

# EMPOWERING LITERATURE FOR EDUCATING CHARACTER BUILDING (A STUDY CASE ON READERS OF O. HENRY'S *AFTER TWENTY YEARS*)\*

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## ABSTRACT

When Martin Luther King, Jr. mentioned that “*We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education*”, he must have completely understood that education is never enough without educating the students' characters. Nowadays, character-building-based curriculum has been promoted throughout the country to educate students' character building. It also soon becomes the government's concern and urgency to teach character building to students of any level as it is mentioned in the Decree of National Education Ministry number 045/U/2002. However, there are some problematic matters in designing its teaching materials whether it is between didactic and non-didactic or implied and vice versa method of teaching.

To propose a prospective solution of teaching character building to students; therefore, this paper aims to probe and to share a case study from the readers of O. Henry's *After Twenty Years* who happen to be the students of Book Report class at English Language and Literature Department of Jenderal Soedirman University in Purwokerto Central Java. The short story is given to the students as the teaching material to seek the most efficient way of teaching them character building as it is reflected within the short story.

Given the short story, read it, responded and finally answered the questionnaire, those students are able to identify the character building embedded in that particular literary work and to learn them from the story. Besides, derived from the students' questionnaire, it can be concluded that students can educate themselves the character building through the story by

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\* The paper has been presented in The 16th English in South-East Asia Conference: English for People Empowerment in December 8-10, 2011 at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta.

mentioning those learned characters, and they also can show their self-reflection after learning it. In conclusion, there is possibility of using literature as prospective teaching material in educating students' character building by analyzing the qualities embedded in the literature e.g. novels, short stories and poems, and doing this is also a way of empowering literature for a greater life benefit.

Keyword: Character building, Teaching material, and Literature empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

Realizing and being aware of what is happening around Indonesian society nowadays will force and make some of us think and try to relate with the education system that Indonesian people have conducted so far. Corruption, collusion, nepotism and some other white-collar cases are more frequently to appear and to happen in Indonesia; therefore, it is so understandable when some people start questioning this as the result of the unprepared education system in Indonesia since almost the criminals committing those inhumanity cases are those who have pursued high or higher formal education. Further, even some people are saying that the education system has really failed to mentally educate them to really teach them as good human beings and citizens.

These facts are able to lead some of us to look back to what had been argued by Martin Luther King, Jr. that he required us to always *remember that intelligence is not enough. It is intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education.* This is so meaningful to interpret that solely intelligence is not considered enough to teach a person to be a completely educated person. Character building must also be taught and educated to strengthen one's self-value both academically and behaviorally. Seeing the facts that there are still many white-collar crimes happening in Indonesian society either in a very small scale or the huge ones, Indonesian education system is assumed to be incomplete, and it has not yet accommodated character building education during the formal education levels. As a result, the output of such education system can only graduate those well-educated people without having strong and good personalities. It also soon becomes the government's concern and urgency to teach character building to students of any level as it is mention in the Decree of National Education Ministry number 045/U/2002. The government has realized the urgency of teaching

character building to students in all levels of education since, in fact, it is character building that could strengthen the personality and the characters of students who will be the grown-up citizens in this country.

As a higher educational institution, university has been demanded to be one of educational institution that could bridge the conduct of character building education being inserted within its curriculum. Thus far, university or the higher educational institution seems to be not yet providing and accommodating the atmosphere of character building education that must be very useful for its graduates in the future to defend themselves from any misconducts and well-educated crimes committed when they are surviving their lives in the society. It is because clearly one who is living his life with good and strong character and personality will be doing more wise and thoughtful conducts in his life, too. It is just so in line with what Thomas Lickona & Matthew Davidson (2005) mentioned that character building education is placed as *a deliberate effort to cultivate good character*. It means that character building education is assumed to be one fruitful and thoughtful way of cultivating and making good and strong character more down-to-earth. To assume that character building education does not really work in higher educational level is a very big flaw. According to Narvaez & Kapsley (n.d.), they emphasized that character education does not end with high school. Further, it could be understood that universities have also the responsibilities to teach students character building to create and to graduate good graduates possessing good and strong personalities and characters. As one example that has been conducted by Narvaez and Kapsley is to conduct the character building education among 134 colleges and universities to emphasize the students' abilities in terms of *moral reasoning skills, community-building experiences, spiritual growth, and a drug-free environment*. This example could prove that such character building process is still needed and demanded in the higher educational level.

However, the process of conducting character building education for university students might need some innovation in its teaching method and its teaching material. Character building education for university students who are considered mature might need to have a teaching method and teaching material that are not didactic and preaching style. This is in line with what Dewey in Lapsley and Narvaez (n.d.) have emphasized that traditional pedagogy of exhortation, didactic instruction and drill fails to cultivate a social spirit. They are not working to establish the spirit of being socialized people in the society. On the other hand,

what might be needed is teaching method or teaching approach which is more progressive and indirect method that can stimulate the skills of active social construction of moral meaning by participating the democracy, having collaboration and cooperation in work groups and also in discussions.

Furthermore, university students majoring on English Literature study program at FISIP University of Jenderal Soedirman are likely to be much exposed to read various literary works with various topics that some of them are very universal topics reflecting the actual and real life in the society. Literature/ literary works offer its readers with values, humanity, and other issues that sometimes they do reflect things happening in the real life. Therefore, Laersonson & Swingewood (1971) called literature as *a mirror to the age*. By reading literature, students are exposed to many life stories presented within the literature. Therefore, when literature is used as teaching material for character building education, it can predicted that literature could teach students more humanistic life experience, and not teaching them in didactic manner nor in preaching way. In this study, one example of literary works utilized as the teaching material is a short story by O'Henry entitled *After Twenty Years*. In relation to the aim of this paper, the writer wants to explore the quality that literature has that can be very useful and possible to be taken into account as teaching material for character building education. Besides, the writer is going also to illustrate the result of previous study setting an example of utilizing one of literary works to teach character building and the students' opinion after they use a piece of work literature in their character building education process.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Character Building Education***

Nowadays, character building education is booming and is to be socialized by the government. However, it is necessary to understand the concept of character building education before discussing further to take literature into account as one teaching material in character building education classes. Lickona and Davidson (2005) also ensured that teachers play important roles to teach the good characters that have become the spirit of character building education. Furthermore, to understand the definition of character education, one must be able to define what character means. Lickona and Davidson (2005) defined good character as it

consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. By this definition, students who are being educated or taught their character building must possess the ability of identifying the good and the bad things including their action, willing, and concept of good life. In fact, it sounds so perfect; however, students nowadays really need this so that they could have brighter life in the future based on their best characters. Furthermore, Lickona and Davidson (2005) mentioned some indicators of having good characters such as trustworthy, responsible, respectful, fair and just, caring, empathic, self-controlled, and above all, as a good citizen who obeys laws and plays by the rules. It is based on these characters, students are trained to bear them in mind; they understand these characters as their life guidance.

In relation to the aim of this paper that is to study the quality of literature that can be possibly utilized as the character building education teaching media, it could be suggested that in literature there must be issues related to the character indicators mentioned above. It means that within the story or the messages delivered and depicted in the literary works must pop-up those particular issues. Therefore, by reading them, students can easily take a role model to understand the good characters illustrated. These qualities are actually found and depicted in the short story under the study e.g. O'Henry's *After Twenty Years* in which the story brings the issues related to responsibility and honesty between two best friends who vowed to meet again after twenty years later in the same place and in the same date. The conflict provided within the short story is worth reading since such kind of situation is possible to happen in this life. As a result, this novel is chosen as the media for the character building education in this particular time; therefore, it also aims at seeing the effectiveness of utilizing this short story that will be explored by the students.

Furthermore, to examine the effectiveness of the process of character building education, students needs to be assessed. The assessment is of course not to judge their score or grade, but it is more to investigate their understanding of good characters that they have studied or learned during the process. Lickona and Davidson (2005) divided the concept of character into 2 types of character i.e. moral and performance characters. Moral character is the character emerging from interpersonal and ethical relationship among people whereas performance character is the performed characters which are good in the real life. Both of them are supporting one another. The following quotation may explain their position:

*First, it is possible to have performance character without moral character, and vice versa. Second, a person of character embodies both performance character and moral character. Both carry obligation. Third, whereas moral virtues are intrinsically good, performance virtues can be used for bad ends. Forth, both performance character and moral characters have three psychological components: awareness, attitude, and action. Fifth, a person of character, performance character and moral character support each other in an integrated, interdependent way. The last, performance character and moral character can be operationally defined in terms of eight strengths of character. (Thomas Lickona & Matthew Davidson, 2005)*

To understand the effectiveness of the character building education, the writer has also employed the following pointers to carefully check the students' understanding and reaction about the characters that they have learned and found in the literary works. (Thomas Lickona & Matthew Davidson, 2005):

Table 1. Performance and Moral Character Indicators

|                                   | <b>Action/<br/>behavior/ habits</b>  | <b>Attitude/ emotional/<br/>valuing</b>             | <b>Awareness/<br/>cognitive</b>   |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Performance<br/>Character:</b> | <p>2 Demonstrates the skills and habits required for excellence.</p>                     | <p>✓ Is strongly motivated to give best effort.</p> | <p>2 Can identify excellence in many areas of endeavor.</p>                 |
|                                   | <p>2 Practices in order to improve in the skills and habits required for excellence.</p> | <p>2 Is committed to high-quality work.</p>         | <p>2 Understands the performance virtues required to pursue excellence.</p> |

|                         |   |   |  |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Moral Character:</b> | ≥ Acts upon ethical convictions.  | ≥ Cares deeply about doing the right thing; makes the moral self central to identity. | ⊕ Recognizes the ethical dimensions of situations  |
|                         | ∓ Takes a stand for what is right; assumes leadership for influencing others to do what is right. | ∓ Has the courage of conscience in the face of social pressure.                       | ⊕ Grapples with important moral questions (e.g. "How will this decision affect others?" "How would I like to be treated if I were in this situation?") |

The indicators above are to be used as the assessment indicators to check whether those indicators above are shown or performed or not by the students after they read and discuss the short story containing the values of good characters that become the objective of the study.

### **Literature Empowerment and Character Building Education**

Employing literature as the teaching material for character building education is indeed a way of empowering literature exactly like this paper is aiming to purpose. Empowering literature during the process of character building education is supported by some qualities that literature can provide when it is read and enjoyed by its readers. At least, there are some viewpoints of examining the reasons for using and empowering literature in character building education e.g. it is seen as motivating material depicting real sense of life achievement; it is placed as an access to cultural background showing the cultural comparison and eventually leading to social respect, and it is considered to educate the whole person relating the value inside and outside the society.

Literature is seen as motivating material because it depicts the real sense of life achievement. The story has some particular issues of human life that its readers can learn not only about the value good or bad characters, but also the cultural

background that can show them or lead them to see more examples of good and bad characters from other cultures. Besides, there are more positive points that literature can offer and can be empowered for the character building education. Collie and Slater (1987) defined that it is from literature that people can treat it as *valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement*. In relation to the empowerment of literature for character building teaching material, literature is placed as the valuable authentic material because it can provide the real character building education inside its stories. The authentic material reflects the real examples of character building indicators exactly like what is presented by the short story used in this study. O'Henry's *After Twenty Years* presents the story of responsibilities and honesty between two best friends meeting after twenty years whom one of them was apparently the country's most wanted robber that the other best friend had the obligatory duty to arrest him. When such story is read, the readers see the authentic example of character building that they must be able to identify which one is good and another one is the bad. Furthermore, the empowerment of literature for character building can be taken into account just like what Collie & Slater (1987) explained that *literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is 'important' in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues. Of course, the fundamental human issues cover the qualities of good characters presented above. Thus far, the empowerment of literature to be used for the teaching material of character building education is so possible by considering the qualities that literature has e.g. valuable authentic material and fundamental human issues.*

*Another quality that literature could offer is that literature can educate the whole people, (Lazar, 1993).* Generally, it is clearly seen that indeed literature and its literary works can teach its readers. It can be taught with many teaching objective such as the language use, the content and the messages, and also some other ideas that might not be found in other teaching materials. Secondly, Lazar also claimed that *literature may also have a wider educational function in the classroom in that it can help to stimulate the imagination of the students, to develop their critical abilities and to increase their emotional awareness. Thus, it could add more qualities that literature could offer for the character building education and finally literature could empower the character building education for its readers.*

## ***METHOD OF STUDY***

This study is written based on the research conducted by involving the students of English Language and Literature Study Program who were taking the Book Report subject in 2011. The short story employed i.e. O. Henry's *After Twenty Years* was one of the reading texts in that particular class. Therefore, the students were to read and to write their response, opinion and answer based on the questionnaire distributed. The research is a qualitative descriptive analytic in which the data are gained by distributing the questionnaire to the students in order to answer the study objectives namely students can mention the learned characters, show their self-reflection after learning it and finally to prove that literature can be employed for teaching material for educating the students' character building. After the data were gained, they are classified, analyzed and reduced based on the study objectives.

## ***FINDING AND DISCUSSION***

### **Empowering Literature for Character Building Education**

#### ***Reading O'Henry's After Twenty Years: the Case Study***

Recently, a previous study on using short story as the teaching material has been conducted by two lecturers of English Literature Department Universitas Jenderal Soedirman. The study shows that literature, in this case is short story entitled *After Twenty Years* by O'Henry, is very possible to be utilized as one of potential teaching material for character building education, (Murniati & Trisnawati, 2011). The short story is given to the students as the teaching material to seek the most efficient way of teaching them character building as it is reflected within the short story. Given the short story, read it, responded and finally answered the questionnaire, students have joined the so-called the character building education within the Book Report Class. Therefore, the study result of this previous study is going to be described and illustrated here to support the explanation that indeed literature can empower the character building education for the students at the university.

The first thing to underline from the result of the study is to prove that the students acknowledge that this particular short story can teach the character building. According to Murniati & Trisnawati (2011), the respondents clearly stated their idea that this short story can be used for teaching their character

building as they learned the good characters were presented in the story although it was not delivered directly. Based on their questionnaire, respondents for 95% supported and agreed that *After Twenty Years* can be used for teaching their character building; therefore, it can be used for the character building education teaching material. The following is some data describing the positive statement from the respondents.

Table2. Questionnaire answer sheet

| Pertanyaan  | Jawaban:  |
|---|---|
| 1. Menurut Anda apakah cerpen <i>After Twenty Years</i> karya OHenry dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai media pembelajaran karakter (character building education)? | Bisa, karena cerita ini memuat kejadian-kejadian yang berbeda, seperti halnya kejujuran, kesetiaan dan tanggung jawab. Walaupun diuraikan secara tersirat, kita dapat memahaminya. Pendidikan karakter tersebut dapat diterapkan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari tetapi dalam kejadian berbeda.   |
|   | Ya bisa, karena disini dalam cerpen <i>After Twenty Years</i> mengajarkan kita untuk bertanggung jawab atas apa yang kita ucapkan selain itu disini juga mengajarkan kita untuk jujur apapun resikonya nanti.   |
|   | Ya, karena dalam cerpen tersebut mendeskripsikan karakter-karakter tokoh yang bisa memberikan kita sebuah pesan atau pembelajaran dari bacaan tersebut bisa kita contoh dalam kehidupan kita terutama karakter yang baik.   |
|   | Ya, karena dalam cerpen ini saya menemukan nilai-nilai seperti pentingnya kejujuran dan tanggung jawab yang dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai media pembelajaran karakter.   |
|   | Menurut saya cerpen <i>After Twenty Years</i> karya O. Henry dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai media pembelajaran karakter karena cerpen ini berisi tentang persahabatan yang mengajarkan saya tentang loyalitas yaitu kesetiaan kepada seorang sahabat. Cerpen ini menceritakan Jimmy Wales yang mempunyai karakter, dia setia, bertanggung jawab dan punya profesionalitas tinggi dibuktikan ada saat Jimmy Wells harus melaksanakan tugasnya untuk menangkap pencuri yang ternyata pencuri itu adalah temannya sendiri. Ia tetap melaksanakan tugasnya dengan baik walaupun dia tidak melakukannya dengan tangannya sendiri. Namun itu sudah menunjukkan bahwa Jimmy Wells mempunyai tanggung jawab dan profesionalitas tinggi. |

Based on the table above, students mostly claimed that the short story is possible to be used for teaching the character building because the story describes the life experiences related to honesty, responsibility, and moral messages that can teach the students to behave in this life. The spirit of honesty and responsibility is so obvious and therefore students can learn the good characters from this story as it becomes the grand design of character building education i.e. teaching the people the good and the bad characters in life.

Furthermore, the next point is that the character building education inserted in this Book Report class could meet its effectiveness because the involved students are able to identify the good and the bad character based on the story. The questionnaire provided has led the respondents to confirm and to add the learned characters from the short story. Based on the previous study, there are 38.8% of respondents confirmed that they could find the ideas of good characters such as honesty and responsibility from the story. Besides, there are some other 69.2% respondents could show and mention some other good characters from the short story such as professionalism, loyalty, solidarity, law-obedient citizenship and integrity. They could figure them out since they are presented in the story indirectly and the respondents can conclude them. Some of their opinions are presented in the following table:

Table3. Questionnaire answer sheet

| Pertanyaan 2:<br>Dapatkah Anda mengidentifikasi criteria pendidikan karakter dalam cerpen tersebut seperti kejujuran, tanggung jawab, dan lain-lain? Sebutkan! | Uraian Jawaban  |
|--|---|
|  | Kejujuran: saat Jimmy mengirimkan sebuah surat. Tanggung jawab: saat Jimmy harus menangkap Bob. Tepat Janji: saat Bob menunggu kedatangan Jimmy setelah 20 tahun setelahnya. Keberanian: cara Bob datang untuk menemui Jimmy, padahal ia sedang buron |
|  | Honesty, responsible with the job, professionalism, loyalty   |
|  | Kejujuran, tanggung jawab, kesetiaan, pengorbanan, kepercayaan, profesional.  |
|  | Kesetiakawanan, kecerdasan, rasa empati, keprofesionalan, kesetiaan dan tidak berkianat   |

Finally, the last part is that students show that they are learning something related to good characters from that story as they are able to mention the moral messages that they have learned. The data presented below are to support the fact that this process of teaching character building is able to meet the effectiveness because the students not only can identify the good characters inside but also can mention some other moral messages and even some other good character within their opinions.

Table4. Questionnaire answer sheet

| Pertanyaan   | Uraian Jawaban   |
|--|--|
| 3:<br>Dapatkah anda menemukan pesan moral dalam cerpen After Twenty Years? | Ya tentu, saya bisa menemukan pesan moral dalam cerpen tersebut, terutama dalam hal tanggung jawab dan setia kawan yang dilakukan oleh Jimmy Wales dan dalam hal setia kawan serta menepati janji yang dilakukan oleh Silky Bob.   |
|  | Yes, I learned about what friendship is all about, the loyalty and the professionalism. I learned about Silky Bob who still remembered his promises with Jimmy Wells after twenty years. Even though hes a bank robbery but still has a royalty with the promises that he made with his friends. |
|  | Pesan moral dalam cerpen tersebut adalah kesetiaan dan kejujuran sangat penting bagi suatu hubungan persahabatan agar tetap terjaga sampai kapanpun, namun tanggung jawab akan pekerjaan atau profesi harus diprioritaskan walau harus berhadapan dengan teman sendiri.                          |
|  | Ya, saya dapat menemukan. Menunjukan rasa sayang kita kepada sahabat itu tidak cukup hanya dengan kesetiaan/ kesetiakawanan saja, tapi juga dengan tetap mengakui kesalahan yang diperbuat sahabatnya dan tidak membenarkannya.  |

Therefore, this study based on O'Henry's *After Twenty Years* really contribute to support the fact that literature can be utilized and can empower the teaching and learning process of character building education.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, there is possibility of using literature as prospective teaching material for educating the students' character building seen from the qualities embedded in the literature e.g. novels, short stories and poems, and doing this is also a way of empowering literature for a greater life benefit. This

empowerment of literature is supported not only based on the theoretical overview based on the qualities attached to literature, but also based on the study conducted previously.

Based on the result of this study, it can be suggested that character building education can employ any other short story and novels. It also suggests that other forms of literary genres such as poems or drama as long as they have the criteria of the characters that students can learn from.

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