

## BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTER THROUGH WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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### Abstract

Nowadays, some behavioral problems like cheating in schools, bullying, pervasive youth violence and other problems are well documented. These misbehaviors have made the needs of character building among students are obviously required in any level of education. It is therefore important for teachers to instill their students with noble characters like honesty, cooperative, responsibility, discipline, creativity, and so forth. These characters can be built through writing activities. Hence descriptive text and the activities of writing processes can be an alternative way to engrave their noble characters. This paper attempts to describe character education, character and good characters; explores on kinds of good characters that can be implied in writing descriptive text; and how descriptive text can build students' good character.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Good Characters, Descriptive Text, Behavioral problems

### A. INTRODUCTION

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically ... intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

(Martin Luther King, JR).

Nowadays, there is consistent decrease of emotional intelligence (EI), while cognitive intelligence and academic achievements are tending to be increasing. This phenomenon is affirmed by the facts which show the increasing rate of drug abuse, violence and crime, high prevalence of depression, hopelessness and helplessness, unwanted premarital pregnancies, school dropouts, and so forth. These students' misbehaviors which are well documented indicate the decreasing emotional intelligence.

These behavioral problems also appear among students in Indonesia. For instance, they like to give verbal harassment and physical assault to their friends, and manipulate their friends for their own shake. These acts intentionally causing harm to others. This act of bullying nearly happens in all level of education, including at elementary school. There was a case an older student bullied younger student at elementary school for ridiculous reasons. It was ended up into death. It is a grievous fact to see them committing crime at young age.

Moreover, they do fight each other and often disturb any public facilities during their fight. Mocking friends are often done by the students. They like to humiliate their friends in public. If the students cannot hold their humiliation, there is a possibility for them to conduct a suicide. Besides, they do free sex as their life style. Syarif, the head of BKKBN, in 2010, exposed that the rate of students who conduct free sex is increasing. The result showed that 51 percent students in Jabodetabek have ever done it which means from 100 students, 51 of them were not virgin (cited in Zubaedi, 2011). Using drugs has become another behavioral problem for high school students. Many of them are involving in drug abuse. They would do anything to get this drug like stealing from friends and family, being robber, selling everything they have, including themselves, and others. Sexual harassment is also conducted by the students to their friends. Kagan (2013) revealed that 83 percent of female students and 60 percent of male students got sexual harassment at school. In addition they also like to give harsh comments on something they do not like through social media. They often post unnecessary contents in their accounts which sometimes lead into porn. A number of suicides among students are also increasing recently. In Tanah Datar Regency, for example, there are four students who successfully hang themselves to death within three months.

Those behaviors are still added with some academic misbehavior at school and/or university. When students are given tasks by their teacher or lecturer, they tend to do it at last minute of submitting time. They often do procrastination either for completing the assignments or for preparing themselves before tests. Cheating is also a common thing happen among students in every examination they have. The students who are supposed to learn before exam often prepare 'small papers' in case they cannot answer the questions. They play many tricks to run cheating during exam. Besides, plagiarism now on has gained its popularity among students particularly in university. Students from undergraduate degree till doctoral degree may do this kind of academic dishonesty. They tend to "copy-paste" someone ideas to be admitted as their own. The language used

in and outside of the classroom between students and lecturers also need to be addressed properly. School dropouts are also being the only choice for unsurvival students at university.

This increasing moral crisis has been leading to significant need of character education in any level of education, starting from elementary school till university. Related to it, school is the most influential and important place to build students' character. As stated by DeRouche and Williams in Adeyemi, et.all (2009), school is a place where students have the opportunity to witness and practice civility, caring, and compassion and to develop together as a community of learners and can help develop both positive personal values and civic competences. In another word, school will try to accomplish two major purposes; cognitive – academic development and character education. That is the goal of true education as declared by Martin Luther King, JR above. Besides, Education can be considered successful when it can change the students' behavior and attitude towards life.

Thus, teachers as one of school personnel have a duty to engrave these good characters to students. Though, this is not an easy job for teachers but it can be done in such way whether implicitly or explicitly. Writing as a process of exploring ideas, experiences, thought and feeling on an issue, can be an alternative way to help students build their character. By being a writer, they can engrave good characters as writing experiences expand.

## **B. DISCUSSION**

### **1. Character Education, Characters and Good Characters**

Character education, variously known as values education, moral education, transmission of cultural values and socialization is regarded as the definition given by Frye (cited in Suyadi, 2013). He exposes character education as a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through an emphasis on universal values that all people share. It is also as the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical value as proposed by Elkind and Freddy in Zubaedi (2011). National Education Ministry (2010) also argues that character education is the effort of developing human being potency as basic for acquiring strength, belief, developing personality, intelligence, noble character, morals and skills that one needs for individual, society, nation and state. It can be said character education is an education which comes up with an idea of blending cognitive academic development and noble characters in students' life.

Since the core part of character education is character, it is better to find out more what character that is meant here. Character is what make a person differs from others. It is in line with Hornby (2000) who defines character as all the qualities and features that make a person, groups of people, and places different from others. Another definition is also given by Lickona (2008). She identifies character as a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way. Braine and Derek (2007) argue on character as positive and cultivated traits that become habits by which the whole person is judged to be exemplary (De Braine and Derek, 2007). In short, characters refer to a series of cognitive, attitudes, motivations, behaviors and skills that turn into habits.

Moreover, good character can be achieved by tailoring students' moral knowledge (knowing the good), moral feeling (desiring the good), and moral action (doing the good). These three components of good character are best shown in table 1.

**Table 1.**  
**The Components of Good Character**

<b>MORAL KNOWING</b>	
<b>Moral Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
Moral Awareness	People often don't see a situation that involves a moral issue and that requires moral judgment. People use their intelligence to see when a situation requires moral judgment.
Knowing Moral Values	Gets passed from one generation to another; ethical literacy and its application requires knowing these values.
Perspective Taking	This is the ability to take the viewpoint of other people, see a situation as they see it, and imagine how they might think, react and feel. It is a prerequisite for moral judgment.
Moral Reasoning	Involves understanding what it means to be moral and why we should be moral. Growth is gradual and children learn what counts as good moral reason and what does not count. Respect the intrinsic worth of every individual.
Decision-making	Thinking one's way through a moral problem. Asking the questions: What

are my choices and what are the consequences?

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**MORAL FEELING**

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Conscience	A mature conscience includes: a sense of moral obligation and the capacity for constructive guilt.
Self-Esteem	A healthy measure of self-esteem helps us to value ourselves and be less dependent on the approval of others. Self positive regard has a positive correlation with treating others positively.
Empathy	This is identification with, or vicarious experience of, the state of another person/emotional side of perspective taking.
Loving the Good	The highest form of character includes being genuinely attracted to the good. When people love the good, they take pleasure in doing well. They have a morality of desire, not just a morality of duty. Part of the moral potential of ordinary people, even children.
Self-Control	Emotion can overwhelm reason, that's one reason why self-control is a necessary moral virtue. Self control helps us to be ethical even when we don't want to. It is also necessary to curb self indulgence.

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**MORAL ACTION**

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Competence	Moral competence is having the ability to turn moral judgment and feeling into effective moral action.
Will	The right choice in a moral situation is usually the hard one. Will is the mobilizing of moral energy to do what we think we should. It takes will to keep emotion under the control of reason. It takes will to see and think through all the moral dimensions of a situation. It takes will to put duty before pleasure. Will is the core of moral courage.
Habit	Moral conduct benefits from habit.

Source: Lickona (2008)

Linked to the components of good characters above, there are many experts exploring some good characters that should be had by the students. First, Lickona (2008) who introduces the six pillars of characters. They are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Next, the pilot book of implementation of character education in school promotes six main values, as shown in table 2.

**Table 2.**  
**Values developed in Senior High School**

<b>Values</b>	<b>Description</b>
Religiosity	Minds, words, and actions of someone based on the religion and God's values.
Honesty	Behavior which is based on effort to be an honest human being in minds, word, and actions.
Perspicacity	Logical and realistic thinking in doing something to produce a new way or result.
Democracy	The ways of thinking and acting of someone that considers someone else as equally.
Tolerance	Behavior that prevent and improve moral and natural destruction.
Integrity	Autonomous, confident, responsible, cooperative, and disciplined behavior.

Source: National Education Ministry (2010)

Other good characters are also given by the board of research and development centre of curriculum. There are at least 18 good characters that are based on religion, Pancasila, culture and the goal of national education like religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independent, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, patriotism, respect for achievement, friendly, peace, read a lot, care for environment, social care, and responsibility.

According to Kovalik as quoted in Samani and Hariyanto (2013), good characters are caring, common sense, cooperation, courage, creativity, curiosity, effort, flexibility, friendship, initiative, integrity, organization, patience, perseverance, pride, problem solving, resourcefulness, responsibility, and sense of humor. National Education Ministry (2009) has identified at least 49 characters that should be developed in teaching and learning process. They are alertness, attentiveness, availability, benevolence, boldness, obedience, truthfulness, gratefulness, generosity, orderliness, sincerity, virtue, responsibility, patience, initiative, self-control, punctuality, resourcefulness, tolerance, creativity, discretion, diligence, loyalty, hospitality, sensitivity, enthusiasm, flexibility, discernment, cautiousness, dependability, thoroughness, determination, thriftiness, deference, compassion, persuasiveness and wisdom.

## 2. DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

Actually writing is a process of transferring ideas into written form. Writing will help the students to explore ideas, experiences, thought and feeling on an issue. Writing can provide a record of the students' thought that they study and evaluate later. Whenever the students write, they will discover more about themselves. It also enables to see and know them better. The students should be exposed to a variety of writing experiences. They should be given opportunities to write a variety of texts. One of them is descriptive texts in which it explores the experiences of writing four types of descriptive texts.

Descriptive text is a kind of text that describes a particular *person, place, animal, or thing*. As like other texts, it has three components to be written. They are social function in which students need to define the aim of describing a particular thing; person, animal, place, and thing. Second, the students need to line up the identification and description of the things being described. This is well-known as generic structure. The last part of it is language features. It focuses on formal aspects like neat hand writing, correct spelling and punctuation, as well as acceptable grammar and careful selection of vocabulary. In writing descriptive text, students have to focus on specific participant, use descriptive adjectives, use simple present tense (unless extinct), and so forth.

Moreover, the students have to follow series of writing process in order to have good descriptive text. It is a method that helps students get started writing and helps them organizing their ideas (Oshima and Hogue, 1991). For the first time before coming to writing process, they have to choose one out of four types of descriptive text such as describing person, animal, place and thing. Once they have made decision, they cannot turn back on. Then Kirsznner and Stephen (2011) argue that the students need to consider three things before writing, like subject matter (what you are expected to write about), purpose (why you are writing), and audience (for whom you are writing). This can be conducted by proposing several questions, as seen in table 3. below.

**Table 3.**  
**Questions about Assignment, Purpose and Audience**

Assignment	What is your assignment? Do you have a word or page limit? When is your assignment due? Will you be expected to work on your assignment only at home, or will you doing some work in class? Will you be expected to work on your own or with others? Will you be allowed to revise your work?
Purpose	Are you expected to present information – for example, to describe a particular person, animal, place or thing? Are you expected to express your personal reaction - for example, to tell how you feel about a particular person, animal, place or thing? Are you expected to evaluate parts, qualities and characterization of particular person, animal, place or thing?
Audiences	Who will read your paper – just your instructor or other students in your class? How much are your readers likely to know about your topic? Will your readers expect you to use formal or informal language?

Adopted from Kirsznner and Stephen (2011)

After questioning themselves, they can straightly go to the first writing process, prewriting stage. At this stage, students are concentrated on activities which help them generate ideas which are choosing and narrowing a topic. Since they need to identify it, they have to select a topic which arises from their biggest interest and of course fits the assignment; writing descriptive text. If it is a person, it is possible for them to describe their role model like parents, teachers, artists, and so on. If it is an animal, it is okay to describe the scary animal for them, or the funniest animal that they ever have, etc. if it is a thing, it is pleasurable to describe

their lucky charm, favorite thing, or others. If it is a place, it is nice to share to others on a specific place which they like or dislike the most. As soon as they get the topic, Oshima and Hogue, (1991) says that they need to narrow it to a specific focus so that they can write descriptive text clearly and completely.

Then, they have to follow the next phase, brainstorming. It is a way of gathering ideas about a topic. It has a purpose to get the students started writing more quickly and save their time in the later stages of the writing process (Oshima and Hoque, 1991). At this point, the students are provided with several techniques of brainstorming like listing- making a list on whatever words phrases come into their minds; free writing-generating ideas as many as possible and to write them down without worrying about appropriateness, grammar, spelling, logic or organization and mind-mapping or clustering-generating ideas just like free writing by using shapes. They will choose the technique which is fit and comfortable for them to use. In relation to descriptive text, they will accept all ideas that come to them without ignoring unrelated ideas on the topic. For instance, when they describe their favorite English teacher, they will describe him or her by highlighting personal identity in identification, and parts, qualities and characterization in term of physical description and personality traits that make the English teacher differ from others.

At the stage earlier, it is fine to write many ideas whether relevant or not. Yet this time those unrelated idea which has been identifying before are about to be crossed out. This stage is called as planning. It means the students will organize the ideas they generated by brainstorming into an outline. Here they will have an outline consists of topic sentence, supporting points and supporting details of descriptive text. The third stage is writing the first draft. The aim of it is to get the ideas down in writing. This rough draft does not have to be 'perfect' because the students will make some changes by adding or crossing out words and phrases, reordering ideas and details, clarifying connections between ideas and so on. Any relevant new ideas are welcomed in writing rough draft. No wonder in writing it, the students found number of mistakes. The students will have a complete descriptive text which is far from a word of "ready".

The next is polishing stage. Polishing is more successful if it is done in two steps; revising-working on big issues of content and organization; and editing-working on smaller issues of grammar and punctuation (Oshima and Hogue, 2006). Kirszner and Stephen (2011) defines revision is the process of reseeing, rethinking, reevaluating, and rewriting the work. Oshima and Hogue (2006) also assume revising is a time for the students to change, rearrange, add or delete, all for the goal of communicating their thoughts more clearly, more effectively and in a more interesting way. During revising, the students just need to concern mainly with content and organization. The second steps are proof reading or editing for possible errors in grammar, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. It is also called as self monitoring production. It is consciously trying to avoid making errors while you are writing or going back and correcting them after writing (Lane and Ellen, 1999). Once the students are aware of and know how to correct their most serious and frequent sentence-level problems, they must monitor for errors whenever they write. It is better to rest the paper first, at least a night before. It is based on consideration, the students will get 'fresh eye' to do this stage. The last stage is the students will write the final copy of descriptive text.

### **3. Good Characters Implied in Writing Descriptive Texts**

Sometimes, writing descriptive text can be challenging and boring activities as well. Yet this situation can be disappeared if the students see it as not just another school assignment (Gallagher, 2006), but as a mean to build their good or positive characters. When the students are asked to write descriptive text, they will consciously engrave honesty inside them. Honesty is best defined as a behavior which is based on effort to be an honest human being in minds, word, and actions (National Education Ministry (2010). It is because the students must describe what something look like. For it provides the readers of a clear mental picture of what being described, students have to describe it as it is. Then, the students need to choose one out of four types of descriptive texts; describing person, animal, thing and place. Once they have made decision, they have to stick on it unless they want to waste their time by keep changing it all the time. It shows the students learn how to make commitment. It is a feeling of hooking into certain responsibilities. The students are also have a character of accomplishment; an appreciation to completing the task given (Samani and Hariyanto, 2011).

Here, the students learn how to build commitment to themselves and the teachers as well. Next, since descriptive text talks on particular thing, the students need to choose the thing that really interested for them. They also will deal a lot with many personal opinions that indicates many descriptive adjectives written in the descriptive text; make students have to carefully select the strongest words to be used. These points reflect that the students are smart in choosing topic and word selection. It can be said the students have perspicacity inside them. It is a logical and realistic thinking in doing something to produce a good descriptive text (National Education Ministry (2010).

Besides, other good characters are also implied at the moment before the students starting to write. As discussed earlier, the students will be asked to question themselves (see table 3). It reflects that the students develop their alertness in writing descriptive text. They realize on something to write and respond it well. Perseverance is another good character they students get during writing descriptive text. It can be said as it is

because the students need to follow several writing process for example free-writing, planning, polishing till writing the final copy of descriptive text. It shows the endurance of students to keep on writing till come up to descriptive text. Specifically, the students will have creative and logical thinking when they enter the prewriting stage. Creativity identifies as arising ideas, creating something original or recycling it in such imaginative way (Samani and Hariyanto, 2011). It means the students focus on generating any relevant ideas on the topic chosen. This character is also seen when the students narrowing the topic and start to do brainstorming activities.

Dealing with planning and writing rough draft stage, the students are also given a chance to develop their positive character like being an independence writer. It means a character which not depend much on others to finish own task (Suyadi, 2013). Although descriptive text will be messy, at least they try by their own hand. It is added the next good character into effort. Effort and responsibility are added the lineup of positive characters through writing descriptive texts. Without having the highest effort, it would be impossible to gain responsibility of doing planning stage. Courage also engraved at these stages. They like taking a risk of committing many mistakes and wasting most of their time doing revision and editing task. On the last stage of writing process, polishing stage, positive characters are built. Though many students do not have the skills to carefully edit (correct errors), they have do the ability to help one another revise (make the content of their papers better). Someone who can assist one another with revising help show they have good character like care, respect for others, tolerance and cooperative (team work). Besides the art of flexibility are also given at this stage. It means the students have courage to change, rearrange, add or delete and even rewrite the descriptive text. Patience is definitely existed since they have to wait for a night to do polishing. Finally, the students gain self confidence after running all stages in writing descriptive texts. In short, those good characters are best described at the following table.

**Table 4.**  
**Good Characters Implied in Writing Descriptive Texts**

Pre-writing	Honesty, commitment, accomplishment, perspicacity, smart, alertness, perseverance, creative and logical thinking
Planning	Independence, effort, responsibility, courage, creative and logical thinking
Writing Rough Draft	Independence, effort, responsibility, courage, creative and logical thinking
Polishing	Care and respect for others, tolerance, cooperative, patience
Writing Final Copy	Self Confidence

#### **4. Building students' Character through Writing Descriptive Text**

Teacher as character educator has a vital role in implementing character to the students. Teaching it is not an easy job, but it is necessary one, and can be very rewarding when teachers see the students' progress and know that they have helped them to make it happen. One way to teach and build students character is by asking them to write descriptive text. Below are some procedures that can be used by teachers in instilling character while they do writing activities.

- Step 1. Ask students to choose one out of four types of descriptive text.
- Step 2. Ask students to find the other students who have the same choice and then form a group of two.
- Step 3. Ask students to discuss on their topics in pairs for about a couple minutes. Here, the students may use the questioning about assignment, purpose and audience before.
- Step 4. Ask students to narrow the topic chosen in pairs.
- Step 5. Ask students to plan their own writing individually.
- Step 6. Ask students to write rough draft of their descriptive text.
- Step 7. Ask students to do polishing by revising on content and organization first (Generic structure of descriptive text), then exchange the paper with pair.
- Step 8. Ask students to write the second final draft.
- Step 9. Ask students to proof read their writings (language features of descriptive text) and exchange the paper with pair.
- Step 10. Ask the students to write final copy.
- Step 11. Ask them to attach proof of all writing process along with descriptive text.
- Step 12. Ask them to describe and elaborate positive values they can get from writing descriptive text.

- Step 13. Ask them in what ways they can imply the positive values in their academic life. Share it to teachers and other friends.

Although it is a bit hard to do, it can be learned continually. It is in line with Hellen G Douglas who said character is not inherited. One builds it daily by the one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action.

### C. CONCLUSION

Writing a good assignment is both a challenge and one of the most rewarding aspects of study. It is also can be used as a mean for building students positive characters. The good characters are instilling at the moment students decide to write, particularly writing descriptive text. Then at the time, they choose the appropriate topics that fit their interest. Besides, when they have to follow some writing process, the good characters are still there waiting for being engraved by the students. All in all, by writing descriptive text, they can imply good characters like honesty, accomplishments, responsibility, caring, respect for others, self-confidence, perseverance, and so forth. The procedures of implying good characters through writing descriptive text could be different. Yet, this paper tries to offer one of them and it need to be improved.

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