

# Developing Students' Soft Skill through Children Literature

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**Abstract—**This paper discusses the strategy of teaching children's literature as a media to develop students' soft skills. Soft skills are tied to an individuals' emotional quotient (EQ), the cluster of personality characteristic, communication skill, personal habits, friendliness, optimism, and their harmonious relationship with other people. The research employs library research which focuses on certain references without conducting field research. The data consists of some references which are relevant to the subject of the research. The procedure of collecting data encompasses: preparing general idea on the subject of the research , finding supporting information, focusing and organizing information, finding relevant references, reorganizing and taking a note, reviewing and finding enrichment references, and formulating a concept which is relevant to the subject of the research. The data is analyzed using preliminary analysis, that is, a set of simple effort to develop and analyze data into a simple framework through the process of selection of data. The result of research has found a technique that can be applied to develop students' soft skills through children's literature, namely Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching (R2BT). Through employing this technique, teaching children's literature is not only to read and comprehend the elements of story grammar, but it can be a vehicle to guide students to achieve soft skills. This technique also touches three important aspects in developing soft skills, which are: value knowledge, value reflection, and value practicing.

**Keywords—**children's literature, soft skills, reflection and rationale based technique

## I. INTRODUCTION

The activity of teaching and learning literature in elementary school traditionally only focuses on structural aspect, in which the students are trained to explain the intrinsic aspects of the story and what the story tells about (Basiga, 2009). Commonly, students are taught to explain character, plot, and certain words in the text. For advanced level, sometimes, the students are directed to explain images and events created by the author. However, learning literature is not only restricted on discussing such aspects. Moreover, literature can be a vehicle to instill soft skills to the students. Especially for the pupils of Elementary School, soft skills can be exposed to them through children's literature. Children's literature is one of genres in the literary work which is created imaginatively based on the child's view. It may tell anything about the life which is appropriate with child's logic and emotion.

Education in Elementary School ideally must have a priority over developing soft skills without neglecting the significant role of hard skills or academic skills. Soft skills are self-developed, interactive, communicative, human and transferable skills. They include positive thinking, good interpersonal skills, communication skills, time management, self-confidence, problem solving, including analyzing a problem, setting goal, and thinking through both the long-term and short-term consequences of an action. Ultimately, soft skills are believed would make the youth achieve a great chance to be succesfull in a competitive environment, and increase their employability potential.

One of the assumptions used in developing soft skills is that putting academics mastery as a media to develop soft skills. For this reason, children's literature becomes the strategic media to reinforce and develop students' good personality or soft skills. Ghazali (2008) states that literature can bring about changes in the attitudes of the learners. This fact is also affirmed bythe the perspective that one of the essences of literature teaching, as the essence of all teachings, lies in values or moral. The potency of employing children's literature as a media of developing students' soft skills is supported by the psychological finding that the world of children naturally is the world of story. In fact, all children like to listen, read, and see something about a story. Through a story, children are not only guided to know the various problems of life and human being, but also to internalize the core values which are for their life.

The purpose of the research is to formulate an appropriate teaching technique of children's literature to develop students' soft skills. Specifically, this research's objectives are as follows:

1. Formulating the basic assumption of teaching technique of children's literature using Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching.
2. Formulating the principles of teaching technique of children's literature using Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching.
3. Formulating the procedure of teaching technique of children's literature using Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching.

#### A. The Concept of Soft Skills

The concept of soft skills takes root from the concept of emotional intelligence. The terminology of soft skills are used to distinguish them from the term of hard skills. Hard skills refer to cognitive capacities (IQ) while soft skills belong to Emotional Intelligence. Hard skills are used for seeking a job while soft skills are useful to maintain it (Elfendri, et al, 2010). In this concept, soft skills are imparted to fine one's attitudes, values, motivation, beliefs, desires, willingness to share and embrace new ideas, goal orientation, flexibility, and various skills of communication, interaction, and manners so that he/she is able to adapt with different situations diligently and responsibly. Soft skills are divided into two main parts, which are one part involves developing attitudes and attributes, and the other part encompass communication skills to express attitudes, ideas, and thoughts well in oral, written, and non-verbal areas. Thus, soft skills are life skill for oneself, and community so that a existence of person can be accepted by others (Rasmita, et al, 2009:48-49).

Soft skills building is aimed at fostering the development of ethical and responsible individuals by teaching them about the good values that people should apply. The students are taught values of caring about other people, honesty, responsibility, and other important traits to make them as upstanding citizen. As moral education, developing soft skills describes character education encompassing the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality. The cognitive dimension plays significantly to lead students to achieve moral awareness. Specifically, moral awareness is the students' ability to use their intelligence to consider when a situation requires moral judgment, and then think carefully about what the right action is. Soft skills are also formed through internalizing the good, and applying the good things. Ultimately, the students are helped understanding the core values, commit to them, and apply them in their own lives.

Developing soft skills or good character through children's literature needs to formulate core values. Values which are acted by a person in his/her behavior become a real character. Thus, there is no a person's behavior which is free from a value. In relation to core values, Lickona (1991) proposes ten core values as underpinnings of character. These values are relevant to the effort of developing soft skills. The values are presented in the table below:

TABLE I. TEN CORE VALUES IN SOFT SKILLS

.wisdom	.positive attitude
.justice	.hardwork
.fortitude	.integrity
.self-control	.gratitude
.love	.humility

The first value is wisdom. This value leads people to decide a thing logically, that is, what thing is good for themselves and others. The second is justice, which relates to how respect the rights of other people. The next value is fortitude. It is ability to overcome the problem with the right thing. Having fortitude could avoid teenagers to do suicide, for instance, when they do not know how else to deal with their overwhelming emotions. The fourth value is self-control that is the ability to manage emotion proportionally and not

give into overbearing feelings or temptations. The fifth virtue is love in term of the willingness to sacrifice for the good of others. The sixth value is having a positive attitude. Those who have a positive attitude will get the chance of success and be valuable to others. Hard work becomes the seventh value. Hard work is applied through taking initiative, being diligent, setting goals, and being resourceful. The eighth essential value is integrity. This value involves the unity between what is believed and what is done. Gratitude is the ninth virtue. It entails person's mentality to accept satisfactorily for what already have, and be happy with everything that he/she is blessed to have in his/her life. The final virtue is humility that is a person's ability to accept his/her imperfections and appreciate others' special quality. These ten essential virtues can be the reference values in developing soft skills in English language teaching.

At least, there are three kinds of soft skills that can be implemented and used in a process of teaching and learning children's literature, which are: transcendental soft skills, intra personal soft skills, and interpersonal soft skills. Transcendental soft skills relate how to guide students are familiar with God and able to apply the religious teaching. Then, intra personal soft skills focus on students' competency to socialize themselves, control their emotion, able to think in a critical, creative, innovative, and analytical manner which includes the competency to apply the knowledge. Interpersonal skills refer to communication skills in terms of convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms, adaptability, and ability to work and cooperate with people who are different in terms of cultural and social aspect. To keep these simple, it is clear that the different soft skills are categorized as personal qualities in terms of spiritual, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills.

The effort of developing soft skills also ties in with the field of psychology. Theories of cognitive and development are purposed to explain how children develop, and thus, how to teach them appropriately in the frame of students' development. Piaget proposed a theory about cognitive development which employs in the four stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2007). Sensorimotor occurs since birth through ages 18-24 months. The last three stages connect to the discussion on moral development. In the preoperational stage (ages 2-7), the main emphasis is the mastery of motor development skills. The preoperational stage is a bridge between the sensorimotor stage and concrete operational stage. When they are in 7-12 years, they move into the concrete stage which is indicated by their ability to think about a situation logically and concretely. They can also see things based on others' perspective instead of only seeing things from their own point of view. Then, children achieve the formal operation stage when they are 12 years and older. Through this stage, they can think things abstractly.

Furthermore, Piaget's cognitive development theory is elaborated by Kohlberg becoming a theory of moral reasoning (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2007). This theory is grouped into three different levels: pre-conventional morality, conventional morality, and post-conventional morality. Through the stage of pre-conventional morality, students will obey rules in order to avoid punishment. The stage of preconventional morality also deals with self-interest.

Students adapt themselves to rules in order to get something they want. Then, the stage of conventional morality occurs when children enter middle school. Through this level, students obey rules because they want to be accepted in their community so that they want to achieve an image as a "good boy or girl". The last stage is achieved by students when they are in high school. Through this stage, they act upon what they think is the right thing to do, without considering opinion of others. Then, to move from a stage to another, everyone goes through the stages sequentially without skipping any stage. Students do not automatically move from one stage to the next as they mature. Moreover, students cannot understand moral reasoning more than one stage ahead of their own. For instance, a person in first stage can understand second stage reasoning but nothing beyond that. Therefore, teachers should present moral arguments that are only one stage ahead of a learner's present level of reasoning to stimulate movement to higher stages.

#### B. *The Relation between Soft Skills and Children's Literature*

Children's literature is one of genres in literature which is produced for youth from birth through age 13. Children's literature is learned in elementary school since traditional elementary schools enroll children through sixth grade, and typically children are 12 or 13 years old when they complete elementary school. Although some children are not able to read on their level, their interest level would be the same as that of their peers.

Children's literature relate to the concept of genre in literature. Genre is a type of literature which has certain characteristic. Genre refers to the division of types of literary work based on style, form, and content of the story (Mitchell, 2003:5-6). The genre of children's literature is grouped into six types of genre, those are: realism, formula fiction, fantasy, traditional literature, poetry, and non-fiction. Realism is the possibility that the story has occurred or not, even though it is not a must that it has really occurred. Formula fiction refers to detective, mysterious, romantic story, and series novel. Then, fantasy story is an illogic story. Moreover, traditional story refers to a legend in a society without a real author. In addition, poetry is closely related to the term of "lyric" and points to an origin in the sphere of music (Klarer, 2004:26). The poetry for children consists of narrative poetry and personal poetry (Nurgiyantoro, 2005:27-28). Narrative poetry is a poetry which contains a story or a story which is told through poetry. Personal poetry is a specific poetry for children. Finally, nonfiction is a real story which is written using literary words, such as biography, autobiography, and etc.

Children's literature with the various genres can be used to develop students' soft skills. This idea emerges from the concept of bibliotherapy which has existed since 1916. Through the concept of bibliotherapy, literature can be used for social and emotional development across all ages (Reagan, and Patricia, 2008:38). Bibliotherapy firstly is addressed to the emotional needs of those seeking counseling, and to teach social skills to children and adolescent. Bibliotherapy is identified by McCarty and Slygh (2004) as a proactive intervention for youth who are at risk and/or present with behavioral challenges. This program would generally used in relation to other positive behavioral supports for students with emotional or behavioral

challenges. Furthermore, bibliotherapy has obvious ties with wellness and soft skills development programs as initiatives for school age youth.

In reading a fiction or nonfiction text, for instance, the students are guided by their teachers, not only read and comprehend the elements of story words and grammar, but they respond to the literature in a variety of ways, discuss characters and conflict in the story, find the message, internalize and think core values in the story.

#### II. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the research has found a technique of teaching children's literature which is directed to develop students' soft skills, namely *Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching (R2BT)*. There are three aspects which relate to this technique, encompassing the basic assumption, principle, and procedure of employing the technique. Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching is based on the assumption that humans have the soul to internalize and mind to think core values. This technique is employed under six main principles, those are: creating a harmonious relationship between a teacher and students, being a model, treating students based on their moral development, leading students to think logically, leading students to think systematically, and leading students to think holistically. Finally, this technique can be employed using the procedure, encompassing: designing soft skills based syllabus, designing soft skills based lesson plan, selecting an appropriate literary text, gaining students' attention and curiosity, identifying core values, clarifying core values, analyzing conflict of value, selecting value, and conducting assessment.

The use of Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching to develop students' soft skills through children's literature can be employed by considering and practicing the basic assumption, principle, and procedure of this technique.

##### A. *The basic assumption of teaching technique of children's literature using Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching.*

Reflection is the humans' consciousness which functions to improve the quality of their life (Koesoema, 2007:217). Thus, human beings cannot be separated from the process of reflection. Through the process of reflection, the students can be guided to get the meaning of a fact, phenomena, information, and a thing. In the context of soft skills development, this reflection is directed to the process of comprehending a meaning and value which are derived from the literary text.

Kesuma, et al. (2011:119-120) formulate the students' comprehension on a meaning and value in the literature on six hierarchies. The lower hierarchy is indicated by the ability to expound the correlation between a material and its meaning and value. The middle hierarchy refers to the awareness that there is God that control human being and universe. Humans do not the original owner of anything, because all things belong to God as the real owner. The third level is the appearance of students' motivation to do something based on their understanding on the learned meaning and value. The fourth level is the students want to apply the meaning and value in their life. The fifth level appears when the students become a model for their family and community. The summit level is when students want to

persuade their colleague to apply the meaning and values as they have learned.

The other assumption of Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching is that humans have the potency of mind to think the values, distinguish, and decide the right and wrong one. Through the process of thinking, the students are guided to think a meaning and value critically and logically.

#### B. *The Principles of Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching*

The use of Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching in teaching children's literature for developing students' soft skills must follow the certain principles below:

1. Creating a harmonious relationship between a teacher and students. A harmonious relationship is created by taking care, giving mutual understanding, treating all students equally, and receiving students' various background. Without creating a harmonious relationship, the process of reflection cannot occur.
2. Being a model for students. A teacher's attitude must be a model for the students. A teacher must apply the values which are transformed to the students through his/her attitude.
3. Treating students based on their moral development. The children's moral development is recommended to be a basis to develop their soft skills. The moral development relates to three domains, which are: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development. Cognitive domain focuses on how children think something logically. Behavioral domains relates to how children act in a real situation. The, emotional domain focuses on how children feel something on the side of morality.
4. Leading students to think logically. The process of developing children's logic must be directed to lead the children to think something based on their capacity of logic.
5. Leading students to think systematically. The development of children's rationality is directed how they can solve a problem systematically.
6. Leading students to think holistically. Through thinking holistically, students can understand something comprehensively so that they can predict some possible situation early. In this condition, students can be a good anticipator at least on a situation which is suitable for their life experience.

All principles must govern the implementation of Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching to teach children's literature for developing students' soft skills.

#### C. *The Procedure of Applying Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching*

The process of learning and teaching children's literature through Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching can be employed using the procedure, encompassing: designing soft

skills based syllabus, designing soft skills based lesson plan, selecting an appropriate literary text, gaining students' attention and curiosity, activating students' background knowledge, identifying values, clarifying values, analyzing conflict of value, selecting value, and conducting assessment.

##### 1) *Designing soft skills based syllabus*

In providing a syllabus for the need of soft skills development, the teacher must not change the existing syllabus, but adapt it appropriately. All materials in the syllabus can be cultivated to integrate them into the core values. In the perspective of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CLT), this strategy is in line with the principle of interdependence that drives to establish relationship to arrive at new insights. In another word, this makes possible for the teachers and students to create a connection to reveal meaning (Johnson, 2002:29). In this case, the core value can be understood as a kind of meaning which should be found by the students in learning the literature.

To integrate the core values into the syllabus, the teachers must understand the curriculum, materials, and core values. Some strategies which can be employed by the teachers are as follows: Firstly, identifying standard of competency and basic competency. The curriculum contains standard of competency (goal) and basic competency (objective) for each subject which should be achieved by students. Teachers must find ethical value which is possible integrated to the standard of competency and basic competency. Secondly, analyzing indicator, subject matter, and topics. The standard of competency and basic competency are spelled out by the indicator a basis to formulate subject matter, and topic. Finally, selecting subject matter which can be integrated into the core values. This is the significant stage to integrate children's literature and the core values for soft skills development.

To analyze the potency of integration between subject matter and core values, some main principles should be considered which are: principle of correspondence, principle of philosophy, and principle of clarification. The principle of correspondence entails the direct connection between a subject matter and core value. In teaching short story, for instance, the teacher uses a text which contains a direct connection to certain ethical value. Then, principle of philosophy states the teacher can integrate the subject matters to the core value philosophically since not all subject matters have a direct connection to core value. The final principle emphasizes that the teachers can clarify the content of subject matter which contains contradictory remark to the core values.

##### 2) *Designing soft skills based lesson plan*

Developing soft skills in lesson plan can occur in the section of objectives, materials, and procedures. In the section of objectives, teachers write explicitly the kinds of soft skills that they want students to gain from the lesson based on the pre-determined instructional objectives. The explicit statements help teachers to make sure what kinds of soft skills that should be understood and internalized by their students. In term of materials, teacher must write the lesson which must be taught and the soft skills that would be developed. Relating to procedure, teachers write a set of activities and techniques which can facilitate them to deliver

soft skills to students. For instance, beginning the class by praying to God, greeting students, cultivating and reflecting soft skills which are found in the lesson, and closing the class by motivating students to study hard.

#### *3) Selecting an appropriate literary text*

Selecting the literary text must accommodate students to internalize the core values with still concern with the main goal of teaching literature. The teachers may select a literary text after identifying the chance in a curriculum which can be used to explore moral values (Lickona, 2012:253). Moreover, the process of selecting a literary text must consider the students' cognitive, moral, behavioral, and language development.

#### *4) Gaining students' attention and curiosity*

Students are guided by their teacher to focus on and have curiosity about the subject. Students in this step, also guided to make connections with their own prior knowledge, their own personal experiences (text-to-self), world events (text-to-world), and other literary pieces (text-to-text).

#### *5) Identifying values*

It is assumed that values can help students to foster their character. This step belongs to cognitive process, in which students must find and comprehend their own core values and others. At the classroom, students are facilitated to find core values which are believed by themselves, family, friends, teachers, and society. As a result, this process makes the values are clear for students so that they function as a direction and formation of students' soft skills. Furthermore, this step emphasizes on students' effort to find the moral values in the literary text. In short, these techniques do not eliminate the learning objectives of literature and their relationship is just complimentary each other.

#### *6) Clarifying values*

Clarifying values lead students to discover values through behavior, feelings, ideas, and important choices they have made for their life. By applying this process, students are helped finding, analyzing, and choosing the values which they want to achieve. Thus, they can have self-reliance in deciding and directing their life without other person's intervention. This technique also enhances the ability of students to communicate their beliefs, values, and feelings to other person. The students are also encouraged to empathize with other person who has different value from their own. Another strategy is moral reasoning approach. This approach emphasizes on students' cognitive development to think logically through analyzing problems which relate closely to the values and judge them based on the moral values. This technique is employed through class discussion which focuses on certain dilemma of morality. In reading a short story, for instance, some moral problems which are found in the text are appropriate to be discussed in order to encourage students to decide reasonable ways to solve it.

#### *7) Analyzing conflict of value*

A short story, for instance, must contain a conflict which can be found through analyzing characters of the story. The conflict in a story commonly involves the conflict of value. In term of soft skills development, students must be guided how to think correctly and appropriately what they must do and vice versa. For instance, a person wants to give money to

poor people, but at the same time he/she has not enough money to pay it.

#### *8) Selecting value*

After finding and analyzing core value in the literary text, students may get the process of selecting value. Selecting value is constructed by an assumption that a value may become an important thing for someone, and vice versa, it is not a priority for another. In this context, students are guided to decide which value is important for them. Teacher just gives reinforcement for students to make a value decision without intervening for their decision.

#### *9) Conducting assessment*

Conducting an assessment for developing students' soft skills through children's literature can be done through portfolio. Portfolio helps students to become autonomous, and foster them to do a reflection and monitor their own learning (Nunes, 2004:334). To begin a portfolio assessment, teacher can explore students' learning experience in learning a literary work. Then, they are encouraged to explore core values in the literary text, internalize, and construct knowledge about them.

To achieve the target of teaching children's literature, the nine steps above must be conducted totally and orderly. Moreover, the steps are explicitly be able observed at the classroom.

### III. CONCLUSION

The function of children's literature is not only for entertainment, but it can be used an alternative media for developing students' soft skills. Besides, the effectiveness of children's literature as a vehicle to develop soft skills also needs teacher's creativity in selecting an appropriate teaching technique. In this context, Reflection and Rationale Based Teaching (R2BT) can be considered as one of relevant techniques to develop students' soft skills through children's literature. Moreover, this technique also touches three important aspects in developing soft skills, which are: value knowledge, value reflection, and value practicing.

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