# BUILDING STUDENTS' POSITIVE CHARACTERS USING CHILDREN LITERATURE AND DRAMA AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## Abstract

Education, nowadays, puts much pressure on character building. Developing good character is first a parental responsibility, but the task must also be shared with schools and the broader community. Good character is developed over time through character education. The goals of character education are thus essentially the goals of raising good children: youth who understand, care about, and act upon the core ethical values that make for a productive, just, and democratic society. In addition, building good characters for young learners is very necessary since the basic and fundamental education is well built for the young. An early character education establishes a reinforcing system of positive influences that help youth to deal effectively with life and avoid becoming involved in negative behaviors. Based on the government regulation No. 17 in 2010, the main goal of education in the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia focuses on character education. Character education is given as integrated materials in the thematic subjects. During the implementation of 2013 curriculum at some schools, the writers observe that the materials for English which can also develop good characters still need variation. Therefore, the writers propose children literature and drama as a challenging strategy to build students' good characters because they have contribution in building character education. When using drama as one of the genres in literature, the goals of teaching and learning process can be more than linguistic. Drama not only encourages children to speak but also gives them the chance to communicate, even with limited language, using nonverbal communication. Drama or dramatizing a text makes language more meaningful and memorable than drilling or mechanical repetition. In addition, teachers of English can work on ideas and issues than run through the curriculum. Important messages can be conveyed and explored through sketches and role plays. Drama can also be used to introduce the culture of the new language through stories and customs and with a context for different kinds of behaviour. Therefore, drama will provide the suitable atmosphere for students to build good characters during the teaching and learning process because drama is a means for developing language skills, encouraging social interaction and group participation and teaching children how to listen and respond appropriately. Discussing and differentiating good and bad characters of the story will teach students to always have and build good characters in their life, and avoid themselves to build and perform bad characters for their life. In addition, the process of practicing drama in the classroom will lead to the practice of building good characters among the students themselves.

**Keywords:** Character education, young learners, children's literature, drama.

## INTRODUCTION

Schools today face enormous challenges in educating all of the young people in their charge. In addition to provide youth with basic academic knowledge and skills, and promote their character development, schools have increasingly been called upon to play a primary role in helping to solve a variety of social problems among youth (Battistich, 2011).

Education nowadays does not place cognitive as the first priority as the previous curriculum did. By the existence of 2013 curriculum, education puts much pressure on character building. Battistich (2011) mentions that the goals of character education are thus essentially the goals of raising

good children: youth who understand, care about, and act upon the core ethical values (such as diligence, compassion, integrity, and fairness) that make for a productive, just, and democratic society.

Furthermore, research suggests that comprehensive, high quality character education, is not only effective at promoting the development of good character, but is a promising approach to the prevention of a wide range of contemporary problems. These include aggressive and antisocial behaviors, drug use, precocious sexual activity, criminal activities, academic under-achievement, and school failure (Battistich, 2011)

2013 Curriculum does not put English as a compulsary subject for elementary students. In this case, schools may or may not decide to use English as a local content subject. This idea is contrary to Cameron (2001) who stated that it has long been hypothesized that children learn a second language better than adults. This idea is often used to support early introduction of foreign language teaching. The critical period hypothesis is a special period for learning languages during childhood. In relation to the above statement, Moon (2005) said that when children start learning English at primary school, they will increase the overall time for English and in the long term achieve a higher level of proficiency than those starting later.

Dealing with English learning process, Coltrane (2003) states that children's early phase of language learning can create positive attitudes and a lifelong interest in the language if it is done appropriately. Curriculum and materials need to provide learning experiences which are motivating, suited to their cognitive and linguistic levels and take account of their special instincts and preffered ways of learning. Many people agree that young learners need an approach with characteristics, such as: activity based; based on here and now/ use of concrete materials, contextualized, focused on communication (meaning) rather than form, multi sensory, play and fun oriented, socially oriented, content/topic based or cross-curricular, with a strong oral emphasis initially especially with younger learners, and plenty of teacher support and scaffolding.

In addition, Thi Cam Le (2005) stated that in the teaching and learning process where classroom is often the only source of English, materials play a crucial role in exposing learners to the language. In the process of teaching and learning, we cannot separete it with literary test. Literary text is a wide range of texts that tell a story to make a point, express a personal opinion or provide an enjoyable experience. There are some kinds of literary texts; they are all written works, such as novels, poems, plays or drama, short stories and other literature sources.

Children's literature can motivate the students' interest to learn a new language. Bringing in children's literature into English language class can create opportunities for the students to practice language in a more natural way (Rigg& Allen, 1989; cited in Liu:189).

Drama offers an excellent opportunity for students to develop fluency in English. In accordance with the above statement, the writer considers drama as a motivating material at early learning phase. Zalta (2006) claims that drama provide meaningful and enjoyable language practise, encourage learners to explore the wonderful world and develop students' intelligence by stimulating their imagination and creativity.

During the implementation of 2013 curriculum at some schools, the writers observe that the materials for English, especially for building character education are not available yet. The materials are not attractive enough for young learners in which they just focus on vocabulary and grammar exercises. In order to support earlier character education at elementary school level, the writers would like to do some discussions on the basis of a problem formulated as " How do children's literature and drama build students' character education?" The discussion of this paper is expected to be useful for

teachers of English in order to develop character education in the process of teaching English to young learners.

## DISSCUSSION
### English in the 2013 curriculum

Based on the government regulation No. 17 in 2010, the main goal of education in the 2013 Curriculum in Indonesia focuses on character education. The education process is aimed at developing students' competence in order to: (a) believe in God, have a good personality and atitude, (b) be knowledgable, crtitical, creative and innovative, (c) be healthy, self reliant and confident, and (d) be tolerable, democratic, responsible and have a social awareness. Character education is given as integrated materials in the thematic subjects starting from the first grade to the sixth.

In the 2013 Curriculum, English is not listed as a compulsary subject for elementary school level, but English is still taught as one of the local contents as it was in the previous curriculum. Therefore, it is optional. In other words, the decision to put English as a local content subject in school depends on the regulation of the school itself (Nuh, 2013).

As a local content subject, the writers assume that the English materials, objectives and the goals are not clearly stated in the 2013 curriculum. On the basis of the preliminary observation, the teaching and learning process done in most Engling classrooms are still dominated by vocabulary and grammar teaching, which have nothing to do with early character education. In this paper, the writers assume that schools need to improve their English teaching strategy by using children's literature and drama as the alternative to support early character education in English language teaching. Therefore, children's literature and drama may serve as the facilitator for character development.

In relation to the above assumption, Coltrane (2003) states that early language learning can create a positive attitudes and lifelong interest in the language if it is done appropriately. So, the curriculum and materials need to provide learning experiences which are motivating, suited to their cognitive and linguistic levels and take account of their special instincts and preferred ways of learning. Many people agree that young learners need an experiential approach with characteristics, such as: activity based, based on here/now use of concrete materials, contextualized, focused on communication rather than form, multi-sensory, play and fun oriented, socially oriented, content/topic based or cross curricular, with a strong oral emphasis initially especially with younger learners, plenty of teacher support and scaffolding, content chosen on the basis of children's cognitive level and some age-appropriate language awareness/noticing activities.

### Teaching Young Learners

Teaching young learners is different from teaching adults. According to Klein (2005:12), young children tend to change their mood every other minute, and they find it extremely difficult to sit still. On the other hand, they show a greater motivation than adults to do things that appeal to them. In addition, Ashworth and Wakefield (2005:3) claim that all young children are highly motivated to learn language.

Harmer (1985; cited in Sosiowati, 2003) says that young learners are curious, like to seek teacher approval, tend to be bored very easily, and do not like sitting and listening for a long time.However, the curiosity and sufficient notices and appreciation from their teacher will motivate them to do something. Furthermore, they require constant changes of activities; and they need to be involved in something active and appreciated by their teacher.

In order to support English language teaching in the classroom, teachers should have some competencies, especially the competencies to teach English to young learners. Linse (2006) mentions three characteristics of competent EYL teachers. The characteristics are as follow: (1) YL teachers need to have a very good language skills because they provide the main language input for children who may have limited exposure outside the classroom. They need good interaction skill in order to use the kind of activity based and interactive methods which seem most suitable for young learners. They also need a flexibility to be able to adjust their language to the children's level. Knowledge of English so they can provide feedback, and a rich knowledge of the culture so as to get children interested, (2) YL teachers need a knowledge of how children learn foreign languages and appropriate teaching strategies for teaching English so as to create interest in learning English and (3) YL teachers need to have knowledge of children's cognitive, linguistic and emotional development as these impacts on their foreign language learning.

In addition, there is also a multitude of different ways in which character education is taught for the children. Some schools may have the character education traits included in the school rules and guidelines (Prestwich, 2004; cited in Tyra:4). The types of character education programs use different methods to teach children about different character traits to help them strive morally, socially, and academically, but one of the most important models of character education is the teacher (Tyra: 4).

**Character Education**

Character refers to a much broader constellation of attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and skills. It is more than simply avoiding involvement in socially undesirable behaviors. Character includes attitudes such as the desire to do one's best and being concerned about the welfare of others; intellectual capacities such as critical thinking and moral reasoning; behaviors such as being honest and responsible, and standing up for moral principles in the face of injustice; interpersonal and emotional skills that enable us to interact effectively with others in a variety of circumstances; and the commitment to contribute to one's community and society. Stated simply, character is the realization of one's positive development as a person—intellectually, socially, emotionally, and ethically (Battistich, 2011).

The social, ethical, and emotional development of young people is just as important as the academic development. As Theodore Roosevelt stated: "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." After all, we know that good workers, citizens, parents, and neighbors all have their roots in good character. Therefore, it is critical to create schools that simultaneously foster character development and promote learning. Further, Park (2009) mentions that recent research findings show that character strengths are related to academic success, life satisfaction, and well-being for children and youth.

Character education deliberates the use of all dimensions of school life to foster optimal character development. The goals of character education are thus essentially the goals of raising good children: youth who understand, care about, and act upon the core ethical values (such as diligence, compassion, integrity, and fairness) that make for a productive, just, and democratic society. Effective character education involves creating the kinds of classroom and school environments that enable all students, without exception, to realize their potential to achieve these vital goals (Battitish, 2011).

Building good characters for young learners is very necessary since the basic and fundamental education is well built for the young. Varying "age appropriate" strategies and practices are being successfully applied to all grade levels from teaching social and emotional skills in the earliest grades, to service learning and prejudice reduction in secondary schools. Therefore, it is important to set a

strong foundation during the earlier grades and to reinforce and build upon that foundation during the later grades.

Below is the list of the ten essential Character Education traits, which South Carolina Department of Education put in their Character Education Toolkit (2009):

- o **Respect:** to show high regard for authority, other people, self, and country
- o **Honesty:** to always be fair and straightforward in conduct
- **Cooperation:** to play together or work well with others to accomplish a common goal
- **Good Citizenship:** to be actively engaged in demonstrating pride and responsibility in self, school, community, and country
- o **Responsibility:** to be held accountable for your own actions
- o **Self-discipline:** to demonstrate the ability to control yourself in all situations
- **Caring:** to demonstrate concern through kindness and acceptance while meeting the needs of self and others
- **Kindness:** to be considerate, courteous, helpful, and understanding of others' feelings and beliefs
- o **Fairness:** to play by the rules, to be open-minded to the viewpoints of others
- o **Dependability:** to be counted on or trusted.

Through evaluation studies, the impact of character education can be seen through changes in school environment and student attitudes and behavior. For example, many character education schools are reporting reduced violence, discipline referrals and vandalism, and improved attendance and academic performance.

### Children's Literature

Literature can be a good way to teach character education because :literature lends itself to the teaching of specific moral dilemmas and the examining of specific character traits" (Prestwich, 2004:143; cited in Tyra,5).

Otten (2002) states that children's literature or reading stories leads directly to character development. Ordinarily fiction does not intend to teach something specific, such as, being honest pays dividends. There are many books that helped us to grow, that pushed us to rethink our views, perhaps even brought about a change in our standards. in other words, the books influenced our character and helped to make us the person we are today. Whether told in the books of young children or adults, stories give the reader the vicarious experience of living through the trials and thrills of characters in a book. With reflection, the reader can decide how he or she would have responded to the decisions the fictional character made. Each of those reflections and decisions gradually influences the thoughts and actions of the reader.

The content of children's literature can motivate the interest of students to learn a new language. Bringing in children's literature into English language class can also create opportunities for language learners to practice language in purposeful ways, and the experiences of reading children's literature encourages language learners to construct meaning and to engage in active reading (Rigg& Allen, 1989; cited in Liu:189).

Among types of children's literature, the picture book is the one that has been suggested and used often by teachers because both the pictures and the text work interdependently to tell a story, and the language-rich illustrations create a rich contextualization (Spangenberg-Urbschat&Prtichard, 1994; Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; cited in Liu, 191)

It is important to select books to support student learning from every genre of children's literature (Popps, 2005:85). A literary genre is a specific kind of literature, such as biography, poetry, or historical fiction, and each genre has certain characteristics that distinguish it from the others. Moreover, there are certain characters that can be learn from each of the story.

Fables are stories in which animals behave like humans. Their purpose is to illustrate human foibles or to teach a lesson. Representing human struggles and feelings is an essential part of good story telling.

Human beings, in reading the fables and reflecting on them, can see that while human have the same characteristics that lead the animals into situations of unequality and injustice, they also have unique characteristic of reason that enables them to reflect on the lessons found in the fables, plan for the future and change their environment and behaviour (Clayton, 2008:198).

The most famous of these are Aesop's Fables (Aesop, 1990), a collection of stories that demonstrate the consequences of greed, impatience, vanity, or ignorance. In this study, the writers tend to use fables as the sort of children's literature to build character education

**Drama as a learning method in ELT**

Why use drama activities? Zalta (2006) states that drama motivates children and builds confidence. It helps children to activate language and have fun. Using drama activities has clear advantages for language learning. It encourages children to speak and give them the chance to communicate, even with limited language, using nonverbal communication, such as body movements and facial expressions. In short, drama involves children at many level; through their bodies, minds, emotions, language and social interaction.

Phillips (2000) suggests that dramatizing is a better word for this than drama. Dramatizing means that children become actively involved in a text. This personalization makes language more meaningful and memorable than drilling or mechanical repetition.

Further, when using drama, language learning aims can be more than linguistic. Teachers of English can use topics from other subjects. For example, children can act out scenes from history. They can work on ideas and issues that run through the curriculum, such as respect for the environment and road safety. Important messages can be conveyed and explored through sketches and role plays. Drama can also be used to introduce the culture of the new language through stories and customs and with a context for working and different kinds of behaviour (Zalta, 2006).

Doyon (2000) in Dailey (2009) mentions that teachers of English in Japan often struggle with the problem of passivity. Shyness, insecurity and low participation not only make lessons frustrating, but also negatively affect practice time and overall development. Passivity creates a downward spiral where insufficient speaking practice contributes to low speaking proficiency which, in turn, affects self confidence. Insecurity causes shyness and reluctence to speak up in class.

On the basis of the problem faced by teachers of English in Japan, Dailey (2009) In his study, taught English through drama in order to stimulate participation and speaking practice to thirteen students at a small commercial business college at Fukuoka. In his study, he found that all 13 students volutarily joined this class expressing interest in drama and improving their Englsih speaking ability, they demonstrated more participation and confidence. The teacher's acting or directing may have also contributed to the project success. Enthusiactic demonstations and passion for theather may have inspired students to overcome their inhibitions. Unachieved goal in which students continued to make mistakes. However, student appeared less afraid of making mistakes, less embarassed and began to enjoy learning.

Gaudard (1990; cited in Hu, 2011:5) claimed drama makes students inevitably immersed in a social milieu and create more experience for students learning how to get along with other people. The value of drama lies in the creative process and its effective opportunity for working with others. Hu (2011) claims that this kind of active cooperation makes every student feel responsible for their task; even some students will become confident and engaged when they take some roles in the activity. Students' initiative will be explored through drama. They will concentrate more on their work instead of being distracted. The teacher's role is just a timer or conductor who is responsible for giving some directions.

Meanwhile, the process of practicing drama in the classroom will lead to the practice of building good characters for the students. Students will face a lot of opportunities to build good characters among their friends as well as their teachers. For example, drama can build the characters of (1) developing skills in listening, decision making, and citizenship, (2) understanding the importance of respecting others, (3) understanding that everybody is different and that it is natural to make mistakes, (4) identifying people (in this case can be the teachers as well as their friends) children can trust, (5) introducing responsibility, (6) developing social skills and facilitating cooperation by having children work in groups, and (7) enhancing self-esteem (Gower, 2001).

**Using Children's Literature and Drama for Building students' positive characters**

Zalta (2006) claims that in order to use children's literature and drama in English language teaching at elementary level, the students need to transform the stories into a drama using the steps as follow:

1. First of all, the teacher should choose a simple story that students have been studying.
2. Then, to create a script for the story with as many parts as there are students in your class. Note that there are several students playing the same part. For instance, the teacher could have several students playing the role in the script.
3. After that, have students prepare costumes and props.
4. Finally, put on the play for other classes and/or parents

In using children's literature and drama in this paper, the writers would like to do some adaptation in order to develop the students' character education. The steps are as follow:

*Reading comprehension*

At the beginning step, teacher will read on a short story with the genre of fable, such as "The Three Little Pigs". The story will be read aloud and discussed in order that the students comprehend it. The discussion is also used by both teacher and students to explore and recognize some good and bad characters exposed in the story and the moral lessons as well.

*Preparing the drama*

First, teacher will create a simple script for students to act out. Next, students will practice the script. In this step, the students will have their roles based on the characters and do rehearsal. They will have to work cooperatively to prepare their drama. Here teacher will just observe and encourage the exploration of some positive characters through their involvement in the group activity.

In this step the teacher has a very great opportunity to observe, explore, and encourage the occurance of character education among the students. The teacher will observe how the students behave among their friends as well as how the students behave towards him/*her* as the teacher. Here, the teacher will identify and classify the students' characters in terms of the positive and negative ones appeared during the interaction in the classroom. In the process of classification, teacher merely divides the expected outcome in terms of the positive and negative characters. The positive characters

are characterized based on doing what is expected (e.g. responsible, self-reliant, confident, respectful, creative, etc). Meanwhile, the negative characters are characterized based on the existance of some unexpected characters. For example, the students works only when reminded, do not work at all, and even bother others. Finally, the teacher will encourage the students by giving rewards and reinforcement. The positive characters will be praised, while the negative characters will be reminded to be eliminated from the students way of behave. Here the role of teacher is very important as mentioned previously.

### Performing the drama

In this final step, the students will perform their drama as a result of the combination of their language learning process and their positive character development through their involvement and cooperation during the second step. They can put on the play for other classes and/or parents in order to show their learning outcome.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Character is vital force for positive development and societal well-being. Character strengths play important roles in positive youth development, not only preventing problems, but also enabling conditions that promote thriving and flourishing. Children sets of character strengths are happier, do better at school, are more popular among peers, and have fewer psychological and behavior problems. These strengths can be developed and strengthened by appropriate parenting, schooling, various youth development programs, and healthy communities.

The above assumption may become a fundamental or the new paradigm in 2013 curriculum which places the importance on character education. In order to develop character education in EYL setting, the writers assume that there should be an interesting material and method than enable language practise and character development. In this paper, the writers assume that children's literature and drama may serve to facilitate the ELT. The use of children's literature and drama has significant place in the young learner classroom. The activities provide meaningful and enjoyable language practise as well as develop the atmosphere of character education.

Finally, in order to optimize character education, it is suggested that schools and parents must work together in this direction in order to inculcate moral values in the young growing minds.Building good characters for young learners is very necessary since the basic and fundamental education is well built for the young. Teachers as well as parents want the students or the children to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right.

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