**Developing Character Building Through Multicultural Reading Text**

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**Abstract**

The ministry of National Education has determined to integrate character education into Indonesian classroom instruction. This shift roots from many reported facts of acute sadism, lack of respect for parents, elders, and teachers, increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating and stealing), nepotism, and corruption. It is believed that moral courage is one of the trademarks of human maturity. This demanding turned teachers and lecturers to be more creative in designing innovative material. Therefore, teachers need to integrate not only such important points as higher order thinking skills but also character education into their materials.

Special materials are needed for students by inserting the local cultures. It is expected that beginners can learn best from the materials that they are familiar with. In teaching foreign language, it is needed to be sensitive to the fragility of the students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding. Learning a foreign language implies some degree of learning a second culture. My students can learn how to appreciate members of another culture and go hand in hand with them. I hope they have positive thinking and open-minded view. If people understand differing worldviews, they will usually adopt open-minded attitude toward cross-cultural differences. Moreover, by inserting local cultures in developing new English material, it is expected that students can develop awareness of their own culture and appreciation of others, which are good characters.

Therefore, this paper discusses developing character building through multicultural reading text.

**Introduction**

The number of sadism is growing rapidly lately in Indonesia. In some areas, people do not hesitate to assassinate a person or a group of people for foolish things such as for sake of solidarism of their motorcycle gang. In some areas that are well known for the religious conflicts are worse than other parts of Indonesia. A conflict may occur just because insignificant issues or a group of people kills people randomly just to spread terror. They did it on purpose, to trigger conflict. Some students in the big city do crime in the street, like stabbing each other, making riot in the environment, and stealing. Cheating in the national examination is also a common thing. Young generations are seeds for the future leaders.

We want great generation; we do not plant good and bad. It is already in our blood. What we need to do is developing the good characters by giving examples. To overcome this situation, as educators, it is badly needed to take care of this matter carefully and wisely. As we know that language plays important roles in education life, because it is a "hand" to educate young generation from one era to another, and to enlighten people in the dark.

Today, people especially teenagers tend to use language to represent their characters, for example they use slang and inappropriate words in the wrong situation. It means that language is a part of their fashion and identity (Tri Floriasti, 2011). According to Thomas Lickona in Zuchdi (2011: 216) that the use of bad language is one of the signals, which leads a nation to the crushed situation. Educators, parents, and

government need to find a way and try to organize a program or education that promote values in life, such as appreciate others, elders, teachers with different background (Megawangi, 2004: 95)

One attempt had been done to give young generation, especially English student teachers in Indonesia, English lesson, which was inserted with multicultural values. This effort was not only by adding, adopting and applying universal values and cultural identities, which were match with students' needs, but also by managing, selecting and running good strategies in teaching learning process (Tri Floriasti, 2011). As lingua franca, English is given in university level and it is divided in to four skills Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. It is expected that by learning these skills, which is already inserted by cultural values, students learn the English skills and can mend their characters as well.

This demanding turned teachers and lecturers to be more creative in designing innovative material. Developing character building through multicultural reading text is one of the innovative materials.

Why multicultural? Indonesia consists of 17.506 islands, 746 languages, and 1.128 tribes. It can be said that Indonesia is multicultural country, which enrich the national heritage and strengthen the identity of Indonesian as well. The uniqueness of Indonesia is priceless treasures that unite people in diversity. However, the diversity it self may trigger potential conflict between Indonesian. Knowing, learning, comprehending and applying the knowledge of culture in daily life will glue them and avoid the future conflict. Therefore, giving multicultural knowledge to student teachers is one practical way to enlighten them how to appreciate differences then go hand in hand with others in Indonesia and in the world. At the end, they are not only play as good model to their students to be but also occupy themselves as transformers of multicultural knowledge. Securing this knowledge is a process to develop good characters such as appreciative, democratic, and tolerant.

**Discussion**

How to insert multicultural into English material is not easy. The aim is to develop appreciative, democratic and tolerant characteristics of student teachers in English Education Department of Faculty of Languages and Arts, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia. It started by observing and deciding the problems in the Reading class, that students had problems in determining the main ideas of reading materials, recognizing word, grammar and context clues, differentiating between fact and opinion, finding evidence in reading to support an argument, predicting content and last using clues to infer the information in a written text or picture. GTM/ Grammar Translation Method mainly dominated the technique in the teaching learning process. Moreover, there was no innovation in reading materials and the media. In addition, the ministry of National Education has determined to integrate character education into Indonesian classroom instruction. Then, considering the problems, it was decided to insert multicultural into reading material.

Then the next step was planning the materials, media and the approach that would be applied in the class. The materials were arranged from the most familiar topic with students to the most foreign one. They were given with various text types. The text types that were given to the students were various, started with narrative, descriptive, then recount. Texts are pieces of written or spoken language created for a particular

purpose and context. The purpose of a text might be to persuade or inform or a combination of both (Anderson & Anderson, 2002)

Since context is influenced by culture – values, customs, beliefs, attitudes and situation, then the students were introduced with the social context of the text type being studied, which correspond to the Genre Approach, a recommended one for teaching English as it matches with the type of the National Curriculum that English is learn through text. In the genre approach (Feez & Joice, 1998), consists of 5 phases: building the context, modeling and deconstructing the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text, linking to related text.

The narrative text was given in the first two meetings. The activities in building the context were given to the students include:

1.

▶ **Activity 1: <u>Individually</u>. Look at this picture. What can be inferred from the picture?**



Taken from story-of-kisah.blogspot.com

▶ **Activity 2: What is happening in the picture?**

The aim of activity 1 was to present the context through pictures. So that students get the situation, which could be captured from the expression, gestures and clothes of the actors. Therefore, they can build the context of the story and might connect it with their prior knowledge, cultures and beliefs. Activity 2 was designed to establish the social purpose through discussions and it was cross-cultural activities, such as comparing differences in the two cultures as well. Students discussed their interpretation based on the picture then one or two students shared theirs to the class.

Then, knowing how to identify and construct text types is an important second phase – modeling and deconstructing the text. Students were prepared to absorb —

investigate the structural pattern and language features of the model by reading the text model and not only comprehending the message from the main idea and the specific information but also mastering the features which was displayed in activity 3, 4 and 5. In activity 5 students prior knowledge appeared as they started to judge and compare the story with their cultural background. How they saw and weighted the problems in the story was extraordinary. Their answers reflected their personal opinion and it also communicated their characters.

▶ **Activity 3: First thing first in the reading for main idea**

Individually

Read the following paragraph and answer the questions:

**The Myth of Malin Kundang**
　　A long time ago, in a small village near the beach in West Sumatra, a woman and her son lived. They were Malin Kundang and her mother. Her mother was a single parent because Malin Kundang's father had passed away when he was a baby. Malin Kundang had to live hard with his mother.
　　Malin Kundang was a healthy, dilligent, and strong boy. He usually went to sea to catch fish. After getting fish he would bring it to his mother, or sold the caught fish in the town.

　　One day, when Malin Kundang was sailing, he saw a merchant's ship which was being raided by a small band of pirates. He helped the merchant. With his brave and power, Malin Kundang defeated the pirates. The merchant was so happy and thanked to him. In return the merchant asked Malin Kundang to sail with him. To get a better life, Malin Kundang agreed. He left his mother alone.
　　Many years later, Malin Kundang became wealthy. He had a huge ship and was helped by many ship crews loading trading goods. Perfectly he had a beautiful wife too. When he was sailing his trading journey, his ship landed on a beach near a small village. The villagers recognized him. The news ran fast in the town; "Malin Kundang has become rich and now he is here".
　　An old woman ran to the beach to meet the new rich merchant. She was Malin Kundang's mother. She wanted to hug him, released her sadness of being lonely after so long time. Unfortunately, when the mother came, Malin Kundang who was in front of his well dressed wife and his ship crews denied meeting that old lonely woman. For three times her mother begged Malin Kundang and for three times he yelled at her. At last Malin Kundang said to her "Enough, old woman! I have never had a mother like you, a dirty and ugly woman!" After that he ordered his crews to set sail. He would leave the old mother again but in that time she was full of both sadness and angriness.
　　Finally, enraged, she cursed Malin Kundang that he would turn into a stone if he didn't apologize. Malin Kundang just laughed and really set sail. In the quiet sea, suddenly a thunderstorm came. His huge ship was wrecked and it was too late for Malin Kundang to apologize. He was thrown by the wave out of his ship. He fell on a small island. It was really too late for him to avoid his curse. Suddenly, he turned into a stone.

Questions:

1. What is the main idea of the above paragraph?

2. Do you have difficulties getting main idea of the above paragraph? Explain!

► **Activity 4: Read and learn the following explanation below.**

**What is a narrative?**

A narrative is a text that tells a story and, in doing so, entertains the audience. The purpose of a narrative, other than providing entertainment, can be to make the audience think about an issue, teach them a lesson, or excite their emotions. (Anderson & Anderson, 2002)

**Features of a narrative**

Constructing a narrative

The steps for constructing a narrative text are:

| |
|---|
| An **orientation** in which the narrator tells the audience about *WHO* is in the story, *WHEN* the story is taking place and *WHERE* the action is happening |
| A **complication** that sets off a chain of events that influences what will happen in the story |
| A **sequence of events** where the characters react to the complication |
| A **resolution** in which the characters solve the problem created in the complication |
| A **coda** that provides a comment or moral based on what has been learned from the story (an optional step). |

**Grammatical features of a narrative**

Narratives usually include the following grammatical features:

| |
|---|
| **nouns** that identify the specific characters and places in the story |
| **adjectives** that provide accurate descriptions of the characters and settings |
| **verbs** that show the actions that occur in the story |
| **time words** that connect events, telling *when* they occurred. |

► **Activity 5: Fill in the blank below**

**The Myth of Malin Kundang**

**The characters of the story, where and when the story takes place:** _____ _____ _____

**The problems:** _____ _____

**How the problems are solved:** _____ _____ _____

**How the story ends:** _____ _____ _____

**What are the messages that you can get from the story?:** _____ _____

**What did you learn from the actors?** _____

In activity 5 students prior knowledge appeared as they started to judge and compare the story with their cultural background. How they saw and weighted the problems in the story was extraordinary. Their answers reflected their personal opinion and it also communicated their characters. From the table below it can be seen that students had various response. The appreciative characters dominated the activity 5. Students appreciate the mother of the rebellion son was 18. They appreciate her patience that she had been waiting for Malin Kundang for long time. Two students responded that old generation should give freedom to the younger generation.

Table 1

The number students response in activity 5

| Characters | Activity 5 | Activity 7 |
|---|---|---|
| Appreciative / Not | 18 Students - Appreciative | 13 Students – Not Appreciative |
| Democratic / Not | 2 Students - Democratic | 4 Students - Democratic |
| Tolerant / Not | 0 | 3 Students – tolerant |

In the next stage students began to construct of the text type and the lecturer gradually reduced the contribution. Students were asked to do self-correction and peer editing activities as a next phase- joint construction of the text. Then, the results were scribed onto white board and discussed them to class. In activities 6 students were given Jigsaw and information-gap activities to support their ability in constructing the text and 7. In activity 7 students got a chance to practice freely how to construct narrative text. They were given four reading narrative texts, and then asked to identify the features and the grammar of the texts like activity 5.

**Conclusion**

Students knew that they should appreciate people who have different background but sometimes it was hard to accept the difference especially if they had no chance to know other cultures. Designing innovative material, which is aimed to develop character, is badly needed for students without giving extra subject into curriculum. Students

Intelligence plus characters is a great package that should be had by people who want to take responsibilities in transferring knowledge and leading in the life. In the global world, character building is one of the aims of Indonesia education so that Indonesian can play in international world without forgetting the root – Indonesia great culture. Inserting the multicultural material in English lesson is one way to answer the demand of the Ministry of National Education and the challenge of the world. It is a proof that Indonesian play important roles in the world.

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