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PREFACE

The quality of education is in fact inseparable from the quality of the students' character. Education is considered successful when it can change the students' behavior and attitudes toward life. It implies the meaning that the better the quality of the students, the better their character will be. If in recent years students tend to be immoral, doing anarchism, cheating, being irresponsible, being intolerant, it shows an indication of the failure of the education itself. In response to this problem, the English Education Department of IKIP PGRI Semarang hosted TEFLIN International Conference by taking the theme of "Language Teaching and Character Building."

This conference explores approaches, issues and questions related to the character building in language teaching. Therefore, the topic areas include (1) the concepts of character building, (2) method and material development in character based language teaching, (3) trends in the linguistics study of English for science and technology, (4) courses assessment and evaluation, (5) the role of IT in language teaching, (7) translation in language teaching.

In this opportunity, the committee extends deepest gratitude and high appreciation to all contributors to make this conference possible. It is realized that the publication of this proceeding is still far from being perfect; however, hopefully it will be useful for the readers as a reference for enriching their knowledge on language teaching and character building.

Semarang November 3, 2011

Chair of the Committee

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Building Students' Character through the Teaching of Writing

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Abstract

At present, the government of the Republic of Indonesia through the Ministry of National Education is in a high spirit to carry out education that emphasizes on the building of students' character. In order that the program is successful, all components of community should be responsible. Putting the responsibility of building students' character just on the teachers' shoulder and school is actually irresponsible. It should be developed, catered and nurtured in schools, at home and most importantly in community. It is these three environments that shape one's character. Of course, the character imposed on students in education is the one which qualifies them as good persons. In the context of character education in schools, it is expected that all the courses taught in all levels and in all kinds of education are directed to the building of good character. Writing as one of the subjects has a very promising potential to be able to help students build their character. It is about this issue that this article tries to explore.

Key words: character, character education, writing

INTRODUCTION

Though I do not have statistics of the crimes in this country, I believe that the quantity as well as the quality of crimes in Indonesia seems to increase every day. The prevalence of drug abuse, prostitution, trafficking, abortion, sexual harassment, sex intercourse before marriage, robbery, theft, corruption, etc. seem to increase every day. News from radios, newspapers, magazines, or televisions may confirm this claim. So far it is not known for sure yet why these crimes increase. Some people believe that all these crimes happen because of economic crises. Some others think that the crimes occur because of political pressures. Still some others argue that the crimes happen because of the incapability of government to implement law enforcement. Last but not least, there is other view claiming that the crimes happen because the people or the actors committed the crimes have very low commitment, and even, do not want to make good character at all as the primary guidance of all their thought, attitude, and actions. For, good character, in accordance with Lickona (1991 as cited in Vessels and Huitl, 2005) consists of knowing the good, desiring the good and doing the good—habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action.

Character Education

In response to the above issues, the government of the Republic of Indonesia is now launching a form of education which is based on character known as “character education”. The
purpose of character education in Indonesia might be the same as the purpose of character education in other countries, i.e. to make students not only smart but also good (Purpel & Ryan, 1976 as cited in Vessels and Huit, 2005). This education is planned to be implemented in all levels of education either in primary, secondary, and tertiary and in all types of education.

Character in accordance with Berkowitz, et al. (2005) is, among others, defined as “the composite of those psychological characteristics that impact the child’s capacity and tendency to be an effective moral agent, i.e. to be socially and personally responsible, ethical, and self-managed” (p. 2). Character Education Partnership (CEP) defines character education as a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share (as cited by Berkowitz, et al., 2005).

If we closely pay attention to the definition above, there are some important points that attract us to discuss further. First, character education is a national movement. This implies that all components of our nation should get involved in this program. It is irresponsible then to put the burden and responsibility of educating students’ character only on teachers’ shoulder. Parents, educators, politicians, government officials, businessmen, etc. should also be responsible for this program.

Second, character education is intended to foster ethical values. What is meant by ethical values? According to Vessels and Huit (2005) there are four ethical values to foster. They are: ethical sensitivity, ethical judgment, ethical motivation, and ethical action. Further, the four ethical values are elaborated as follow. Ethical sensitivity is defined as the perception of moral and social situations, including the ability to consider possible actions and their repercussions in terms of the people involved. Ethical judgment is understood as the consideration of possible alternative actions and the rationale for selecting one or more as the best. Ethical motivation is explained as the selection of moral values most relevant in the situation and the commitment to act on that selection. Whereas ethical action is elaborated as the ego strength combined with the psychological and social skills necessary to carry out the selected alternative.

Third, character education is intended to cater responsibility. Responsibility as defined by Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2003) is something that is one’s job or duty to deal with. The learner should be catered and nurtured to be responsible for anything he or she does either for the sake of himself or herself, his or her family, his or her community, and for the whole nation. If one fulfills his or her job rightfully and properly he or she deserves to get appreciation from the other(s). However, if one fails to perform his or her duty rightfully and properly, a responsible person will not try to find fault and blame others. Instead, he or she is ready to be the one who should be blamed and criticized by the public.

Fourth, character education is intended to educate students to care other people. Having the character of caring other people is as important as caring oneself. The impact of this character is that if he or she finds other people having no food, for instance, he or she will feel upset and try to find ways to help. If he or she finds that children of the same age of his or hers drop out from school because they cannot afford the school fee, he or she will feel upset about them and try to help them. If he or she finds an old man or woman afraid of crossing a busy and crowded traffic, he or she will be ready to offer assistance. In short, caring other people means, among others, “to think that something is important and to feel interested in it or upset about it” (Cambridge Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, 2003). This means that the learners may not neglect, ignore, or underestimate anyone or anything.

Fifth, character education necessitates modeling. This means that in order that the students are able to attain and internalize the values of good character within themselves a
model of good character should be demonstrated. For example, if we want our children to be fair and honest, it is imperative then that a good model of fairness and honesty should be modeled by all components of nation. At home, they must be modeled by parents. At schools, they must be modeled by teachers. In political business, they must be modeled by politicians. In running government, they must be modeled by government officials, and in interpersonal and social relationship, the model should be demonstrated and shown by the whole members of community at large. So as with the other good characters, the commitment of all components of the community to do the good should be the priority. Without the availability of a model it is doubted that the program character education will result in good result.

Finally, character education involves the teaching of good character. Though teaching good characters seems to be simpler than giving model of good character, teaching good character intentionally and elaborately is still needed. According to Narvaez and Lapsley (no year), there are two strategies relating to this: “minimalist” strategy and “maximalist” approach. A “minimalist” strategy requires teacher educators to make explicit the hidden moral education curriculum and reveal the inextricable linkage between the best practice instruction and moral character outcomes. Second, the “maximalist” approach requires pre-service teachers to learn a tool kit of pedagogical strategies that target moral character directly as a curricular goal (p. 1).

Why is character education necessary? Is there any evidence that character education fixes misbehaves or wrong deeds? The results of some research indicate positive effect of character education on students’ behavior. For instance, the research conducted in South Dakota from 1998 – 2000 by Walsh-Vetter, Moss and Wright (as cited in Bischalaney, 2009) found the decrease in crime and drug use. They also found that more exposure students have to the program the better they behaved. Sweeney (2008) reports that between 1993 and 2003, the percentage of high school students who reported involvement in a fight (at school or elsewhere) declined from 42 percent to 33 percent. Other indication of the effectiveness of this program is also shown by other study revealed by Sweeney (2008:4), “the rate of in-school theft and the number of students who reported skipping school decreased from 1992 to 2003”.

The Essence of Character Education

The essence of character education is actually teaching morality. What is morality? According to Damon (1988 as cited in Vessels and Huitn, 2005) morality is defined as (1) an evaluative orientation that distinguishes good and bad, (2) a sense of obligation toward standards of a social collective, (3) a sense of responsibility for acting out of concern for others, (4) a concern for the rights of others, (5) a commitment to honesty in inter-personal relationships, and (6) a state of mind that causes of negative emotional reactions to immoral acts (p. 2).

We cannot imagine what will happen if one does not care about morality anymore. What will happen if one does anything he or she likes without considering whether it is good or bad; if the social standards agreed collectively by the society are neglected; if one does not care to others anymore; if one does not appreciate the rights of others; if one does not appreciate honesty anymore in conducting interpersonal relationships; and if one does not react negatively to immoral acts.

Components of Character of Education

As stated earlier that character education has the purpose to help the students to build good character covering: knowing the good, desiring to do the good, and doing the good. Children must understand what honesty means and they must be able to reason about and
interpret each situation, and then decide how to apply the principles of honesty. Children must be committed to doing what they know is right. They must be able to understand the perspectives of others, to consider how others feel, and to develop an active moral conscience. Children need opportunities to practice the social and emotional skills necessary for doing what is right but difficult, and to experience the core values in their lives.

According to a guide book provided for Boy Scout of America (2003) the core values that are expected to be able to build children’s character are: citizenship, compassion, cooperation, courage, faith, health and fitness, honesty, perseverance, positive attitude, resourcefulness, respect, and responsibility. Citizenship means contributing service and showing responsibility to local, state, and national communities; compassion is defined as being kind and considerate, and showing concern for the well-being of others; cooperation is defined as being helpful and working together with others toward a common goal; courage is defined as being brave and doing what is right regardless of our fears, the difficulties, or the consequences; faith is defined as having inner strength and confidence based on our trust in God; health and fitness are defined as being personally committed to keeping our minds and bodies clean and fit; honesty is defined as telling the truth and being worthy of trust; perseverance is defined as sticking with something and not giving up, even if it is difficult; positive attitude is defined as being cheerful and setting our minds to look for and find the best in all situations; resourcefulness is defined as using human and other resources to their fullest; respect is defined as showing regard for the worth of something or someone; and responsibility is defined as fulfilling our duty to God, country, other people, and ourselves.

In conclusion, character education is expected to be able to yield Indonesian generation who know the good, have desire to do the good, and do the good. In other words character education involves head, heart, and hand.

Building Students’ Character through Writing

Writing as one of the courses taught should also play its role in the effort of building students’ character. Writing is expected to enable the learners to know the good, to have desire to do the good, and to do the good through. There are two types of writing that are assumed to fulfill these missions. They are expository writing and argumentative writing.

The meaning of writing

Lots of definition of writing have been given by the experts. River (1980), for example, defines writing in different angles. If it is the act of putting down in conventional graphic form something which has been spoken, it is called notation. If the student is asked to discriminate various sounds, it is called spelling. If it involves students in grammatical exercises, the construction of simple dialogues, and uncomplicated translation exercises, it is called writing practice. And when it refers to the expression of ideas in a consecutive way, according to the graphic conventions of the language, it is called composition.

Byrne (1984), other expert, defines writing as the production of a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. For Troyka (1987), writing is understood as a way of communicating a message to a reader for a purpose. Hammond (1989), on the other hand, defines writing as a complex task which requires everything from getting your spelling right to making your voice distinctive enough to be heard. From the definitions discussed above it can be concluded that writing intended in this paper is the way of expressing and communicating ideas through a written language. The question is “How can writing be used as a means of building students’ character?”
The Nature of Expository Writing

Now, we come to the discussion of the nature of expository writing. An exposition, in accordance with Anderson and Anderson (2003:122), “is a piece of text that presents one side of an issue”. This text is intended to persuade the reader (written text) or listener (oral text) by presenting one side of an argument. In order that the reader or the listener is persuaded, the argument put forwarded should be convincing. Anderson and Anderson (2003) claim that a good argument or persuasion should clearly express a point of view or thesis. The thesis includes what the writer hopes to prove, the subject of the text, a statement of what the writer believes, and the line of arguments. Another way of presenting a good argument or persuasion as suggested by Anderson and Anderson (2003) is by using generalizations or reasons to support the argument. The last way of presenting argument or persuasion as suggested by Anderson and Anderson (2003) is by using evidence to prove the generalizations or support the reasons. There are some choices recommended. The writer may use either one or the combination of the following: the result of research, expert opinions, or testimony (quotes).

It is agreed that a writer is at the same time also a reader. It is reasonable then that while he or she is writing, the writer should also be critical to what he or she is writing. For instance, he or she should ask himself or herself whether the generalization made true?; whether a single case proves that other cases always happen?; whether what he or she is writing telling the truth?; whether he or she is exaggerating or stretching the truth; and whether the statements quoted are from real experts or just from quacks (Anderson and Anderson, 2003).

The Nature of Argumentative Writing

Argumentative writing is defined by Anker (1998) as writing that takes a position on an issue and defends it with evidence—to persuade someone else of the position. Argument in general in accordance with Smalley, et al. (2001:281) involves, “one side gives an opinion and offers reasons in support of it, and the other side gives a different opinion and offers reasons in support of his or her stand”. Specifically for argumentative writing it is one kind of writing that attempts to change the reader’s mind, to convince the reader to agree with the point of view or opinions of the writer. Therefore, Smalley, et al., (2001), suggest that argumentative essay should be highly persuasive and logical.

There are a number of ways to support an argument: using facts, quoting the opinions of experts, and giving example. Among the three methods, showing the facts is believed to be the most powerful support. Facts, in accordance with Smalley, et al. (2003), include data that have been objectively proved and are generally accepted, such as historical facts, scientific data, statistics, and so forth. Quoting the opinions of the experts is also recommended to support an argument. While example, it is suggested to be typical to prove the case.

In the context of character building, a basic question can be raised: “What lessons that can be learned from this writing course? There are some advantages that can be profited from writing class. First, writing teaches the writer to be able to present his or her ideas clearly so that misunderstanding in the part of the reader can be avoided. Second, writing teaches a writer to become cautious in making generalization; without enough data he or she cannot make any generalization. Third, writing teaches a writer that he or she may not tell a lie. Fourth, writing teaches a writer not to exaggerate beyond the truth, and finally, writing teaches a writer to show himself or herself as a real expert.
CONCLUSION

From the discussion we have so far, you may agree with me that building students' character can be done through different subject matters taught at school, included writing course. In writing course, two types of writing are believed to be potential for building students' character. They are expository writing and argumentative writing.

Reference


Biodata:

Abdul Muth’im was born on June 6, 1955. In 1995 he graduated from PPS IKIP Malang. He has been speaker in some local, national and international seminars and conferences. He also got involved in CTL training held in Malang and in Seattle, US in 2002. He has written two books in the field of English teaching and learning. Now, he is an S3 student of the State University of Malang.