

CRITICAL AND EFFECTIVE READING TO BUILD THE CHARACTERS AS ACTIVE READERS

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Abstract

Basically, everyone already has its own character. However, the character can also be formed through habit and experience. As it is explained by Lickona (2013:72), a good character consists of knowing, desiring, and doing the good—mind habit, heart habit, and action habit. Consciously or not, people have a variety of character instilled in him through activities done daily, such as reading habit. Good readers do not necessarily accept or reject what they read, but must be critically analyzed the reading through various critical reading techniques, namely making inference, distinguishing facts from opinion, identifying tone, purpose, and bias. In addition, active readers should apply different reading skills in each reading activity based on the purpose and reading texts chosen, so that the activity can take place more effectively and helpful. The reaction of readers to reading materials by selecting appropriate reading skills and is followed by careful analysis can encourage the formation of good character in him. Active readers are critical, sensitive, carefully, objective, flexible, responsible, prudent, effective, disciplined, and have a high curiosity towards reading.

Key words: Active Readers, Character building, Critical and Effective Reading

A. INTRODUCTION

Someone with good characters can understand himself, know where his position exactly, be sensitive to his environment, stuff for something new, and do good things for himself and others. Those characters are not merely built. The character building is influenced by his activities.

One of activities that can help the character building on someone is reading. Reading activity can be done everywhere, anytime, and for any purposes. Reading is done to kill the time, do school homework and assignment, work report, and also to get new information. The result of the activities can give some effects on someone such as his mind-set, his attitude, and also his response toward anything around him.

Reading is not merely read the writing, get information, and then finish. Reading can make the readers feel happy, sad, angry, upset, afraid, etc. This activity can give positive and negative effects to the readers. No one wants to feel regret after doing that activity, of course. That's why, a good reader should be active and critical in doing reading activity. Being an active and critical reader can build someone's character strongly and later on can influence his life generally.

According to Harmer (2001:210), "to get maximum benefit from their reading, students need to be involved in both extensive and intensive reading." In extensive reading, a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement, and in intensive reading a teacher usually choose, direct and design what the students read to enable students to develop specific receptive skills. The choosing of texts can influence the students' purpose in reading. It is not enough to tell students to "read a lot", it is needed to offer them a program which includes appropriate materials, guidance, tasks, and facilities. In order to get students to read enthusiastically in class, it is needed to work to create interest in the topic and tasks.

University students read many kinds of material: research articles, essays, critiques, reports and analyses. The students are expected to be able to do much more than understand and remember the basic content. They should read critically, interpreting, evaluating, and reacting to assigned readings. According to McWhorther (1994:54), in critical reading, the readers need to annotate as they read, analyze and evaluate what they have read, and draw comparisons among several works. In short, a critical reader should start being critical before, while, and after reading. When she or he does this, she/he becomes an active reader.

There are some advantages by becoming active while reading. Beside getting new and important information, unconsciously, at that time a reader has already build his own characters. In a discussion done at Wikipedia, it is stated that character building is experiences which teach you some of life's lessons; lessons like keep your word, pay attention, don't run with sharp objects. That explains how experience influences someone's characters so much. That is also happen in doing reading activity by becoming active readers. An active reader will not accept anything he read easily, he tends to think first whether the topics are right or wrong, worthy or not. Active readers also avoid taking too long time for one activity only and divide times for various activities in their life.

In other words, without analyzing the reading text, the readers usually are influenced easily by the gotten information. Then, making reaction such as too happy, angry, sad, and even disappointed. However, by becoming critical reading, the reaction can be more positive.

Beside understanding the content of material he reads, an active reader can get many information without spending so much time. As stated by Mikulecky and Jeffries (2005), "*Readers do not always have time to enjoy what they are reading*". Eventhough they have willingness to know about new information, or new theory, they always need to divide their time for some other activities. Because of that, applying the appropriate strategies and skills can give valuable help for every reader.

There are some strategies in reading that can help someone becomes an active and critical reader namely SQ3R, PQRS, DRTA, concept building, PACA, KWL plus, and so on. Some of these strategies are mentioned by Kinsella (2000:4) in her book. The strategies consists of several reading skills that can be applied in doing reading activities such as; scanning, skimming, previewing and predicting, guessing meaning from context, understanding punctuation, reference, and summarizing. By using various reading strategies and skills, a reader can become more effective and efficient in timing his activities, can do many things in short time, flexible and responsible.

Based on the facts and explanation above, the writer is interested in writing an article concerning about how to build the characters as active readers by applying critical and effective reading activities.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Critical and Effective Reading to be Active Readers

When someone decides to read, he probably thinks about what he want to find and how he can get what he want. Next, he will choose the reading selection and choose the strategies to get the things. In this case, the person can be called an active reader. According to Kinsella (2000:2), active readers get involved with what they read, respond to the reading with thoughts, questions, and ideas. The more involved the readers are, the more they learn from the reading activity.

Someone becomes an active reader when he analyzes what he read. According to Vradenbreght in Nyoman (2010:357), content analysis is related to the content of communication with three components, namely: (a) who is talking, (b) what is being talked, (c) what is the effect. It means that, readers need to know who the writer is, what is he talking about and also his position on the topic, and what is expected from the readers after reading the texts/articles. These points become the guidance for the readers to analyze their reading texts.

Critical reading activity helps the readers to become critical or active readers. Whatever the materials they read, they do not only "read it", but also get in it. Critical reading is a procedure to analyze and evaluate reading material. Students need to observe details as they read and recall facts after they have completed assigned readings. College-level reading material will present complex issues and arguable claims about which students will have to advance conclusions, synthesize new material with previous knowledge, identify relationships to other information, or determine their agreement or disagreement with a writer's position.

To non-critical readers, texts provide facts. They gain knowledge by memorizing the statements within a text and is satisfied with recognizing what a text says and restating the key remarks. To the critical readers, any single text provides but one portrayal of the facts. Critical readers thus recognize not only what a text says, but also how that text portrays the subject matter. According to Kurland (2000:2), critical reading has three steps of analysis; what a text says (restatement – talks about the same topic as the original text), what a text does (description – discusses aspects of the discussion itself), and what a text means (interpretation – analyzes the text and asserts a meaning from the text as a whole).The readers need to be active and creative when reading. They have to ask some questions and think about the text.

To read critically is to make judgments about how a text is argued. McWhorter (1980:377) explains that critical reading means the careful and deliberate evaluation of ideas for the purpose of making a judgment about their worth or value. Readers should not read looking only for information and should read looking for ways of thinking about the subject matter. When reading, avoid extracting and compiling lists of evidence, lists of facts and examples. Avoid approaching a text by asking "What information can I get out of it?" Rather ask "How does this text work? How is it argued? How does the text reach its conclusions?"

Beside being critical, an active reader also should be effective. It is true that to read means to understand what is being read, however, a reader should do the reading activity effectively. She/he can get various information without spending too much time. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2005) say, "*Readers do not always have time to enjoy what they are reading*". Eventhough they have high curiosity to get new information or understand a new theory, they should be able to divide their times for other activities. That's why, using the appropriate strategies in reading can help the readers much

Students are expected to have comprehension skills. According to Broughton, et.al (1978) in Tarigan (2008:12), comprehension skills are placed at the top position. The aspects include 1) understanding the simple meaning, 2) understanding the significance and sense (reader's purpose, readers' reaction), 3) evaluation on the

content and form, and 4) the flexibility of reading speed based on the purpose of reading. The skills can be applied by readers in their reading activities which can help them to get understanding more easily. That's why students should get the point from what they read well and deeply by not only knowing, identifying, but also evaluating.

Basically, critical and effective readers are called good readers. When critical readers try to evaluate what they read and try to get in the text, effective readers need to do reading for main ideas, it means that an activity in reading to find out, gain, and understand the ideas from the reading selection (Tarigan, 2008:120). Furthermore, he also explains the characteristics of a good reader: 1. A good reader knows why he reads, 2. A good reader understand what he reads, 3. A good reader should have various reading speed based on his purpose in reading (skimming, scanning, reading faster, critical reading, etc), and 4. A good reader should familiar with the printed media (paperbacks, graphics, magazines, and newspaper). In short, when a good reader decides to read, he should think the reason why he reads, then choose the appropriate skills/strategies based on the organization of the texts he reads to reach the goal.

2. Character building

Building the characters by becoming active readers sounds simple, but both have a real connection. As mentioned before that reading is an activity that is done regularly, again and again, that finally becomes life experience. The purpose of reading is to get understanding on the written texts. Tarigan (2008:7) says that reading is a process done and used by the readers to get the writer's message from written communication. It also can be said that reading as communication activity with the written messages. In a communication, it is expected that the message can be gotten by the readers in form of understanding the texts.

Everyone has different purpose in reading, depends on his/her needs. Tarigan (2008:9) also explains that the main goal of reading is to seek for and achieve information, including understanding or getting the meaning the content of the text. This meaning is the point of our reading activity. To get the point, readers need to focus and do the reading activity seriously. The way readers catch the idea from what they read can give big effects on the establishment of some characters for them, such as wise, stuff, be responsible, brave, loyal, and patient.

In schools, character building means the children/students are trained to be responsible, discipline, honest, not only in the classroom but also in the society as their characters. Beside getting formal education, they also learn to be responsible on their duty toward the class shift, throw the garbage into the rubbish bin, and be polite to anybody. Mochtar (2007) in his article explains that character building is a kind of character education. Unfortunately, in general many people assume that character education is like religion subject, civic education, or behavioral subjects which focus on the introduction of values in the form of cognitive and affective a little bit. While, character building is much more than what people thought. It is not only knowledge they get in the classroom, but also outside the classroom.

Lickona (2013:72) explains that characters consist of operational values which are needed in practice. Then the characters will grow and make a value becomes a nature, internal character that can be used to react toward various conditions morally. It can be said that characters are formed from three related aspects: moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral behavior. The three things can show the good characters that people have inside of him.

According to Douglas in Samani, et.al (2013:41), character is not inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action. It is true that characters are influenced by heredity (parents), but environment (natural and social) also take a part in building someone's character. Furthermore, Samani et.al (2013:43) explains that character is *nilai dasar yang membangun pribadi seseorang, terbentuk baik karena pengaruh hereditas maupun pengaruh lingkungan, yang membedakannya dengan orang lain, serta diwujudkan dalam sikap dan perilakunya sehari-hari*. (Character is someone's basic value inside of him which is formed because of heredity or the influence of its environment that differentiates him from others, and revealed through his attitude and behavior in everyday life). From the explanation above, reading activity is a part of his environment that can build student's characters.

Surento in his article about character building says that "Character building" is experiences which teach you some of life's lessons; lessons like keep your word, pay attention, don't run with sharp objects. Many character building experiences hurt and may contain a "significant emotional experience". With a little good luck, you will live through them and be a better person. Reading activity as a part of life can give so much experiences to readers that later on can teach them about life and socialize.

Because the character can be seen from someone's attitude, furthermore, in his book, Samani, et.al (2013:46) also explains about the scope of the characters value that is divided into five as follow: a. the characters in relationship with God (disciplined, self-correction, thankful, faithful, honest, future oriented, etc), b. the characters in relationship with himself (hard worker, the risk taker, visioner, disciplined, mature, empathy, responsible, dynamic, creative, productive, persistent, appreciate other's work), c. the characters in relationship with family (loyal, sportive, loving and caring, honest, wise), d. The characters in relationship with

people and nation (hard worker, future oriented, tolerant, wise, smart, precise, friendly, and dedication), and e. the characters in relationship with nature (hard worker, future oriented, appreciate the health, dedication).

From the explanation above, how big the influence of someone's activity on his life. That's why, active readers, consciously or not, have build the characters inside of them that can indicate their relationship with God, himself, family, people and nation, and also nature. It is cleared that critical and effective reading can build the characters.

3. Building Characters by becoming Active Readers

Whoever the readers, students, graduate students, or anybody get a big chance to build their character by becoming active and critical readers. According to Kinsella (2000:2), "when you use a reading strategy, you become an active reader." Readers can analyze or evaluate what they read by applying several techniques of critical reading, such as making inference, differentiating the fact and opinion, recognizing tone, generalization, and bias, and identifying writers' purpose. Beside that, applying some reading strategies such as PACA, Cornell Note-taking, Concept building, KWL Plus, etc also can help much in character building. Last, applying several fast reading skills also essential, namely reading faster, skimming, and scanning.

Reading critically needs consideration toward the quality, the appropriateness, and the trustworthiness of what is being read. McWhorter (1994:48) mentions that readers can evaluate what they read by giving several questions to themselves, which later on will be answered by them by reading actively.

The following are several questions by active readers:

a. *Is the writer competent in talking about the topic?*

A good reader should know who the writer of the article is and find out whether he is competent in the field. Usually, the name of the writer and also a short description about him is placed at the bottom of the article. Readers need to read that part to evaluate the reading text. It will be quite difficult for readers if there is no writer's name given in the article. However, the absence should not stop readers to analyze what he read.

For example: a writer who writes about economics should have background knowledge on economics. Therefore, he can express anything and be responsible with that. However, if he doesn't have such background knowledge, his writing can be questionable. That's why, readers should not merely accept what they read, and they can do deep analysis by reading and understanding any description about the writer. Confirming information done by readers can help them to be a cautious person. Caution is needed by everyone to react toward his surroundings.

b. *What are the facts and opinions?*

A good reader should find out whether the statements given by the writer is supported by some evidences or facts that can be verified or just his opinions. Then, the reader can give response toward the information. By distinguishing facts and opinions, someone is trained to be responsible, precise and sportive. These are other characters that should be built in everyone.

c. *What is the writer's purpose?*

Another important point that should be gotten by a reader when doing reading activity is the writer's purpose. Usually, the writer expresses his purpose explicitly and implicitly. Sometimes, he also states several purposes but there is one which dominates others. Then, a reader should identify which purpose that a writer gives in his writing. It can be done by analyzing his choice of words (tone) and the way he builds the ideas (authors' thought patterns).

Readers' ability to identify the writer's purpose can help them to be a curious person. The curiosity will lead them to be more sensitive, confident, and appreciate others' ideas.

d. *Is the writer biased?*

Bias is the writer's partiality toward the topic in his writing. A good writer shouldn't be bias but neutral. He should not show his feeling explicitly. However, in fact, this still happened in any writing. That's why, a good reader is expected to find out whether the writer is bias or not. It can be done by analyzing the way the writer explains about the topic; from different sides or one side only.

By doing this, actually, a reader has built another important character for himself that are objective, open minded, and future oriented. Being objective and open minded can help anybody in decision making for any cases in his/her life. Future oriented means that by knowing the writer's position on the reading texts, readers are thinking about the long-term effect of the idea to the readers.

The four questions above can be applied by any reader in their reading activities. By asking the four questions, as if the readers are making communication with the writer directly. Finally, the message can be gotten by the readers well.

By doing the activities, the readers are building some good characters for themselves. It sounds simple, but by analyzing any reading texts, people can become cautious, be responsible, flexible, sensitive, confident, powerful, objective, open-minded, and appreciate others' ideas.

Beside some explanations above, an active reader is a reader who can organize his time effectively and efficiently in every reading activity. He does not need to take a very long time for one reading text. He even can read several texts in a short time, but still can get understanding. As stated by Mickulecky and Jeffries (2005:) that a reader does not have enough time to enjoy what he reads because so many things to do. It means that, in busy days, readers still can do reading activity but should do it effectively.

The following are some other reading skills that can be applied by readers that can help their character building also (Mickulecky and Jeffries: 1996:15). They are:

a. Scanning

Scanning is a very fast reading that is done by readers to look for specific information in a very short time by reading a little. Usually, it is done on some kinds of texts that are well recognized by readers, such as telephone lists, table of contents, dictionary, program schedules, etc (Fry, 1978:). By applying this strategy, readers can save the time and do not need to read the whole text and just focus on what he seeks. They can become effective and efficient people. It is helpful in decision making and having priority because not all information given is important.

b. Skimming

Skimming is another high speed reading that is applied by readers to get the general information in a short time. What is expected here is just the general understanding on the text (around 60%). In applying skimming, readers only need to read certain parts of the text, such as the title, the first paragraph, the first sentence of the body of paragraphs, the last paragraph, pictures or charts (if any).

The benefits of skimming are: 1) Finding the general information in a short and efficient time, 2) reading more in a short time, and 3) saving much time without reading less important things. (Nurhadi, 2004:98). The same with scanning, readers can save much time by applying this reading skill and make them more flexible, dynamic, appreciate the time, and smarter.

c. Reading Faster

Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996:206) mention three reasons of doing reading faster, they are:

- 1). Read more in a shorter time.
- 2). Get more understanding.
- 3). Learn to think in English.

Reading faster means reading groups of words. It will be easier for readers to connect one idea and another. The same case with scanning and skimming, when applying this skill, readers can be more effective and efficient and also be able to give more attention on particular and more important things better and faster.

When readers read informational text: a kind of text which informs the readers by giving opinions, explanations, reasons, facts, and examples about a certain topic (Kinsella:1), readers can use various reading strategies, such as SQ3R, Concept building, outlining, DRTA, KWL Plus, PACA, etc. Each strategy consists of several steps that can be followed by readers when they read informational texts namely text of social studies, science, and language and art. The strategies are effective for particular texts. It means that, there is one strategy that is better applied for one kind of text. For example, concept-building strategy is more applicable for mathematics and science text. KWL Plus is more effective for social texts that readers already have background knowledge about the idea.

Active readers should use different strategy for different kind of text. Because they can get benefits from different strategy they use in understanding the text. It will be easier for them to follow the ideas, stay focus, save much time, and get important information. Unconsciously, this activity takes the readers to their character building. They learn to be dynamic person, serious, flexible because do not stuck on one strategy only, discipline, and critical also.

In general, applying different reading skills and strategies for different purpose in reading can make someone becomes more flexible and dynamic. It means that, if readers want to get specific information, they can do scanning, if they want to get more general information, skimming and reading faster can be applied, and if they want to get deep understanding on what they read, they can do evaluation and analysis by applying critical reading techniques. Therefore, different purpose is by different skills or strategies. This act is called flexibility. Becoming a flexible and dynamic person is important in daily life especially in making relationship with different people with different characters. It is supported by Ahuja and Ahuja (2004:) who explain that flexibility in reading is a skill of reading different texts by different ways. Someone who is flexible can be accepted in society easily.

As mentioned above, when people plan to read something, they need to set the goal first. Then, the activity that will be done will help them to reach the goal, and it is a useful tool for building character. Making goals teaches readers to be more productive with their time and resources rather than wasting them. Readers quickly learn that it takes perseverance and patience to reach their goals.

C. CONCLUSION

In fact, building characters can not be done instantly. It does not mean that a person does one activity once and then characters are formed immediately. Helen Keller (1880-1968), an American blind and deaf writer/lecturer once said:

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved."

Actually, it needs a process to build characters inside someone. One way is by having reading experiences. In this case, becoming an active reader by doing critical and effective readings can build some good characters of someone which is reflected in his daily attitude. It is true that someone already have characters since he was born, but the characters can be built and become stronger by having influence of some aspects such as family, friends, daily activity, habits, and belief. The characters are cautious, objective, flexible, dynamic, effective, future-oriented, smart, responsible, sensitive, and appreciate others' idea, and so on. If someone takes reading activity as one of his life activity, it is hoped that the characters can instilled in him more deeply. Then, the good characters can bring him to a better relationship with the God, family and nation, nature, and even himself.

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