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Character Education for Integrity and Justice toward Sustainable Future

**Editors:
Widyastuti Purbani
Satoto E. Nayono**

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Conference on Character Education**

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Widyastuti Purbani
Satoto E. Nayono

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EARLY CHILDHOOD CHILDREN'S CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH PLAYING

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays in Indonesia, there have been so many social problems happening around us that cause many educators (parents, teachers, and society) to feel concerned. All of these social problems end up to character values. It has therefore become a national responsibility for providing a common concern for character education. Character education as a solution to social and national problems needs to be developed as early as possible since individuals are at their early childhood (0-8 years). If such education is successfully developed to children, and the character values become the foundation of their personality, the following phase of education will be more easily developed. Considering that most children's activities consist of playing, the best method to develop children's character education is through playing activities. Through joyful playing under the educators' guidance (parents', teachers', and societies'), children will acquire knowledge about the values of virtues (knowing the good / moral knowing), feel, want and love the values of kindness (desiring the good or loving the good / moral feeling), and perform good behaviors (acting the good / moral action). In this manner, the process of character values internalization, from the external into conscience, transpires in joyful way without any coercion.

Keywords: Character education, playing, early childhood children

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, there are at present many social problems created by individuals of all ages, ranging from children bullying their peers, teenagers performing free sexual behaviors, students engaged in gang fighting, husbands or wives cheating on their spouses, government officials abusing their authorities to elderly people committing suicide because of unbearable heavy-lifeloads, and many more other events that make educators need to reflect on what has been wrong with the education. Some groups of people criticize the system of instruction and education in schools. Is it fair enough to lay the fault solely upon the responsibility of the schools? Presiden Susilo Bambang Yudoyono urges on all people nationwide to give a common concern for character education because all the problems that occur in this society and nation end up downstream to character values. Thus, the responsibility of character education is not charged solely upon schools but also on educators in general, including schools, families, societies, and the nation. If character education is not successfully committed, let us not ever wish to achieve Indonesia's peaceful, well-mannered, prosperous, and affluent future (Madina, 2010). Character education as a solution to social and national problems needs to be developed as early as possible from the moments individuals are at their early childhood (0-8 years). If such education is successfully developed to children, and the character values become the foundation of their personality, the following phase of education will be more easily developed. This is similar to what Freud argued that the failure to form a good personality in early childhood will later bring about a problematic one in a person's adulthood (Freud, in Muslich, 2011).

Considering that children's most activities consist of playing, the best means to develop character in their early childhood is through play activities. Based on the problem as described,

the paper is to discuss early childhood children's character education through playing. For the purpose, the paper will be preceded by a discussion of character, followed by relevance of play and character education, and closed with a conclusion.

A. CHARACTER

A.1. Definition of Character

According to Sykes (in Wasesa, 2011), character is a description of one's moral or psychological qualities which are readable from his/her attitude and behavior pattern, involving thoughts, feelings, and actions.

In line with Wasesa, Munir (2010) defined character as one's established pattern of thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

While Alwisol defined character as a description of one's behavior which accentuates the values of right or wrong, and good or bad, either explicitly or implicitly (2006, p. 8).

In sum, character can be defined as one's quality description or behavior pattern that includes thoughts, feelings, and actions with the dimensions of good-bad or right-wrong, either explicitly or implicitly.

A.2. Character Education and Its Aim

Related to the definition of character which includes three aspects: thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as dimensions of good-bad, character education can be defined as manner education to inculcate human moral values consciously and tangibly, involving elements of: (a) cognition, covering mind, knowledge, and awareness; (b) affection or feeling, and (c) psychomotor or behavior or action (Muslich, 2011; Suyanto, 2009).

Still concerning three aspects of character and its dimension, Lickona (1992) stated that components of good character consists of: (1) knowing the good/moral knowing, (2) desiring the good or loving the good / moral feeling, and (3) acting the good / moral action.

In order not to become an adventure without any direction, the aim of character education should be unerring, and the method should be appropriate (Musfiroh, 2008), so that character education will achieve not only cognitive domain, but also affective and psychomotor domains.

With the aim of developing character education unerringly, Megawangi has, by basing on the noble values of the nation of Indonesia, developed The Nine Basic Character Pillars, including: (1) loving God, (2) being responsible, discipline, and independent, (3) being honest, (4) being respectful and courteous, (5) being compassionate, caring, and cooperating, (6) being self-confident and creative, also working hard and never giving up, (7) developing justice and leadership, (8) being good and humble, and (9) being tolerant, and loving peace and unity (Alvarez, 2008).

In order that character values may be internalized by early childhood children naturally without any coercion, the best learning method is through playing. This is in accordance with Isaac's opinion (in Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003) that play is children's natural resource for learning.

B. RELEVANCY BETWEEN PLAYING AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

B.1. Relevancy between Characteristics and the Importance of Play and Character Education

Playing is a fun activity, undertaken for the benefit of the activity itself (Santrock, 2002, p. 272).

According to Isenberg and Jalongo (2003), there are five important characteristics of play, that is, voluntary and intrinsically motivated, symbolic and meaningful, active, rule-bound, and pleasurable.

Considering the importance of play for early childhood children, three leaders, John Dewey, Patty Smith Hill, and Susan Issac (in Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003) each stated that children acquire cognitive and social skill through playing. Isaac even protected children's right to play and encouraged parents to stimulate their children to play by saying that play is children's natural learning resource.

According to The International Association for Childhood Education and The National Association for the Education of Young Children, play is important because it lets children explore

Moreover, develops social and cultural understanding, helps children to express their thoughts and feelings, gives children the opportunity to meet and resolve the problem, and develops language proficiency skills and concepts (in Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988).

Based on the characteristics and the importance of play, it is concluded that play has a fundamental meaning in children's lives for developing both cognitive and social skills through reasonable activities. Specifically for character education, children can gradually learn and become aware of the fact that human beings' activities are controlled or governed by some rules through relevant playing. From this point, children may further learn other social and cultural rules, including good characters according to national and local cultural views.

3.2. Relevancy between Classification of Play and Character Education

According to Parten (in Santrock, 2008), if play is viewed from social development, started from the least up to the most of one's social maturity, it can be classified into six levels.

1. Unoccupied play: observing other children's playing activities, playing with his /her own body, going up and down the chair, performing random movements without a certain goal, looking around the room.
2. Solitary play: playing alone and independently on others.
3. Onlooker play: playing while seeing his/her friends playing, children can ask their friends who are playing some questions, but there is no attempt or intention to get into the play.
4. Parallel Play: playing in parallel with their friends, playing with the same materials, but each works independently.
5. Associative play: playing in throngs; children play together with a little or without organization. They talk and ask one another questions, and borrow toys from one another.
6. Cooperative play: playing cooperatively with a common goal in a group that brings about a sense of group identity for the members. There are rules and variety of roles of the members in each group, and the activities undertaken are organized. In a competition, the activities are aimed at winning each own group.

From level to level of these six types or levels of social play, it is to be observable that there is an increase in social participation-rule-governed behaviors. It also means that the rule-bound activities, containing character education, can gradually be socialized to children through levels as they grow in age and develop socially.

3.3. Relevancy between the Function of Play and Character Education

The purpose or function of play can be explained from two theories, namely classic and modern theories (Isenberg & Jalango, 2003).

According to classical theory, play is an activity that is based on some causes as follows:

1. Surplus energy: children need to play to exhaust their excess energy.
2. Recreation and relaxation: children restore energy that has been used to perform activities.
3. Instinct: children practice life skills needed in the future, for example, learning to play a role as a father or mother.
4. Recapitulation: children repeat the experience of their ancestors, for example, chasing one another to repeat the hunting era.

According to modern theory, play can be viewed from three perspectives as follows:

1. Psychoanalytic Theory: Playing is a means of emotional release, allowing children to express feelings freely without any pressure.
2. Theory of Cognitive Development: playing is a part of cognitive development, besides that, it is a way of learning for children; playing trains children's flexible thinking and problem solving processes.
3. Cultural Theory: playing has a contradictory principle: at one stage, children are tied to pretending, and on the other, children are aware of their true identities.

According to both classic and modern theories, essentially playing can develop various skills, including motoric, cognitive, affective, linguistic and social skills. In the context of character education, the role of playing is to develop social skills. For example, when children are playing

pretend play, they may learn a variety of future roles and responsibilities required in their culture; they may play joyfully while practicing behaviors and some characters of their ideal-adults, which were generated from their ancestors, in their future lives.

B.4. Relevancy between Educators' Roles in Children's Playing and Character Education

During playing activities, the role of educators as mentors is highly necessary. Based on others' research findings, Isenberg and Jalongo (2003) presented some roles of teachers in children's playing activities as follows:

1. As an observer: observing the interaction between children and their playing objects, the interaction among one another, the length of children's playing time, and the problems they face.
2. As an elaborator: when children keep playing with the same objects or the same theme over after time, teachers or educators may give advice to children to change the playing objects or the theme so that the playing does not seem monotone and becomes elaborated.
3. As a model: sometimes educators need to be models for children in order to help them play a particular role or behavior with a specific skill, for example, become a model of a rabbit mother who protects their children against the attacks of other animals.
4. As an evaluator: evaluating to what extent children's playing activities can meet their needs, and how much children can learn so far.
5. As a planner: teachers or educators may prepare and organize the space and the instruments to play in order that children may play appropriately.

All these roles need to be played by all educators in developing children's character so that educators can help children when they face problem, enrich children's play, know whether or not play stimulates children's character development, attain feedback what progress children have got so far, and provide further supported environment for children to perform their play constructively and joyfully.

B.5. The Role of Playing in Developing Children's Character

The character values that are aimed to be developed will be acquired by children through stages: moral knowing /knowing the good; moral feeling/desiring or loving the good; and moral action/acting the good. In this context, children's character value acquisition is explained through children's moral value acquisition because the two are viewed to have the same development processes (Ayriza, 2011).

Moral Knowing /Knowing the Good

Through fun and exciting playing, especially rule-bound ones, children under educators' guidance will acquire knowledge of good character values, known in Lickona's term (1992) as moral knowing.

According to Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, early childhood children are at the heteronomous moral development stage; it means that children believe that the rules or regulations applied to them are unchangeable, for they are inherited traditionally from people of power so that children tend to accept the rules or regulations rigidly. Further, children also believe that the rules or regulations are established and will always be. As a result, children will relate the violation and the arrival of punishment automatically. For example, children who commit a mistake often look around anxiously because they believe that the arrival of punishment is unavoidable (Piaget, in Monks, Knoers, & Haditono, 2001; Santrock, 2008). Thus, the rules or regulations introduced to children who are at the heteronomous moral development stage will be accepted as they are and obeyed loyally.

Moral Feelings/Desiring or Loving the Good

The knowledge of good character values having been acquired by children, they need to be inculcated with feelings of guilt and shame when children violate the rules applied in a play or game, known in Lickona's term (1992) as moral feelings.

According to Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, a person's personality structure consists of the id, the ego, and the superego. The superego starts showing its functioning when children are about three years old, at which they gather and adopt their parents' and community members' moral values. Once the superego starts functioning, the ego will be filled with feelings of guilt and shame when the superego judges the ego has done something wrong or guilty (Freud, in Rathus, 2007). In addition to shame and guilt, empathy also supports children's development in learning good character or moral values. To acquire empathy, children need to learn perspective taking (Eisenberg, 2006). By acquiring good character values affectively, children will desire or love the good.

Moral Action/Acting the Good

After having acquired knowledge of good character values (moral knowing), and felt guilty when violating regulations (moral feeling), children need to be trained to act the good through conditioning, known in Lickona's term (1992) as moral action.

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (in Grusec, 2006), reinforcement, punishment, and modeling are the processes that are able to explain children's moral development. When children are rewarded for their complying behavior with rules or social custom, they tend to repeat the behavior. Likewise, when children are punished for their rule-violating behavior, they tend to abandon the behavior. In modeling the behaviors they observed, children select the ones they want to model based on their own intensions. In this context, the roles of children's cognition (internal factor) and the models of their environment (external factor) collaboratively determine the actions they actualize.

If the reinforcing pattern is applied consistently in playing activities to the developing good character values, children will habitually and unconsciously learn to behave in accordance with the character values established so that eventually they will get used to behaving in good manners.

In sum, it can be overall concluded that children may learn moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action through fun and unburdened playing.

CONCLUSIONS

Play is a natural source of learning to learn everything for early childhood children, including learning character values. Through rule-bound playing, children learn the knowledge of good character values (moral knowing). In early childhood, children are at the stage of heteronome in their moral development; meaning that children will accept whatever rules applied in their lives, including in their playing rigidly, and believe that the rules are established and will always be. Therefore, along with the development of their superego, children will feel guilty and ashamed if they violate the established rules (moral feeling). Considering most activities of early childhood children are playing, so applying rules in their daily playing activities, will lead them to being conditioned to obey rules. By rewarding or reinforcing good behavior, educators will make children tend to repeat the behavior, and by punishing bad behavior, they will make children tend to leave out or abandon that bad behavior (moral action). Thus, through joyful playing activities, children will unconsciously, without any coercion, accept instructions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Hopefully, with the presence of good character human beings, this nation and country will be led to brighter future.

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