

Visual-Art Education for Character Development

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Abstract—One of the challenges faced by schools nowadays is how to develop the character of students effectively. In this troubling era, the need for effective education is clear when we face new challenges unknown to previous generations such as the distribution of hoax, hate speech, pornographic content on the internet, sophisticated techniques in drug abuse, etc. Research shows that to be effective, character education must involve the entire school community, be based on core ethical values, and be infused into all school subjects. In this paper, I argue that visual-art is one of the potential subjects to develop the character of the students. By integrating character development activities with cultural, productive, and critical aspects of visual-art learning, students character can be developed effectively. Four examples of visual-art learning strategies that are intended to develop students' characters (cooperative skill, perseverance, cross-cultural skill, and self-identity) are presented. It is realized that the goal of character education cannot be achieved instantly but through a long, complicated, and challenging process. Since character development is a must, these challenges must be faced with all risks.

Keywords—*character education; visual-art learning; cooperative skill; perseverance; cross-cultural skill; and self-identity*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian context nowadays, character education in schools becomes a hot issue due to the fact that there are problems in the schools' efforts to develop student's good character as demanded by Indonesian Constitution. Article 3 of Act of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 2003 on National Education System, clearly states that the goal Indonesia national education is aimed at developing learners' potentials so that they become persons imbued with human values who are faithful and pious to one and only God; who possess morals and noble character; who are healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent; and as citizens, are democratic and responsible.

It is realized that social ills which are symptomatic in Indonesia nowadays such as soaring crime rates among the young age groups, rampant abuse of power and corruption, hate-speeches especially in social media, and drugs abuses by various circles of society, are manifestation of ineffectiveness of character building programs in Indonesian schools. This statement is not intended to overlook excellent character education programs in some schools. It should be recognized that some schools, especially boarding schools, have implemented effective character education programs.

Unfortunately, the number of such good programs is limited in comparing with the need of the nation. This fact needs our attention as Berkowitz stating that "no society can survive if it does not deliberately foster the development of character in each subsequent generation of youth" [1].

Certainly, the schools should not be blamed alone for the ineffectiveness of their character education programs. We all realize that the character of a student is also influenced by social environment beyond the formal educational setting. Effective character education programs in a nation require the collaboration of all stakeholders that includes government institutions (central and local), schools, organizations, families, and all members of society. In my opinion, character education in schools should not be a stand-alone program. It should be joint efforts involving all stakeholders to make school curriculum (written and hidden) effective and meaningful. I hope ideas presented in this paper, however small, could contribute to the character development efforts in schools.

II. CHARACTER AND CHARACTER EDUCATION DEFINED

A. Character

Webster Comprehensive Dictionary defines the word "character" as "the combination of qualities distinguishing any person or class of persons; any distinctive mark or trait, or such marks or traits collectively, belonging to any person, class or race; the individuality which is the product of nature, habits, and environment." This definition is in accordance with the definition made by The Jubilee Centre [2], that is, "a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct;" and the definition formulated by Homiak: "the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another" [3]. It seems that the essence of the word character is "personal trait or inclination." That is why Agboola and Tsai [4] describe the word character as "the way we express our inner and outward being." As a psychological phenomenon, the character is complex because it involves the capacity to think about right and wrong, to feel the moral emotion, and to act consistently according to the morality that is believed [5].

In the daily conversation, we use the term "good character" as well as "bad character." We expect a person having good character so he/she can contribute positively to his/her community, environment, and nation. Aristotle called the good character as "*phronesis*, or practical wisdom which consists of a number of virtues, but the most important thing is knowing

what to do and what not to do at the right time and place [6]. Otherwise, we do not expect a person having bad character. Good character includes: affectionate, brave, courageous, creative, courteous, generous, honest, loving, loyal, responsible, sincere, thoughtful and others. Bad character includes: arrogant, callous, careless, cruel, dishonest, greedy, irresponsible, lazy, ruthless, selfish, untrustworthy, vulgar, and others.

The Indonesian Ministry of Education [7] identifies 18 good characters recommended to be developed in schools' educational programs. The 18 good characters derived from Indonesian culture, ideology, and educational philosophy. They are religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard-working, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, the spirit of nationality, patriotism, achievement-oriented, communicative, peaceful-minded, reading-habit, environmental-concerns, social-awareness, and responsibility.

Shields [8] classifies four types of character needed by a person to be a competent, ethical, engaged and effective adult member of society, namely: (1) intellectual character (related to culture of thinking such as curious, open-minded, reflective, strategic, skeptical, and truth-seeking); (2) moral character (related to culture of love and justice according to certain moral convictions such as compassion, courage, integrity, justice, and respect); (3) civic character (related to culture of service and engagement such as caring, responsible, democratic, and collaborative); and (4) performance character (related to culture of quality and excellence such as perseverance, diligence, resilience, hard-working, pay attention to details, and loyalty).

B. Character Education

Education may be defined as intentional activities to develop the capability (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) of an individual so he/she becomes a competent person and good citizen. Simply put, education is to help an individual become both competent and good. This definition implies that character development is embedded in any educational activity. Therefore, it can be said that character education is not new as it has existed since the early history of education. Character education is as old as education itself.

Throughout history, many terms have been used to designate character development efforts. Some of them are moral education, civic education, religious education, positive school culture, service learning, and positive youth development. In the Indonesian school curricula, subjects specifically related to character education are *Pendidikan Agama*, *Pendidikan Moral Pancasila*, *Pendidikan Budi Pekerti* and *Pendidikan kewarganegaraan*. The term "Character education" which is widely used in educational circle refers to the intentional efforts to equip students with specific characteristics that help them become a good citizen. U.S Department of Education defines the character education as "an explicit learning process from which students in a school community understand, accept, and act on ethical values such as respect for others, justice, civic virtue, citizenship, and responsibility for self and others" [4]. Jubilee Centre [6] (a) (n.d:5) regards character education as "any form of moral education focusing on the development of virtues as stable

qualities of character with the aim of promoting human flourishing (eudaimonia) and founded on (some) general theory of virtue ethics." The Indonesia Ministry of Education in its Action Plan for Character Education published in 2010, stated that character education is essentially a moral and value education designed to develop the ability of members of a school community, so that, they can make good decisions, play role models, maintain and practice virtues in everyday life wholeheartedly. Character education should include moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in order to form a unified embodiment of student behavior and attitudes.

The current renewed interest in character education is simply a reminder of the importance of stressing educational core values such as religiosity, honesty, integrity, citizenship, perseverance, and community awareness to help students in facing new societal challenges unknown to previous generations.

III. CHARACTER EDUCATION IN SCHOOL

A. The Role of the School

Developing the character of a child is the responsibility of all parties. The family (especially parents) is considered the most dominant in influencing the early formation of a child's character. The dependence of the child on his/her parents and all family members in the early days of his growth makes a child very close, psychologically, to his/her parents and family. Furthermore, after a child enters a certain age, he/she is then sent to school.

School is a new environment that will affect his/her development. This is where the school plays a role in continuing the development of child's character. In a school where a student spends hundreds of hours a year, he/she has a good opportunity to develop self-confidence, social skills, morality, and new values. Developmental psychology theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky emphasize the importance of the schooling years in developing a child's ethical values. According to them, during the school period, a child's character is formed in a good or bad way [9]. As the child age gets older, he/she will enter a wider society (including the media), which will also affect his/her character.

The importance of the school's role in character development is recognized by governments in various countries as reflected in the formulation of guidelines and the establishment of character education services by the governments for use by schools. In addition, some private institutions and organizations do the same.

B. Effective Character Education in School

The goal of character education at schools is to help students develop good character, which includes knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values mentioned above such as respect, justice, civic virtue, and responsibility. To be effective, character education programs must include all stakeholders in a school community and must be integrated with the curriculum and culture of the school as a whole. Character education should not be relegated to a special character education class.

Many character education models have been developed for use in schools. Evidence of the effectiveness of these models is demonstrated in schools that apply these models. In schools applying these models appropriately, attendance at school increases, fewer students drop out, fewer students misbehavior, and higher academic achievement [1]. Many formulas on the principle of effective character education. One of them is a formulation made by Lickona et al. [10], as follows:

- Character education should be based on core ethical values. These core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for oneself and others are believed as the foundations of good characters.
- Character education should include the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the moral life.
- Character education requires a deliberate, proactive, and comprehensive approach to promoting core ethical values in school life.
- Character education should be supported by good school character. Schools must be a caring community. The school environment must be imbued with core ethical values such as attention and respect for others, responsibility, kindness, and fairness.
- Character education should give students opportunities for moral action.
- Character education should include a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and facilitates them successfully.
- Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation so that students have a stronger inner commitment to do what is morally right.
- Character education requires school staff to become learning and moral communities where all share responsibility for promoting core ethical values.
- Character education requires moral leadership from both school staff and student.
- Character education should involve parents and community members as partners in character development efforts.
- Character education should be assessed in three aspects, namely the character of the school, the school staff functioning as character educators, and students' character in terms of understanding, commitment, and action towards the core ethical values.

In addition, Berkowitz provides seven rules of thumb for effective character education as follows:

- Treat students appropriately.
- Treat other people appropriately in the students' presence.
- A School must demand good character.
- Students need to practice good character.

- Students need to reason about, debate, and reflect on moral issues, and
- Parents are actively and positively involved in the school's character education programs.

The principles of effective character education and seven rules of thumb above show that character education is not a special program added to the curriculum of a school. This is in line with Berkowitz's assertion that effective character education is not adding a program or set of programs. Rather it is the transformation of the culture and life of the school [11].

IV. CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH VISUAL-ART SUBJECT

Visual-art subject (drawing, handicraft) has been in the school curriculum since the beginning of modern public school in Europe in the early years of the nineteenth century. In Indonesia, drawing (*menggambar*) and handicrafts (*kerajinan tangan*) have been taught in public schools since the Dutch colonization era, in the last part of the nineteenth century. In Indonesia's current public schools, the visual-art, along with music, dance, and drama, are included in the curriculum under the umbrella name: *Seni Budaya* or Art Culture.

A. *The Benefits of Visual-art Learning*

The inclusion of visual-art subject in the school curriculum for around two centuries is an indicator of the importance of the subject. Why is visual-art subject so important to be included in the curriculum? Why is the government willing to invest heavily in an infrastructure of visual-art learning? After all, there are other useful subjects that are not considered. So, why is a visual-art lesson? The answer to these questions is that the government believes that the subject of visual-art can contribute significantly to the achievement of national educational goals in producing competent and good citizens. The research findings show that children's involvement in well-designed visual-art programs help them to learn better, socialize better, and contribute better to society.

The benefits of visual-art learning may be grouped into two, namely the intrinsic benefits and instrumental benefits. Intrinsic benefits of visual-art learning particularly concerned with the unique contribution of visual-art to the human experience that can not be given by other fields such as the aesthetic experience that the child perceives in creating and appreciating works of visual-art. Concerning this, Eisner [12] writes: "The prime value of the arts in education lies, in my point of view, in the unique contributions it makes to the individual's experience with and understanding of the world. The visual-arts deal with an aspect of human consciousness that no other fields touch on: the aesthetic contemplation of visual form." Instrumental benefits of visual-art learning relate to societal needs and values such as developing cooperative skills, cultural awareness, leadership, and integrity.

B. *Character Development through Visual-art Learning*

Visual-art learning centers on learning activities that facilitate students in understanding, creating, and appreciating visual-art works. Understanding, creating, and appreciating visual-art works are called by Eisner [12] as cultural,

productive, and critical aspects of visual-art learning. Thus, developing students' character through visual-art learning is conducted by integrating the character development with cultural, productive, and critical aspects of visual-art learning.

Integrating character development into visual-art learning begins by identifying the type of character to be developed. Once the character type is identified, the visual art learning program is designed taking into account activities relevant to the identified character. For example, visual-art learning intended to develop students' social skills is of course, different from visual-art learning to students' grit or curiosity.

To be effective in carrying out character development through visual-art learning, an art teacher must comprehensively devise learning strategies and take account of the principles and rules of practice for effective character education mentioned above. Well-designed visual-art learning will make students personally engage in learning activities. When a student creates art, he/she is personally involved in perceiving, judging, selecting, and acting on his/her judgment as he/she creates. As a visual-art observer in art appreciation activities, he/she becomes a person who engages through his/her senses as he/she discovers new aspects, builds empathy in the visual stimulus and gains new meaning in the artwork he/she observes.

C. Proposed Visual-art Learning Strategies

The following are some examples of visual-art learning strategies to develop student character.

1) Visual-art learning strategy to develop cooperative skills: By nature, visual-art, are very social because so many activities done in groups like groups to paint a mural or make a large size statue. Students working in groups will realize that they have a common goal and therefore they must work together to achieve that goal. They also realize that everyone has different ideas and perspectives and therefore emerging ideas need to be negotiated to achieve a mutual agreement. Working together to achieve a common goal by utilizing the ideas of each group member is a meaningful learning process. Here, an example of visual-art learning strategy to develop students' skills in working appropriately and productively with Others.

a) Visual-art project: "Group assignment to create a mural entitled Multicultural Celebration"

b) Suggested learning strategies: (1) Provide opportunity for students to form working groups (each group consisting of 5-7 students); (2) Teach students to work appropriately and productively with group members in completing group assignment; (3) inform students that a good mural done by a group of people should present a single group-generated image (4) Provide opportunities for students to share successes by using the language of optimism and humble.

c) Activities relevant to character development: (1) Students learn to articulate ideas; (2) Students listen attentively; (3) Students receive and offer constructive

criticism; (4) Students work as a team to determine and achieve a common goal; (5) Students reflect on the process and results of group work.

2) Visual-art learning strategy to develop the perseverance of students: In the process of art creation, students face problems to be solved visually. In many cases, the problems are not always easy to solve. This requires the students to have a passion for not giving up. By providing challenging assignments to the students, they have the opportunity to develop their persistence and patience. Here, an example of visual-art learning strategy to develop students' skill in persisting and sustaining effort towards a goal.

a) Visual-art Project: "Individual assignment to create a three-dimensional art using used materials."

b) Suggested learning strategies: (1) Provide opportunity for students to work on visual-art art projects that require students to engage with the unknown; push students outside their comfort zone; challenge students with technical problems; (2) Encourage students to finish projects despite obstacles; (3) Provide opportunities for students to make reflections about their unyielding efforts.

c) Activities relevant to character development: (1) Students learn to generate ideas; (2) Students concentrate on attempting to implement their ideas in the form of three-dimensional artwork as requested (3) Students learn to solve technical problems; (4) Students struggle to survive in order to remain able to complete the task given; (5) Students reflect on the process and outcomes of their tasks.

3) Visual-art learning strategy to develop cross-cultural skills: Visual-art learning help students understand human experiences, both past, and present. It provides students through "visual-art appreciation programs" with experiences to respect others' diverse way of thinking, working, and expressing ideas. Here, an example of visual-art learning strategy to develop students' skill in valuing, reflecting, and appreciating artworks from diverse ethnic groups.

a) Visual-art Project: "Appreciating the Traditional Art of Papua, Toraja, and Batak."

b) Suggested learning strategies: (1) Provide opportunity for students to realize the uniqueness of the Indonesian traditional arts from three different ethnic groups; (2) Teach the students about the status of visual-art as a common or universal means of expression among all people; (3) Teach the students that visual-artworks are the manifestation of peoples' beliefs; (4) Provide opportunities for students to discuss the artistic accomplishments of the Indonesian traditional arts.

c) Activities relevant to character development: (1) Students perceive visual-artworks; (2) Students describe the visual characteristics of artworks ; (3) Students discuss the connection between artworks and religious beliefs; (4) Students learn to compare artistic accomplishments demonstrated by works of art from diverse cultures; (5) Students compare their artworks to the artworks of the past.

4) *Visual-art learning strategy to develop a sense of self-identity*: Developing a sense of identity in visual-art learning can be done by giving students the opportunity to explore the local-culture that belongs to them. In this context, local traditional arts have a special role in developing a sense of self-identity of students because they provide students the opportunity to express their feelings through the use of the artistic approaches, ornamental motifs, and techniques typical of local traditional arts that belong to their own culture.

a) *Visual-art Project*: “Creating artwork by using artistic approaches, ornamental motifs, and techniques typical of local traditional art.”

b) *Suggested learning strategies*: (1) Provide the opportunity for students to explore a selected local traditional art form; (2) Teach students about the common characteristics of Indonesian traditional arts; (3) Ask students to individually create an artwork using artistic approaches, ornamental motifs, and techniques of the selected local traditional art; (4) Provide the opportunity for students to discuss the uniqueness of the artistic approach, ornamental motifs, and techniques of the local traditional arts; (5) Motivate students to be proud of their own culture.

c) *Activities relevant to character development*: (1) Students explore a selected local traditional art; (2) Students describe the common characteristics of Indonesian traditional arts; (3) Students create, individually, an artwork by using artistic approaches, ornamental motifs, and techniques of a selected local traditional art form; (4) Students discuss the uniqueness of the artistic approach, ornamental motifs, and techniques of the local traditional arts; (5) Students identify the reasons why they should be proud of their own culture.

The four examples above just outlines to be developed further. These examples are expected to inspire visual-art teachers in developing visual-art learning strategies that are integrated with character development.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The ultimate goal of character education in schools is to equip students with intellectual abilities that enable them to make wise choices about what to do and what not to do based

on certain core ethical values. The goal can not be achieved instantly but through a long, complicated, and challenging process.

In the context of character development through visual-art learning in schools in Indonesia, the challenges to be encountered include: (1) the limited competence of teachers to apply meaningful visual-art learning in relation to character development, especially at the elementary school level; (2) the limitations of well-designed learning materials; (3) the low commitment of school administrators to build a school culture conducive to character development; and (4) the low participation of parents and other community members in the effort to build character in schools. Since character development is a must, these challenges must be faced with all risks.

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