Teaching Elementary School Students Tolerance in Pluralistic Society: Indonesian case

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Abstract

An understanding about tolerance should be implanted since early in life. This paper shows how tolerance education has been embedded as essential part of character development in one Christian school in Klaten, Jawa Tengah since the early 2000s. The students learn about the importance of living in a pluralistic society and applying tolerance toward anyone, regardless of their religion and ethnic. The general theme of love was chosen and it is reflected in loving God, loving oneself, loving others, and loving the enviroment. From here, nine characters were chosen and used to be developed in each grade, from Grade 1 to Grade 6. These nine characters are loving God, compassion, responsibility, self-control, discipline, critical, positive, creative, and efficient. The character development program is offered on a weekly basis in addition to annual outings to neighboring villages. This paper shows the blue print of tolerance education for Grade 1 until Grade 6 as an attempt to empower the students to learn how to appreciate others who might be different from themselves. Specifically, God is portrayed as above everything including religions. This is to avoid the superiority complex of being a certain faith believer. Whenever appropriate, the deliverance of the character discussion was also accompanied by certain Biblical verses to support the claim. Assignments were also given to be carried out off school in order to help the students understand the concept of tolerance and to act as a tolerant person. The cooperation between school staff and the parents is important to get the full benefit of character holistic development of the children.

Keywords: character development program, elementary school children, Indonesia, pluralistic society, tolerance

Introduction

With almost 262 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018), Indonesia is a pluralistic society in terms of ethnic (consists of more than 1300 ethnic, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010) and faiths (a variety of local faiths and beliefs, some of which are under 187 faith organizations (Kemendikbud, 2017). To live in such pluralistic society requires tolerance from everyone (Magnis-Suseno, 1974). Tolerance is understood as the ability and willingness to accept and to appreciate others who are different, including different in terms of ethnic and religion (Fiidyani, 2013). Even though Muslims is the largest group in Indonesia, the founding fathers of Indonesia agreed that Indonesia should be a secular country that would treat everyone similarly regardless of his or her ethnic and religion. As some cities providing schools, universities and offices that attract villagers to migrate, inevitably people of different etnics and faiths have to live and work together. Nevertheless, conflicts between ethnics and faith believers often occurr, despite the governmental efforts to accomodate everyone as equal citizen. Several conflicts among ethnics

are for example Sampit war, occurred in the year 2001 between Madura and Dayak ethnics in Kalimantan island; wars between Dani and Moni ethnics, both are in Papua province; fights between Lampung and Bali ethnics in South Sumatera province; between Aceh and Java ethnics in Aceh province; and attacks toward Chinese ethnics in several provinces since four centuries ago (see for instance tirto.id, 2016). Examples for conflicts among faith believers are Poso conflict in 1998 to 2000 between Muslims and Christinas; Maluku fight in 1999 between Muslims and Christians; fight between Muslims and Christians in Singkil, Aceh province in 2015 (hukamnas.com, 2015). Some studies find that local government might even favors one group while disrespect another group (see for instance Hasan & Mursalin, 2011; Muqoyyidin, 2012; Rumagit, 2013; Wahid Institute 2010, 2011). Several studies report that efforts had been made to ensure high school Muslim students would not be radicalized by Muslim extremist and radicalists (see for instance Farikhatin, 2013; Mubarak, 2012; Munip, 2012; Wiyani, 2015). Basically, when high school students realize that pluralism should be reserved in Indonesia, they would be ready to accept one another regardless of their ethnic and religion. This has been tried by Listyarti (2013) who expects teachers to have significant roles to prepare their students to live in pluralistic society. Soemantrie (2011) asserts that multicultural education is important to provide everyone the understanding and the skill to live harmoniously with people of different ethnic and religion.

The school board, the principle and teachers of an elementary Christian school in Klaten, Sekolah Dasar Kristen 3 (abbreviated as SDK 3), Central Java (located 17 km from Yogyakarta) have long considered the importance of equipping their students holistically to live in a pluralistic society. As a Christian school, students with religion and faith other than Christian have also been accepted. The teachers also commit themselves to teach their students how to apply tolerance in everyday living as they see this as Christ' calling. The curriculum for Christian character development was then planned from Grade 1 to Grade 6. First it took a live-in week-end for Grade 4, 5, and 6 in a nearby village where the students stay for two nights in villagers' home. After several years, the school board and staff agreed to implement a Christian curriculum character as a weekly program, not only annually. More details on the character program follows.

The character development program

As noted by Brannon (2008), a child's character should first be developed at home then continues when the child enters school. However, it seems that some children come to school with problems in attitude and behaviors. Good character is understood as good traits that made individuals do good and right things while avoiding things that would create problems (Park, 2009). Certain indicators of good character such as hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, and having perspective are related to good leadership, tolerance, valuing diversity, and the ability to delay gratification while also reduced the effects of stress and trauma and reduced problems in substance abuse or depression and suicidal ideas (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Brannon (2008) insists that good character program is a joint responsibility of parents, teachers, community, and media.

Taking into account Erikson's stages of identity development and Kohlberg's moral development, Lickona (1992) suggests three goals in character development for elementary students as the following:

a. To help children engaging more in cooperation and mutual respect rather than staying in egocentrism;
b. To help children become a responsible moral agency, knowing what the rights things to do and to be willing to do those right things; and
c. To develop a moral community in classrooms and school, based on fairness, caring, and participation,

Park (2009) mentions several virtues as part of character strengths of The Values in Action (VIA) project, and they are as the following:

1. Wisdom and knowledge that are categorized as cognitive strengths. Included in this category are the acquisition and use of knowledge, creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective;
2. Courage that is categrized as emotional strength and include activities needed to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, honesty, authenticity, bravery, perseverance, and zest;
3. Humanity that is categorized as interpersonal strengths and include caring for others, kindness, love, and social intelligence;
4. Justice that is needed to have a healthy community life, and this include civic strengths, fairness, leadership, and teamwork;
5. Temperance that is needed to protect oneself againts excess and this include forgiveness, modesty, prudence, and self-regulation; and
6. Transcendence that is regarded as strengths that build connections to the larger universe and provide meaning. Included here are appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality and religiousness.

However, other character programs might yet have a set of different characters. Taylor (2017) compiled 39 character education programs that seem working well. and each of them uses a specific set of characters. It seems impossible to have a general agreement on what specific character to be taught.

The character program for SDK 3 was made possible after a series of discussion and analyses that involved Board of School Committee, School Principal and the teachers, and finally the consultants. The selection of the characters to be taught was not following any other character curriculum; rather, it was identified after careful observations from the schoolboard and teaching staff what made good and succesful students as compared to failed students. The process in discussing the curriculum started in the year 2011 and until now the program is evaluated and updated. Apparently, the students' parents also agreed that the character program for parents would also be needed so that parents would be able to give their full support for the succesful of this program.

Several assumptions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, Schwaps, & Lewis, 2003; Lumpkin, 2008) are used to develop the curriculum and some of them are like the following:

1. The character to be developed is one that reflects Jesus Christ' teaching on being children of God. As a Christian school, the Christian values should be clearly understood and practiced in daily life. The program should integrate four subjects in discussion: God, self, others, and environment. It means that the character to be developed is on how we should act toward God, toward ourself, toward other people, and toward environment. These four parties should always

be in harmonious relationship with each other. Altogether nine main characters are perceived as reflecting the Christian values. They are loving God, compassion, responsibility, self-control, discipline, critical, positive, creative, and efficient. Each of these characters include several other characters that are related as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Main characters and related characters in SDK 3 Christian character program

No	Main character	Related characters
1	Loving God. Loving God refers to how we as child of God should love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22: 37, NIV)	Loving God, avoiding sin, ashame when committing sin, joyful, being grateful
2	Compassion. Compassion is having a pity toward other people in need, and is willing to help them (Ephesians 4: 32).	Compassionate, humble, caring towards other people, creature, and nature, willing to sacrifice
3	Responsibility. Responsibility refers to do what one has to do, or been assigned to do (Matthew 25: 21).	Responsible, trustworthy, honest, sincere
4	Self-control. Self-control is important to live among people of different ethnic, religion and social economic status. Using several bible verse such as 2 Corinthians 12 verse 6 and Galatians 5 verse 22-23, since Grade 1 the topic of diversity has been introduced to nurture self-control, forgiving and being tolerant.	Patient, self-control, forgiving, tolerance toward others who are different, conciliator, cooperative, non-discriminative
5	Discipline. Discipline refers to willingly do according to what authority has ordered to (Colosians 2: 5).	Discipline, values time, keeping promises, faithful, committed
6	Critical. Being critical is not jumping into conclusion, but thinking clearly and orderly (Colosians 2: 8).	Rational, critical, analytical, reflective, careful in decision making
7	Being positive. Being positive is having hope that God really takes good care of us (Matthew 6: 25).	Enthusiastic, optimistic, positive thinking, dare to try, risk taker, bravery, diligent, preserverance, persistent, independent
8	Creative. Being creative is to think and to make something new (Genesis 1: 1; Genesis 1: 27).	Creative, innovative, having initiative, open-minded, explorative
9	Efficient. Efficient, pracical, saving, refers to simple living (Proverb 21:20).	Thrifty, not wasteful, simple, efficient, practical

2. The curriculum should be built up continuously and progressively so that all intended characters are discussed in each grade. The character program meets weekly for 180 minutes (for Grade 1,2,3, and 4) or 210 minutes (for Grade 5 and 6).
3. The students should join this program happily and practice what they learn in daily living.
4. School staff demonstrate the desired character reflected in the relationship they build with the students and their parents, and among themselves.

Tolerance is taught since Grade 1 all through Grade 6. The students are given assignments to enhance their understanding of this concept and why it is such an important practice in Indonesia. In line with this, Javanese cultural values also put harmonious as a central aspect (Magnis-Suseno, 1995). This is very relevant to help students get the whole picture of the importance of tolerance in building a peaceful society. The character development curriculum is outlined from Grade 1 to Grade 6 with examples of how the assignments help the students to understand and practice tolerance. The outline is shown in Table 2. Notice that tolerance is not associated with only one main character, but with any other as well. In Grade 1 and 2, students are first introduced to a concept of living with other family members, loving them, caring for them, and also to get to know other friend in the ame classroom. Gradually they are assigned to know their friends deeper and be helpful to others. In Grade 5 and 6 they are also asked to be

more alert to what happen at the national level, and to pray for those in leadership positions who are influential at the local, regional, or national level.

Table 2. How tolerance activities are inserted in the character program

Main Character	Grade	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Loving God	Pray for other family members	Make a list of what they can do to other family members	Build a relationship with a friend and commit to pray for him/her.	Write down a prayer journal consists of a list of names they pray for and why they need to pray for them	Write down another prayer journal consists of a list of names they pray for and why they need to pray for them	- Write down their struggles in praying for other people. - Pray for leaders, from the top level, to the bottom level
Compassion	- Be good to one another in class - Let the teacher knows if there is one who does not do good to another	- Write down how they feel when they receive a good act from others - List down what they can do to help other family members	List down what they can do to help others, not family members	A class project on helping 1-2 friends in need.	Write a personal commiment to help at least 2 people in need. The people should be in their neighbourhood. The result is reported at the end of the semester.	Write an action plan to be humble.
Responsibility	Practice to be trustworthy, honest	Help parents and other family members at home	Being responsible to get ready for school and school work	Write a prayer asking God to be trustworthy and honest	Share the experience of being trustworthy	Share the experience of being trustworthy
Self-control	Do one good act to one of the classmates	Do one good act to at least 3 classmates	Be alert of classmates who are in conflict with each other, and try to mediate them	Ask a friend who has from a different faith/religion about his/her religious days and the meaning of those days	Ask a friend of a different faith to celebrate his/her religious days together	- Invite a friend of a different faith to celebrate your religious days together. - Be ready to explain the meaning of your religious days
Discipline	- Write daily routines (wake up and time to go to school) - Always bring healthy snack from home	- Write daily routines (wake up, take a bath, breakfast, go to school, lunch, take a nap, doing homework, watching television, take a bath, dinner, go to bed) - Always bring healthy snack and snack to share at school from home	- Add to daily routines schedules to wash hair, wash dishes, clean the house -	Write what rules (at home, school and community) have to be obeyed -	Sharing about why failed to keep promises	Make a list of daily learning schedule to prepare for final exam
Critical	Draw a picture of good behavior and bad behavior	Write the consequences of good behavior and bad behavior	Make some comments about acts of family members that are not nice	Analyze a case taken from immediate environment: what is the issue, what might cause the issue, how to solve that problem	- Analyze a case taken from local newspaper: what is the issue, what might cause the issue, how to solve that problem	- Analyze a case taken from national newspaper: what is the issue, what might cause the issue, how to solve that problem

Main Character	Grade	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
					- Make a goal to achieve in a year	- Make a goal to achieve in 5 years
Being positive	Find another student in class and build friendship with her/him	- Find at least two students in class and build friendship with them - Find out the differences between oneself and the friends and discuss whether the differences will influence their friendship	Find at least one person in the neigbourhood who is having a different faith, and befriend with him/her	Try to have 1-2 more friends of different religions	Ask your friends from different faith, what do they want you to pray about	Ask your friends from different faith, what the benefits of having friendship with you
Creative	Practice to ask questions freely in class	Be alert to find classmates who might need help	Be alert to help classmates who might feel lonely or sad, tru to cheerthem up	Class project to have a special performance for end of school year	Class project to have learning groups in class who can work together in doing homework, and to help friends who have difficulties in learning	Class project to help poor people to have regular income
Efficient	Bring snack from home	Bring snack and lunch from home	Share your snack with a friend	Share your lunch with a friend	Save some allowance to donate to those in need	Ask family members and friends from the neighbourhood to save money to be donated to those in need

For each academic year, the total meetings for the character program are 30, divided into two semesters. First semester is from the first week of August until the first week of December for a total of 16 meetings with two weeks in October are devoted each for mid-exam week and for outings. Second semester is from second week of January until first week of May for a total of 14 meetings with one week in March or April is a break for Easter week and one week in March for mid-exam week.

In addition to weekly meetings, in October Grade 4,5 and 6 students have an opportunity to live in for two nights in neighbourhood villages. They stay with the villagers, not necessarily of the same ethnic and/or religions. The students should use the time to learn about the family they visit and stay with, the family history, background and struggles, and to help doing the house chores. Before departing, the students should pray for their host family, after asking what items they can pray for.

Conclusion

What is described as the character development program above is a result of three-year process where the curriculum team met at least twice a month first to discuss the type of characters selected, the objective of each character in each grade, and the content of each meeting. The curriculum team consisted of the school chaplain, six teachers, two psychologists

and two religious teachers. The barrier faced so far is that the school only has limited rooms to accomodate three parallel classes of each grade (altogether around 70 to 80 students) when they get together for the character program. The character program takes place on Saturday from 7.30 until 10.30 or 11. The first hour is devoted as worship time for all students and this takes place in the school auditorium while the next hours the students get together with other students from the same grade.

It is clear that for a character development program to be effective, several parties should collaborate and be in harmonious relationship with among each other; these parties are school board, school staff, students, parents, and community. Each of the characters being developed should also be integrated in all school activities, and not only when the classroom discussion on that specific character takes place. Tolerance is practiced first in the family before gradually broadened into neighbors of different ethnics and religions.

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