



Teaching Good Character in Early Childhood Education through Construction Activities and Dramatic Play

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Abstract. Character values are believed to be solid roots in supporting the integrity of the nation and state. The collapse of a country is resulted by the weakening of the character's values in the life of the people. The Ministry of National Education implements character education at all levels of education, including in Early Childhood Education. Developing Children's characters is an obligation on us all, including parents and teacher. Parents are the primary educators of character, but empirically research shows that all adults who have contact with their children need to contribute to such education, especially their children's teachers. School has more influence later than parenting because of parents are much more emotionally salient in the first years of life, and many children do not experience full or even part-time schooling until they are three, four or five years of age, when many aspect of character are already developing. In kindergarten, teacher can develop some values of character through learning, such as construction activities in a group and dramatic play. Construction activities involves manipulating one or multiple elements of the play environment to construct something new. Dramatic play can be defined as a type of play where children accept and assign roles, and then act them out. In dramatic play, children negotiate and refine their growing understanding by consulting with other children and the teacher. Therefore, through construction activities and dramatic play, teacher can develop some values character such as discipline, tolerance, self-confidence, self-reliance, creative, helping others, cooperation, responsibility, hard-working and leadership.

Keywords: character education, early childhood, construction activities, dramatic play

INTRODUCTION ~ It is a well-worn refrain that more attention must be paid to the moral character of our youth. Such pleas are prevalent in the mass media and in professional forums, and typically are justified by data reflecting the misdeeds of youth; e.g., crime, substance use, unwed teen pregnancies, and suicide. Whereas it is unclear that the state of youth morality is at a nadir and imprudent to suggest that character education is a panacea (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999), it is nonetheless clear that character education should and can be part of the solution (Developmental Studies Center, 1998).

The challenge is to implement character education so that it has the desired impact on the development of children's

character (Bebeau et al, 1999). There are numerous obstacles to such effective implementation, including a lack of an empirical base to justify character education (Leming, 1993), poor dissemination of character education information to practitioners, contentiousness among disagreeing proponents of character education (Berkowitz, 1997), and very limited training of pre-service teachers (Berkowitz, 1998; Jones, Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Central among these challenges is the fact that we do not have a clear empirically grounded sense of what teachers must do in the early childhood classroom (or any classroom, for that matter) to promote character development. This paper will address that limitation by drawing from the



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literature on teaching for character development and even more substantially on the literature on parenting for character development. Bridges between the two literatures will be suggested. Finally, we will offer some suggestions from a more clinical perspective on how early childhood teachers can deal with character dysfunction in students. First, however, we will need to define some terms.

In a prior article (Berkowitz & Grych, 1998), we addressed this same issue from the perspective of early parenting. Four foundational components of character (social orientation, self-control, compliance, self-esteem) and four moral components of character (empathy, conscience, moral reasoning, altruism) were identified. Moral components were defined as intrinsically moral aspects of functioning and foundational components as those that support and facilitate moral functioning but are not necessarily moral or immoral themselves. Many of the character aspects cited above can be subsumed under these eight dimensions. For example, altruism can be understood to include sharing and caring for the needy. Conscience includes awareness of standards, understanding social and moral norms, and guilt. We are not, however, trying to suggest that this list is exhaustive. Our goal is to identify several of the most important moral characteristics and demonstrate how teachers of young children can be instrumental in their development.

Dramatic play having four elements: the child carries out the role of make-believe; the child uses make-believe to turn things into things that need to be played; oral is often used instead of actions or situations; and the game scenario lasts at least ten minutes (Smilansky). In the socio-dramatic game all four elements are present plus two more: at least two players interact in the play scene, and there is some verbal communication involved with the game. Smilansky concluded that sociodrama games will activate resources that stimulate emotional, social, and intellectual growth in children. There are so many similarities between behavioral patterns that bring successful sociodrama playing experience and behavioral patterns needed for successful integration into the school situation (Almon, 2003).

Over the past few decades, educators have become increasingly interested in implementing character education in their schools, and classrooms, and the pace of this expansion seems to be accelerating. There is a rapidly growing, but still quite inadequate, level of funding available for both practice and research in character education. There is also a bewildering variety of programs, vendors, consultants, and concepts for educators to choose from in their search to improve their schools and positively impact the development and learning of their students (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005)

As we know today, the character of this nation is being degassed, marked by



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brawl between students between students, between villages and so forth. The practice of plagiarism on copyright, the selection of admission to state universities (SNMPTN), the examination of national examination (UNAS), dishonesty in the UN are also often frequent and corrupt practices that color the life of the state. All that, just a few of the examples of "amburadulnya" morality and character of the nation at this time. Character education comes as a solution to the problem of morality and character. Although not as something new, character education is quite a kind of "greget" for education in particular to fix the morality of the younger generation. Various alternatives to overcome the character crisis, it has been done and the application of a stronger law. Another widely proposed alternative to overcome, at least reduce the cultural problem and character of the nation in question is through character education (Wibowo, 2011). According to the Ministry of National Education, education is considered as a preventive alternative. That's because education builds a new generation of nation for the better. As a preventive alternative, education is expected to develop the quality of the young generation of this nation in various aspects, and can minimize and reduce the causes of various cultural problems and national character (Kemdiknas, 2011).

Character is the nature, nature, or things that are very basic that exist in a person so as to distinguish someone from others.

Often people refer to it as "temperament". Whatever it is called, character is the inner nature of man that influences all of his thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Character values are believed to be solid roots in supporting the integrity of the nation and state. Character education has been discoursed since the 8th century BC by Homeros. Character education teaches helpful habits of thinking and behavior individuals to live and work together as family, community, and state and helping them to make responsible decisions.

Character is like a double-edged knife. Character has the possibility of producing two different or opposite traits. For example, children who have high confidence. This will cultivate a bold character as a fruit of his belief or just the opposite of raising a reckless nature, lacking calculations for being too sure of his abilities. The great influence of character in one's life, so that's the formation of character must be done from an early age. According to Miftahudin (2010) character education at an early age in the family aims for formation, at adolescence in school aimed for development while in adulthood in college aims for consolidation. The educator's job is to provide a good learning environment to shape, develop and solidify the character of the learners (Miftahuddin, 2010).

Separating character education, or assuming character education is more



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important than intellectual education is not appropriate. Indonesian national education figures Ki Hajar Dewantara stressed the importance of the balance of inventiveness, initiative and work in education. If one takes precedence, while the other is set aside, we will see? Adults who lose their humanity. Interestingly, recent studies show that characters cannot be taught like math. Paul Tough, author of *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity and The Hidden Power of Character* says that character should not be considered as a teaching material, but should be displayed in the child's daily environment. As adults around us, we are also the first example to emulate to display the characters that are considered important. It takes a village to raise a child!

Developing children's characters is an obligation on us all, not least on parents. Although parents are the primary educators of character, empirical research shows that they want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to such education, especially their children's teachers. The development of character is a process that requires the efforts of both the developing individual and the society and its schools. A society determined to enable its members to live well will treat character education as something to which every child has a right.

Character education is a vital aspect of children's learning because it teaches them different social and moral lessons. Character education is taught in many

schools to encourage students' adoption of many values, such as discipline, tolerance, self-confidence, self-reliance, creative, helping others, cooperation, responsibility, hard-working and leadership.

Character education has long been a concern of the government. In Act No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System in article 1 (one) among others stated that education is a conscious and planned effort to create an atmosphere of learning and learning process so that learners are actively developing their potential to have spiritual power, controlling self, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed him, society, nation and state. In addition to the Law, positive characters are also widely written in the vision and mission of educational institutions. In general, educational institutions form a vision that is not only charged to make graduates smart but also noble. The formation of the child's personal character (character building) should start in the family because the child begins to interact with others first occurs in the family environment. Character education should be applied since early childhood because at an early age proven to determine the ability of children in developing their potential. While the school is one of the institutions responsible for the formation of character, because the contribution and role of teachers here is very dominant. The ultimate goal of education is to produce a mature, emotionally and spiritually mature human personality. Schools as institutions have a moral responsibility to educate



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children to be smart and smart in accordance with the expectations of parents and society. The role of teachers is very strategic in the personal formation of children because the task of teachers not only teach but also educate. Teacher's job as an educator is to help children gain useful knowledge for children and society also has good character and personality which is suitable with educational purpose that is developing the potential of learners to have intelligence, personality, and noble character (Sisdiknas: 2003) (Sudaryanti, 2000).

Definition of character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005):

1. Character education is 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. It is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts, and states to instill in their students important core, ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others (Character Education Partnership)
2. Character education is teaching children about basic human values, including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, and respect. The goal is to raise children to become morally responsible, self-disciplined citizens. (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)
3. Character education is the deliberate effort to develop good character based on core virtues that are good for the individual and good for society (Thomas Lickona)
4. Character education is any deliberate approach by which school personnel, often in conjunction with parents and community members, help children and youth become caring, principled, and responsible (National Commission on Character Education) (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005)

There are numerous ways to approach the task of reaching conclusions about what works in character education from the evidence we have gathered from the included studies.

1. One way is to look at which programs have research that demonstrates their effectiveness. In other words, which programs can we conclude actually work, based on existing sound research?
2. A second way is to identify characteristics of effective character education programs. What elements of practice do effective programs tend to share?
3. A third way is to look at character education that is generic (home-grown, not based on a commercially available program) and examine if such programs are effective. What do schools generally do that is effective in promoting character development?
4. Yet a fourth way is to look at research into specific practices, rather than as



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parts of full character education programs. What are the effects of specific character education practices?

A character education component in an early childhood curriculum is at the heart of the curriculum in the first five years of life. It strives to build in each child a positive sense of self as the basic core of positive mental health and motivation for learning. During activities or routines, all interactions affecting the behavior, thoughts, feelings, and actions that occur between each child and the important adults in his/her life can be seen as opportunities to build positive character. Research has demonstrated that in the early years, positive relationships built on trust between children and responsive adults are the key to building positive character development. Additionally, adults who model positive behaviors set examples that teach children through basic language and actions the core characteristics of such concepts as cooperation, courtesy, diligence, empathy, forgiveness, generosity, helpfulness, honesty, hope, justice, kindness, loyalty, patience, perseverance, respect, responsibility, self-awareness, self-discipline, and tolerance. The concepts of love, trust and friendship are central to character development and are internalized through these early relationships (Meiners, 2015).

The project approach is one of the strategies that can be chosen to develop

the principle of playing while learning and making the child a center in learning in early childhood education. This is in line with Dockett's (2002: 241) statement, one of the programs that can be undertaken to develop play and child-centered strategies with a project approach. In project lessons, children are involved in choosing interesting learning topics and want to know more deeply can be done individually or in groups. This is in accordance with the opinion of Katz and Chard (1989: 2) who say that the project approach that in-depth discussion of a particular topic chosen child can be done by one or more children (Dockett, 2002).

Dramatic Play is one type of symbolic play in which children use objects, take roles and define their own scenarios to create meaning from who they are, where they come from and how they learn with others. Dramatic play can be used to train emotions and how to express their feelings, can improve gross and subtle motor skills, initiation, motivation and independence, sensory stimuli, perseverance of the heart, concentration, self-reflection and creativity (Rowell, 2010). Dramatic Play requires two skills that children use:

1. Representational skills Representational skills or representational abilities are where children use objects to support children pretending to play. In the book *Pathways to Play*, Heidemann and Hewit explain that the child's first experience is related to exploring the functional usefulness of the objects around him, Representational Skill on siii



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can be used to use and manipulate objects over time. This can be seen from how children use the language, objects and activities.

2. Role Play, involves imitation behavior, facial expressions and social language skills with friends and adults, including with regards to their daily activities. Dramatic Play also involves planning, organization and negotiating with other children to coordinate with the game. The game is cooperative, goal-orientated, and directed by one or two children. The interaction between children can be facilitated with small groups, teaching children to call their terms and respond to other people's comment
3. Some things to note, especially dramatic play games involving intrinsic motivation of children, children want to do it and this activity should be fun for him. The game is also actively involved entirely and can attract interest in the process rather than the outcome. Playing activities, especially Dramatic Play in children with special needs, need help to develop their playing skills. It takes a special strategy that is constructive and creative to help the development of children with special needs to play.

The following guidelines can be used to be a reference in the design of dramatic play programs namely; 1) When introducing a dramatic play, it would be helpful to have a leader who takes part as an actor in the beginning of play or play for a start 2)

Children with special needs for pervasive developmental disorder and autism can be given a role once or twice as the main character with the longest duration five minutes 3) Keeping the initial role short for children with special needs pervasive developmental disorder and autism, enough to make important points from theatrical. 4) Initial role will work well if not more than three people. 5) The important thing is to create a structural role that can define the situation and role played by everyone. 6) Allow children to focus on playing 7) Provide mentoring if the child has difficulty in his role. 8) Everyone is given the opportunity to take turns playing other roles 9) Provide an opportunity to participate by letting the child choose the desired role. 10) Praise all business roles given (Rowell, 2010).

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