization and culture of a nation. And it reflects a character of a modern nation. The question is, where can morality as a character of a nation be learned from? This paper discusses the significance of literature for moral education; how to be good at literary works; and instructional strategies in literature class.

Discussion

Character education has been defined differently by experts in the field of character development. Hoge (2002) cited in Almerico (2014: 2) stated that character education is any overt or conscious effort to affect the development of desirable individual traits or qualities. It is described as curriculum specifically developed to teach children about the quality and traits of good character. It is a planned effort to develop noble character and cultivate core virtues that are worthy for the individual and society as a whole. 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.

Despite of various definitions and interpretations of character education are available 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. (Almerico, 2014: 2). And Lickona (1991) cited in Brynildssen (2002: 1) suggests a list of good character which includes responsibility, respect, tolerance, prudence, self-discipline, helpfulness, compassion, cooperation, courage, honesty, fairness, and democratic values. Researchers vary as to which specific traits need to include in character education program. However, character education must be designed to encompass the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality. It must help students understand the core values, adopt or commit to them, and then act upon them in their own lives. (Brynildssen, 2003: 2).

One way to bring character education into a complicated curriculum is to make it part of the literacy program by including character lessons in reading and language arts instruction through the vehicle of high quality children's literature.

Experts in the field of character education ranked character traits and recommended such essential traits to include in a literacy-based character development curriculum as: (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. These character traits are relatively neutral and universal in which people from different walks of life recognize them and they transcend religious and cultural beliefs.

Benefits of Character Education

Several studies showed the benefits of character development in school as follows:

1. It helped students' academic achievement and communication skills thus promoting a stronger sense of independence and self-confidence. It lead to the creation of trusting learning environments where students feel good about themselves and others.
2. It yielded in less absenteeism, fewer discipline problems, decreased referrals for misbehavior, a lower dropout rate, and higher performance scores on standardized achievement tests.
3. It had a positive effect on both character development and academic success.
4. It enhanced a child's success both in school and in life.

When schools are welcoming and supportive places, students are encouraged to attend, stay on task, and improve their levels of achievement.

The Significance of Literary Work in Character Education

In generic term literature refers to writings that are valued as works of art, especially fiction, drama, and poetry as contrasted with technical books and journalism. (Hornby, 1989: 728). It is compositions that tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotions, and analyze and advocate ideas. (Roberts V., 2003: 1). It includes texts which use language in ways which could be said to be literary or to have elements of literariness inherent in them including advertisements, jokes, funs, newspaper headlines, example of verbal play. (Carter and Mc Rae, 1996: 7). Musthafa defined literature as a work of that seeks to please the person who made it and the person who attends to it. It is anything that attracts readers, listeners, and/or viewers to express their response to it. In this sense, it can be in the form of written texts such as stories, novel, poems, drama, etc. audiovisuals including TV and video show, and things represented through sound arrangements. (1994: 52). Any form of expressions using language as its basis. It includes both written and verbal work, no matter it is beautiful work or not. For example, notes, letters, imagination, news, stories, poem, anecdote, graffiti, but even speech, prayer, and statements are called literature. (Wijaya, 2003: 2).

Literature represents valuable authentic material. And literary texts represent a valuable source of civilization, knowledge, and can easily provide stimulus for expressing different opinions. (Ibsen, 1995: 143). Educators have been viewing literature as a part of humanities. It is a media in which students can learn such values as moral, virtue, and wisdom, and develop their spiritual intelligence. Reading the good deeds of good and heroic people (embedded in literary work) leads the reader towards goodness and heroism. (Alwasilah, 2003: 31).

Roberts V. states that reading literature helps readers grow personally and intellectually. No matter how it is understood and interpreted. Reading literature opens doors of knowledge, stretches minds, develops imagination, increases understanding of differences and tolerance, and deepens the power of sympathy. It helps us see beauty in the world around us, links us with culture, philosophy, and religions of the world of which we are apart. It enables us recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times, helps us develop mature sensitivity and sense of pity for all living beings disregarding race, color, ethnic, religion etc. It trains us raise sense of equality among the human beings, supports ability to recognize and appreciate the beauty of natural order and arrangement for example through a well-structured song, a beautifully painted canvas, or a well-designed piece of sculpture and handicraft. It enables us to see worthiness of other people, exercises emotions through interest, concern, sympathy, tension, excitement, regret, fear, laughter, and hope. It enables us to develop perspectives on events that take place locally or globally, and it further helps us understand and control ourselves how to respond to those changing events. (2003: 2). It smoothens moral traits and helps human to be mature, leads to be independent thinkers, and gives room for freedom of expression. (Sarumpaet, 2002: viii). It provides opportunities to deconstruct and reconstruct meaning of the text (A. Teeuw, 1991: 18) which is very important for critical thinking exercises. Literature is one of the most powerful factors to shape and influence our life. And, therefore, it humanizes people.

Considering the significance of literature for character education, it is a high time to include it as a machine for character and nation building. Every individual from various walks of life and education level

seriously need to read literatures and learn from them. Literature deserves to be treated in totality and holistically in every corner of life in general and in language classroom in particular.

A piece of literature does not exist until it is being read. (Ibsen, 1995: 142) no matter how valuable a literary work is. From this point of view, the main activity of literature instruction is "reading".

Approaches to Teaching Reading Literature

This section deals with approaches to teaching reading literature and followed by techniques of teaching literature.

1. Reading-as-transmission

The main criterion of this model is "text centered". The meaning is embedded in the text and the reader has to find and retrieve meaning. In this condition, the reader is perceived to be passive for no involvement in meaning reconstruction. The role of the teacher who employs this model in reading activity is as a leader to "relate reading with correctness". This model aims at helping students develop reading skills to enable them extract meanings from the text. In a broader sense, this model leads them to approach reading halfheartedly, because to them reading means to reduce information through teacher's mediation as the only authority to judge its validity. This model is called one-way process of reading.

2. Reading-as-interaction

The second model of reading stresses the significance of the reader's interaction in building the meaning of the text. From this point of view, both the reader and the text are equal; at the same level. The reader is perceived as active participant. In the process of reading, according to this model, the reader is supposed to be fully engaged both his/her spirit and mind to comprehend and to interpret the text. As a result, comprehension or interpretation is "relative" that is to say influenced by the reader's personal idiosyncratic. In other words, the variety of interpretation is depending on one's life experience, attitudes, personal literary history, and what he/ she reads the text will vary.

Therefore, there is no absolute correct interpretation of a text, even though it does not mean that we cannot judge the relative (degree of) validity of differing interpretations of a single work. We can judge that relative validity through "reality" which is relatively constructed in a society and through linguistic conventions. The objective of this model is to let the learners experience themselves find meaning and meet their purpose of reading. (Musthafa, 1996: 4-8). This model is called "a dialectical approach" where each student will meet the text in his/her own way, and his/her understanding of the text is based on past experience and knowledge about literature and life. The learner's literary knowledge will help find the superstructure of the text, to discover features, determine genre, and to see how linguistic features convey a personal style. Past life experience determine the process of interpretation. As a matter of experience, the process of reading literature is determined by the reader's personality, intellectual capacity, influenced by emotions and attitudes. In this model, the teacher will have his/her own "teacher text"-that is, his/ her interpretation determined by individual factors like language and literary education and expectations of experiencing literature. Moreover, the teacher's interpretation determines the student's reading.

In this connection, the teacher's task is to plan a methodological approach to create dialectical reading where the many "students text" and the "teacher text" can become "a class text". And, therefore, audience shares common and rich experience, broad repertoire for appreciating literature, personal and autonomous "voice" in target language. (Ibsen: 1995, p.145). In this model, learners expose freedom of expression. However, it is essential to be noted that the teacher must be careful in choosing his/her strategies for text manipulation so that the "teacher text" will not be explored by the students in their own right. At the same time, the text must also be well chosen and be of the kind that needs teacher help for a fuller understanding.

3. Reading-as-exploration

The third model is, according to Purves (1993) as cited in Musthafa (1996:9) called "hermeneutic" reading. Purves stated further: ... meaning resides in the negotiation among readers in an interpretive community, not in the text, in authorial intention, or in the individual statement concerning the significance of the text. (p. 352). In this model, reading is considered as activity that leads the reader to explore the possibility of meanings, to interpret the text, to exercise arguments and speculations. Reading is an act that designs the establishment of interpretive community through reader's participation and characteristic of the text as an open document.

Techniques of Teaching Literature

A range of activities such as discussion, debate, research, role-playing, and essay writing or journal may be employed in the classroom to nurture student's literature skill.

1. Discussion

Learning is social process to interpret the embedded, expanded and redefined meaning. Leal (1999) cited in Brynildssen (2002: 2) states that, "Students' acquisition of knowledge is not limited to the personal construction of meaning, but is in fact extended, modified, and restructured as a result of the social construction of meaning". She cites Bleich (1978), who claimed, "It is not possible to 'have' an interpretation of a work of literature in isolation from a community."

Discussion as a method of teaching plays very important role to explore student's literary skill. Leal goes on to offer a strategy for engaging students in discussion. Her approach calls for students to individually keep running records of the character traits they find in a work of literature. (Note: the specific traits students track are pre-identified and defined by teacher and student collaboration). After reading and recording, students rank the traits they found by the number of times they appear. A small-group or whole-class discussion then follows, in which students compare their findings. In a study of middle-grade classrooms using this technique, Leal found that "...students became quite engaged not only in discussing character traits demonstrated by the book characters, but also went on to discuss these character traits in their own lives".

2. Debate

Research shows that debate is a promising approach to developing moral reflection. This approach calls for teams of students to advocate for opposing positions on an issue, then switch sides and advocate for the positions they initially opposed. When used in conjunction with literature, this method allows students to debate the often-complex issues found in their reading: Was this character justified in doing what he or she did? Are there circumstances under which the character would have been justified in acting differently? And so forth.

3. Research

Searching for further information-both online and in the library-can help students gain a more profound familiarity with a given character trait. They may be able to find examples of other characters exhibiting the trait in different circumstances and different ways, thereby broadening their scope of understanding. They may also be able to bring new information back to the class, thereby generating new conversational threads and bringing to light unexamined ideas.

4. Role-playing

Students can delve more deeply into the natures and motivations of the literary characters they are studying by role-playing imaginary interactions. This method can be especially useful when examining qualities related to resolving conflict and living peaceably. "Role-playing a character's conflict and resolution can be effective 'practice' for times when students actually become involved in personal conflict" (Otten, 2002, p. 82).

5. Journal Keeping or Essay Writing

These activities allow students to reflect on their learning and apply it to their own lives. After the class studies a character trait, as illustrated in a book or story, the students write their personal responses in their journals (or in an essay), supported by a series of teacher-directed, open-ended questions. For example, the teacher might ask, "What do you think you would have done if you had been in that person's position?" or "Can you think of a better way he or she might have handled the situation?". (Brynildssen, 2002: 2-3).

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