

Review on Extensive Reading for Character Development: Education for International Understanding

A Critical Review Paper by

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Extensive reading is a part of the course in English as foreign language. It is given to improve the skills both in reading and literacy. Bamford states that the benefits of extensive reading are to increase learner's reading ability in the target language, develop positive attitudes toward reading, increase motivation to read, and make gains in various proficiency in the target language, including vocabulary and writing (in Greenberg et al.,2006).

This paper addresses the review on extensive reading for character development which is presented in NELTAL II conference. The review covers the subsections on (1) the summary of the paper; and (2) the critical review of the paper; and (3) concluding remark.

1. The Summary of Extensive Reading for Character Development

Extensive reading course in the undergraduate program of the English Department at State University of Malang encourages reading with good themes to build students' character. The themes are of Education for International Understanding (EIU). Some reasons underlying the use of stories in the course cover its social contexts and power to bring positive mental image of the lofty character such as those of historical figures. Therefore, the extensive reading course was taught to improve student's English proficiency, help them become enthusiastic readers, and develop their character.

The themes employed in the learning tasks cover both cognitive and affective components related with EIU to guide students to become good citizens for the country and the world. This is in accord with the Hague Appeal for Peace conference in May 1999 on peace education. In addition, the need for the peace education is rooted from the fact of great

deal of moral stutterers or moral illiteracy today. Consequently, teachers need to emphasize character building by guiding students to connect their prior knowledge with their personal experience (text-to-self), world events (text-to-world), and other literary pieces (text-to-text).

Literature-based approach becomes the core as it functions as a change agent to develop children's lofty character. Good literature provides role models so that children identify the character which can be stronger than their identification with real figures. This reflects that good literature broadens the children's view of the world which develops their critical thinking as well. It starts from their own understanding to the text and add to their dimensions to evaluate and use the information effectively. Teaching with this approach includes choosing stories for storytelling, writing script, doing poetry recitation, performing play, doing book review, and content analysis.

Introducing EIU is meant to develop and strengthen students' values to respect for others. They are introduced to EIU concept, definition of values, virtues, moral and ethics, the notion of character development, and EIU themes such as peace, multiculturalism and pluralism, sustainable development, human rights and fundamental freedom.

To analyze literary character, the analysis is done on the author's description, what the character and the other say and do, the characters' attributes, qualities, feelings, relationships, goals or motives, and changes.

2. The Critical Review on Extensive Reading for Character Development

Extensive reading as an approach used in the paper enlarges the learners view and review of unknown words in specific context which will allow the learner to infer the word's meaning, and thus to learn unknown words especially those related with the themes on EIU. Reading texts provided in the course not only function as good models for English language use but also for learners' character building. In addition, the reading texts also provide opportunities to study the lofty characters who give students perfect role model. Lastly, the good model can introduce the concept of peace education.

In extensive reading course, the reader deals with a longer text as a whole, which requires the ability to understand the component parts and their contribution to the overall meaning, e.g. reading a newspaper article, short story or novel (Wright, 1992). Based on the paper, the emphasis is not simply developing good reading habit, building up knowledge of

vocabulary and structure, and encouraging a liking of reading. In the long term, it improves the students' character.

Regarding the reading activities above, there are some teaching reading principles: (1) reading is not merely a passive skill; (2) students need to be engaged with what they are reading; (3) students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a reading text, not just to the language; (4) prediction is a major factor in reading; (5) match the task to the topic; and (6) good teachers exploit reading texts to the full (Harmer, 1998). By using inspiring stories in the extensive reading course, these crucial principles are not difficult to do as the students' enthusiastically involved in the class activities

Basically, there are roles of extensive reading in language learning: (1) to provide 'comprehensible input'; (2) to enhance learners' general language competence; (3) to increase the students' exposure to the language; (4) to increase knowledge of vocabulary; (5) to lead to improvement in writing; (6) to motivate learners to read; (7) to consolidate previously learned language; (8) to build confidence with extended texts; (9) to encourage the exploitation of textual redundancy; and (10) to facilitate the development of prediction skills (Bell, 1998). The roles are consolidated during the implementation of extensive reading using the stories in this paper.

Using stories the students like is very strategic for the paper as they are not compelled to finish uninteresting materials. Reading material is normally for pleasure, information or general understanding; reading is its own reward with few or no follow-up exercises after reading; reading is individual and silent. Reading speed is usually faster when students read materials they can easily understand.

Teaching character development is very complex. The complexities are reflected in some quotations in the following:

- Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands. *Anne Frank*.
- The childhood shows the man,
As morning shows the day. Be famous then
By wisdom; as thy empire must extend,
So let extend thy mind o'er all the world. *John Milton*.
- A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you when forget-me-nots are withered. Carve your name on hearts, and not on marble. *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

- Character isn't something you were born with and can't change, like your fingerprints. It's something you weren't born with and must take responsibility for forming. *Jim Rohn*
- Good character is more to be praised than outstanding talent. Most talents are, to some extent, a gift. Good character, by contrast, is not given to us. We have to build it piece by piece — by thought, choice, courage and determination. *John Luther*
- Nearly all men can stand adversity. But if you want to test a man's character, give him power. *Abraham Lincoln*

Character development begins at home and continues at school. There are at least three main points to emphasize in character development namely character feedback, honesty, and good works (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2010). These have been cover in the themes introduced in EIU used in the extensive reading course. In addition this course also has successfully introduced the concept of education peace where students are given opportunities to learn the following:

- To understand what character and integrity are. Character is the qualities in a person and integrity is doing the right thing for the right reason even when no one is watching.
- To choose a set of rules or moral principles they believe will lead to happiness drawn from the stories as the extensive reading materials.
- To look at the choices they have made in the past. It is in line with "I am what I am today because the choices I made yesterday, that person cannot say, I choose otherwise." –*Stephen R. Covey*.
- To decide what they must change their behavior.
- To be conscious everyday of the decisions they make.

3. Concluding Remark

This extensive reading course has introduced an effort done by an English teacher to shape the students' character development. The effort is made due to the realization of parents hope for the betterment of their children's future. This is as what reflected by an anonymous letter below from a father which has been widely attributed to Abraham Lincoln.

A Word To Teachers

He will have to learn, I know,
that all men are not just,
all men are not true.
But teach him also that
for every scoundrel there is a hero;
that for every selfish politician,
there is a dedicated leader.
Teach him for every enemy there is a friend.

Steer him away from envy,
if you can;
teach him the secret of
quiet laughter.

Let him learn early that
the bullies are the easiest to lick.
Teach him, if you can,
the wonder of books.
But also give him quiet time
to ponder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky,
bees in the sun,
and the flowers on a green hillside.

In the school teach him
it is far more honorable to fail
than to cheat.
Teach him to have faith
in his own ideas,
even if everyone tells him
they are wrong.
Teach him to be gentle
with gentle people
and tough with the tough.

Try to give my son
the strength not to follow the crowd
when everyone is getting on the band wagon.
Teach him to listen to all men,
but teach him also to filter
all he hears on a screen of truth,
and take only the good
that comes through.

Teach him, if you can,
how to laugh when he is sad.
Teach him there is no shame in tears.
Teach him to scoff at cynics,
and to beware of too much sweetness.

Teach him to sell his brawn
and brain to the highest bidders
but never to put a price tag
on his heart and soul.

Teach him to close his ears
to a howling mob
and to stand and fight
if he thinks he's right.
Treat him gently,
but do not coddle him,
because only the test
of fire makes fine steel.

Let him have the courage
to be impatient.
let him have the patience to be brave.
Teach him always
to have sublime faith in himself,
because then he will have
sublime faith in mankind.

This is a big order,
but see what you can do.
He is such a fine little fellow,
my son!

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