

Empowering Character Building through “DARLING Community” in Primary Education

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Abstract. Good character is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching. Character education is a national movement to foster ethical, responsible and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values. Religiosity, honesty, responsibility, healthy lifestyle, discipline, hard work, confidence, entrepreneurship, logical, critical, creativity, innovative thinking, independence, curiosity, joyfulness of reading, cooperativeness, obedience, respect, courtesy, democratic, environmental care, nationalism, and respect for diversity are the values that can be taught at school. The proactive effort by schools to instill in the important universal values can be done either in curricular or extracurricular activities. One of the strategies to integrate character building is ‘DARLING community’.. Having characters which signifies awareness to environmental problems and ability to protect the environment is as important as having desirable characters that can help students to succeed in live. This article provides the guidelines for effective and comprehensive character education and discussion about the characters building within environmental education and some proposed models to integrate environmental education into teaching in primary education.

Keywords: *Character building, Environmental education, DARLING community*

Abstrak. Karakter yang baik tidak bisa terbentuk secara otomatis; karakter tersebut dikembangkan dari waktu ke waktu melalui proses pembelajaran yang berkelanjutan. Pendidikan karakter adalah gerakan nasional untuk menumbuhkan generasi muda yang beretika, bertanggung jawab, dan penuh perhatian dengan cara mencontohkan dan mengajari karakter mulia melalui penekanan pada nilai-nilai universal. Nilai keagamaan, kejujuran, tanggung jawab, gaya hidup sehat, disiplin, kerja keras, kepercayaan diri, kewirausahaan, logis, kritis, kreatif, berfikir inovatif, kemandirian, keingintahuan, kegembiraan membaca, kerjasama, ketaatan, penghormatan, ksatria, demokratis, peduli lingkungan, nasionalisme, dan menghormati keberagaman adalah beberapa nilai yang bisa diajarkan di sekolah. Usaha proaktif dari sekolah untuk menumbuhkan nilai-nilai etis yang utama tersebut bisa dilakukan melalui kegiatan intra dan ekstrakurikuler. Salah satu strategi untuk mengintegrasikan pembangunan karakter adalah melalui ‘komunitas DARLING’.. memiliki karakter yang memperlihatkan perhatian pada masalah-masalah lingkungan dan kemampuan untuk melindungi lingkungan sama pentingnya dengan memiliki -karakter lain yang bisa membantu men siswa untuk berhasil dalam kehidupan. Artikel ini memberikan petunjuk untuk pendidikan karakter yang efektif dan menyeluruh dan diskusi tentang pembentukan karakter npada pendidikan lingkungan dan beberapa alternatif model yang bisa dilaksanakan dalam mengajarkan pendidikan lingkungan di sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci; *komunitas DARLING, pembentukan karakter, pendidikan lingkungan*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nurturing good characters for the next generation cannot be instantly done. It should be done sustainably and integrated. One of the sustainable and integrated processes to instill them is done through school curricular and extracurricular activities which based on character education movement. As a national movement, character education aims to foster ethical, responsible, and caring youths with universal values. Religiosity, honesty, responsibility, healthy lifestyle, discipline, hard work, confidence, entrepreneurship, logical, critical, creativity, innovative thinking, independence, curiosity, joyfulness of reading, cooperativeness, obedience, respect, courtesy, democratic, environmental care, nationalism, and respect for diversity are the universal values that are modeled and taught through the school activities.

Among those universal values the urgency to teach environmental care is crucial to work for especially for the children of early age. As the agent of the future, their awareness of environmental issues should be raised as well as their understanding toward the responsibility to use the resources wisely (Prakash, 2014:10). An environmental-care-community within school that continuously drives and fosters elementary school students’ awareness and understanding can be easily formed. The earlier the students are exposed to the

environmental awareness and understanding, the more effective the instilment of the value is. Of course, it also means that the school has homework to do afterward, designing and implementing the right strategy/activity for the students.

Designing and implementing particular activity to be done by lower class of elementary school students can be quite tricky. Since the students of the lower class of elementary school has specific characteristics such as get bored easily and have short attention, the instilment of the environmental awareness and understanding value should be done in an interesting and collaborative way. Their fondness of working collaboratively for interesting activities that help them to foster and instill environmental awareness and understanding value can be implemented through “DARLING Community”. The word DARLING stands for SADAR LINGKUNGAN (environmental awareness and understanding). This community is formed in elementary school to make environmental awareness and understanding as habitual activities for the lower class of elementary school students.

2. METHOD

This study aims to provide theoretical basis for the implementation of “DARLING Community” for the lower class of elementary school students. This descriptive study used library research design. Previous related studies and other related references were used to describe the importances of teaching environmental awareness and understanding for the lower class of elementary students. This study also described proposed model for implementing “DARLING Community” in school-context.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The article emphasizes on empowering character building through “DARLING Community” in primary education. The effort in developing this character building practice is essential to be done in order to tackle moral and character crises from early level of primary education. Educational program and process are inseparable from environmental factor including the values of society, culture, and humanity. This article aims to provide guidelines for the elements need for effective and comprehensive character education and discussion about the characters building within environmental education and some proposed models to integrate environmental education into teaching in primary education.

Character education

The English word ‘character’ is derived from the Greek *charaktēr*, which originally referred to a mark impressed upon a coin. Later and more generally, ‘character’ came to mean a distinctive mark by which one thing was distinguished from others, and then primarily to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another (Homiak, 2007). 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 is not a “quick fix.” It provides long-term solutions that address moral, ethical and academic issues of growing concern to our society and key to the safety of our schools (Character Education Partnership, 2010). Therefore character education is a continuous process in order to produce a future human figure rooted in the cultural values. Thus character education has a higher meaning than moral education because it is not only about right-wrong problems, but how to instill habits of good things in life. Children/learners will have awareness and high understanding as well as concern and commitment to apply the virtues in everyday life.

Thomas Lickona describes character education as “the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue.” We should not assume that children, left to their own accords, will grow and become young adults of good character. Clearly, children need adults to teach them through example. Character education includes a broad range of concepts such as positive school culture, moral education, just communities, caring school communities, social-emotional learning, positive youth development, civic education, and service learning. All of these approaches promote the intellectual, social, emotional, an ethical development of young people and

share a commitment to help young people become responsible, caring, and contributing citizens. Educating the mind and promoting ethical values that lead to success both for individuals and society (11 Principles of Effective Character Education, 2010). Character education can be initiated at any grade level. It is important to set a strong foundation during the earlier grades and to reinforce and build upon that foundation during the later grades. To be effective, character education must include the entire school community and must be infused throughout the entire school curriculum and culture. Education program must stress the qualities of religiosity, honesty, responsibility, healthy lifestyle, discipline, hard work, confidence, entrepreneurship, logical, critical, creative, and innovative thinking, independence, curiosity, joyfulness of reading, cooperativeness, obedience, respect, courtesy, democratic, environmental care, nationalism, and respect for diversity. Five guidelines for the elements need for effective and comprehensive character education are:

Instruction must be planned

Direct instruction must be planned in advance. Once organized, this will serve as a springboard to other ideas and school-wide activities.

Application

Students must be able to apply what they have learned. Learning the definition of diligence does a child little good if he seldom sees it in action.

Teacher friendly

All instructional and school-wide components of the program must be as teacher friendly as possible. This increases the likelihood of the program being accepted by the teachers and taught effectively.

Supported by all

To reach its fullest potential, the program should be supported by everyone in the school. School leaders can make it important by providing the necessary materials, scheduling time for the program and assemblies and talking about it frequently.

Prepare the students

Middle school and high school students often approach the notion of character education with skepticism. Substantial, well planned efforts must be made to create a school climate conducive to maximum buy-in by students (Character Education Informational Handbook & Guide II (2001).

Character education was done in the classroom during teaching learning process specifically in preliminary, core, and closing activities (Marini, 2017). Character building was integrated based on scientific knowledge (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). The implementation of character values was carried out in school culture through daily activities at school (Marini, 2017). In classroom practice, a comprehensive approach to character building calls upon the *individual teacher* to:

1. *Act as a caregiver, model, and mentor:* Treat students with love and respect, setting a good example, supporting pro-social behavior, and correcting hurtful actions through one-on-one guidance and whole-class discussion.
 2. *Create a moral community:* Help students know each other as persons, respect and care about each other, and feel valued membership in, and responsibility to, the group.
 3. *Practice moral discipline:* Use the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, voluntary compliance with rules, and generalized respect for others.
 4. *Create a democratic classroom environment:* Involve students in collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility for making the classroom a good place to be and learn.
 5. *Teach character through the curriculum:* Use the ethically rich content of academic subjects (such as literature, history, and science) as a vehicle for studying the virtues; ensure that the sex, drugs, and alcohol education programs promote self-control and other high character standards taught elsewhere in the curriculum.
 6. *Use cooperative learning:* Through collaborative work, develop students' appreciation of others, perspective taking, and ability to work toward common goals.
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7. *Develop the “conscience of craft”*: Foster students’ valuing of learning, capacity for working hard, commitment to excellence, and public sense of work as affecting the lives of others.
8. *Encourage moral reflection*: Foster moral thinking and thoughtful decision-making through reading, research, essay writing, journaling, discussion, and debate.
9. *Teach conflict resolution*: Help students acquire the moral skills of solving conflicts fairly and without force (Lickona, 1992).

Environmental Education

Nowadays, the world has been concerned with global issues and environmental education and protection in particular. As a result, there is an increasing awareness to protect the ecosystem by ‘thinking green’ and ‘acting green’. Environmental awareness is to understand the fragility of our environment and the importance of its protection. It is about being aware of the environment. The planet is currently facing an increasing number of environmental challenges, which include climate change, global warming, droughts, water scarcity, floods, and pollution. Primary learners are quite inquisitive and always ready to be taught something new. A child’s brain is like a sponge. It soaks up all the information it receives. Schools have a responsibility towards future leaders - not just teaching them how to read and write, but also educating them about environmental awareness. Jacobs and Goatly (2000) confirmed that being aware of the problems, understanding why they occur, caring and having the skills to overcome the problems, and having the ability to evaluate different solutions means nothing if there is no action taken. From this, it can be concluded that the most important objective to environmental education actually is participation in this case by promoting character building through “DARLING Community”.

Environmental awareness should be a part of the curriculum in schools. This will encourage young people to engage in their environment to protect it and can help communities become more environmentally aware. It can be started from the early level of primary education through proposing “DARLING Community”. Some practical tips schools can adopt: (1) Introduce the 3 R’s: reduce waste, reuse resources, and recycle materials, (2) Organize tree planting days at school and tell them why trees are important to the environment, (3) Encourage children to switch off all appliances and lights when not in use, (4) Ensure taps are closed properly after you have used them and use water sparingly. Teaching children what it means to be environmentally aware is important but it will have a more lasting impact if teachers can lead by example. Schools should encourage parents to share their environmental knowledge to their children at home. It would be a good idea to let the children practice at home doing small tasks like picking up their trash and throwing the garbage, or teaching them to turn off the faucet when they are brushing their teeth or washing their hands with soap and not let water run down, or shut off the lights when they have used them.

There are many ways that teachers can do to make the students, not only aware of the environmental problems, but also active in taking steps to participate in the protection of the environment. Those ways can be integrated into classroom activities when the teaching and learning process are conducted. Some proposed models to integrate environmental education into teaching in primary education:

Model 1

Discrete-skills instruction

Despite of the facts that Content-Based Instruction fits so well with integrated-skills instruction, environmental topics can still be used to teach discrete skills. Environmental texts can be downloaded from websites to be used for skimming, scanning, and note-taking practice in reading classrooms. The texts can also be used to promote critical thinking skills, as intermediate and advanced learners learn to distinguish fact from opinion, recognize bias, and provide oral responses to potentially controversial information. Statistics and numerical data about “green” topics can be used in dictations to help students practice numbers (Hauschild et al, 2012).

Integrated-skills instruction through project work

This activities can be done in several ways: (1) students do a research on topics of interest to be written for academic papers , (2) writing and illustrating children’s books or comic strips; (3) creating posters,

brochures, or bulletin board displays; and (4) writing stories or opinion pieces for the school newspaper; (5) performing a debate on controversial environmental topic; and (6) engaging in role plays that explore provocative environmental topics (Hauschild et al, 2012).

Listening or reading for enjoyment

It is fun to just listen or read things in English for the sake of pleasure and enjoyment. This can be done by recording and playing-back English songs related to environmental education. Students can sing along with the song or just listen to it, enjoying the lyrics and music. Students can also watch movies in which its topic is about environment. Poems, novels, and short stories which are environmentally related can also work well with pleasure and enjoyment. The follow up activities can be making summary, discussing the moral value, characters that students can learn in relation environment, or writing of opinion about the song, the poem, the short story, or novel that students read.

Model 2

Self-reported

Students tell/write about their own or classmates' participation. This includes when students interview each other. Students work in groups, then ask friends in the group about what they do to participate in greening their surrounding environment, or asking how 'green' their daily activities are. Students can give examples of activities and reasons why they think their activities are green. Before doing this activity; teacher should prepare a list of possible questions to ask. After doing self-reported activity, students should present the report orally with the help of media, such as slide presentation, pictures, real objects, or other form of media. Students can also give written self-report, but then they still should share it with all friends in class.

Reported

The reported activity can be done in several ways. First, students report on the participation of others outside their class by gathering data or by remembering. Students are required to observe their surrounding neighborhood to spot someone who, in their understanding, takes participation in protecting the earth. This someone can be anybody, such as a gardener, a trash picker, an organic farmer, a mother who turns off all electric equipment when they are not used, etc. In writing the report, students should gather more data by searching it from the magazine, books, library, or internet. Second, teachers can also organize field trips to local recycling centers, if they exist, to learn how important recycling is, how the process works, and what items can and cannot be recycled. Third, bringing the world into the classroom by inviting a guest speaker that has given a contribution in saving/protecting the earth can also be a brilliant idea to educate students about local environmental issues and help students understand what can be done to make a difference. Prior these activities, students should take notes. Afterwards, they can prepare an oral or written response in which they explain both what they learned and what they can do to be more environmentally responsible.

Read about/listened to

Students read a text or listen to a tape about how others participate or could participate. Teachers can provide authentic texts downloaded from the internet in relation to environmental issues. Many texts are available; some are even equipped with worksheet and its answer that ease teachers in using the materials. The teacher should be very keen in choosing the material. The activities in the text should constitute either participation or the description of activities in relation to earth protection.

Recommended

A text urges students to participate. This can be done through listening sections or reading sections. Teachers may read a text in which its content is to recommend students to participate in recycling or using used items. The text may discuss about what people can do to save the energy. The text may in the form of listening section which urges people to do something to protect the earth.

Simulated

Students role-play typical situations, or imagine that they are in a position to participate in efforts to protect the environment. This can be done with the help of situational dialogues prepared by the teacher. The

situation perhaps one becomes the organic farmer and other becomes the conventional farmer, and the two have exchange dialogue on the advantages of organic farming.

Potential action

Students tell/write/choose what they or others will/ could/would do. For example, students are asked to make lists of what they can do to solve the environmental problems they find around the neighborhood. The instruction can be given like this, “Mention 5 things that you can do to minimize the use of plastics”, or “List 5 things that you can do to make people aware of the danger throwing trash into the river, etc. The activities should be shared with everybody in the class either written or oral.

Real

What students are assigned to do, or what is listed as an optional assignment. Jacobs and Goatley (2000) thought that such real participation can be done in three possible types, namely (a) Educational: Students try to educate others, e.g. by making posters and displaying them; (b) Behavioral: Students do something that directly helps the environment, (c) Exerting pressure: Students may send letters to companies and governments in an attempt to bring pressure on them to participate in helping the environment. From these activities, students will be connected with lives beyond school. This connection can give them opportunities to be aware of the problems of real life, and environmental issues certainly offer many opportunities for such connections. The behavioral concept is then proposed to be implemented in the form of ‘DARLING community’ in which learners will be directly participated to save green started by doing simple thing for example picking litter around.

4. CONCLUSION

The development of socialization skills and integration of character education are an important part of a child’s academic success. The effort to teach character education can be effective when implemented rigorously and with a scientific foundation. Schools should focus on teaching character within the regular curriculum. In relation to character education, teachers need to realize that character building should not only be written as part of lesson plan. To build the expected characters within individuals, students need to have good models that they can learn from and reflect upon, or having the experience of doing certain action that can trigger their inner drive. Creating students who are environmentally aware and able to take participation to protect their environment basically help them to possess good moral values. For example, learners who get used to throw trash on the waste bin and who like to grow plants and take care of animals are usually those who have discipline, caring and responsible characters. Thus, helping them to acquire environmentally friendly behaviors are equally important as helping them to acquire good characters within individuals.

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