From Malaysia to America

Community-Based Character Education for Children and Youth

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Introductions

• Lessons learned from a community-based character education program in Malaysia.
• Presented with Meishi Lim Haslip, its first children’s class teacher.
• Empowerment, transformation and the Jenjarom Learning Center
• A dynamic children’s program.
• How youth become agents of social change.
The Setting

- 1997
- 6 children, once a week
- Town of Jenjarom, Malaysia
- More classes were created, grades and curricula adopted.
- 2006: Award for moral or religious leadership
- 2010: Jenjarom Learning Center was opened
- Now serving 300 children and youth with active service projects throughout the town.
The Program

• Mission: Individual and community transformation through moral and character education.
  – Implemented through service projects, songs, stories, games, study and discussion.

• Two branches:
  – Children’s class program: ages 5 – 11
  – Youth empowerment program: ages 12 - 15
Material education is like the lamp and virtues and spiritual qualities is the light within the lamp. When both become united, the outcome will be perfect. If we have all the material advances but do not have people of high virtues and attributes, it’s like having a beautiful lamp but without light; humanity will not prosper and attain peace.
Foundational Principles

1. Virtues of character are latent, like talents.
   – Virtues are developed through service.

2. Life purpose of service.
   – Lacking this, we might live mostly for ourselves.
   – Do we primarily give or take?

3. Although born noble, education determines if we follow our higher nature or sink into our lower nature.

4. Strive for the oneness of humanity.
Curricula

• Developed by the Ruhi Institute
  – An international educational nonprofit
• Culturally adaptive lesson components
  – Songs, games, drama, stories, service activities
• Administered by the Ruhi Institute
Baha’i Faith as Sponsors

• The Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion.
  – Baha'i means a follower of Baha’u’llah.
  – Teaches unity, service, dignity, empowerment, social justice and active involvement.
  – Seeking prosperity that is both spiritual and material: equitable, ethical, benefiting all.
Case Study: Jenjarom, Malaysia.

A historically notorious Chinese Village.

A national award-winning community project based on moral and spiritual education.
Turning Prejudice into Friendship with the Arts

- 90% Chinese
- Little interaction with other ethnic groups
- Chinese / Indian prejudice
- Story of performing on stage with Indian and Chinese children
Children’s Class
Dance by Children

2004.10.30
Under 5 MC’s
Public Talks at Ages 10 & 11
Young Children’s Performance
PROPOSED CHILDREN / COMMUNITY CENTRE AT JENJAROM
Anecdotes

1. Giving an unexpected cupcake
2. Unity & the arguing parents
3. Truthfulness returns the change
Teaching Character

- Children role-play positive vs. negative examples of behavior
- Experience and discuss the effects of following or not following various norms, virtues or rules.
- Experiencing and discussing consequences
- Reflecting on one’s own actions and one’s effects on others
Teaching Character (2)

- Working towards a goal
- Overcoming challenges
- Assuming responsibility
- Serving others (caring for pets, helping)
- Maintaining healthy and happy relationships
  - Communication; conflict resolution
- Adult role modeling
Application in Schools

• Teach, role-play and reinforce one virtue every 3 weeks (e.g. kindness; courage)
  1. Define it
  2. Provide positive and negative examples and the effects of both
  3. Break it down into actionable skills
  4. E.g. kindness includes the skill of giving a compliment to others
Application (2)

• Use morning meetings to demonstrate the skills that express the virtue.
  – Use examples, role-plays and real-life situations.
• Post and practice the language needed for courteous, problem-solving behaviors:
  – “Will you please…”
  – “Okay, sorry, or that wasn’t me.”
• Select purposeful story books & tell real-life stories
• Express virtues in art, drama and music.
• Validate children whenever they express good character.
Application (3): Reinforcing New Habits

• Let children control their own sticker chart: they put a sticker on a chart when they notice that they practiced a virtue
• Class celebrations: whole class song & dance after a child’s good deed
• Anytime mini-celebrations to honor effort
• “Great Moment” certificates
Internalizing Character

• Do not over-emphasize external rewards for character.
• Explain in child language the real rewards for good character are:
  1. Satisfaction we feel inside
  2. Good choices we make
  3. Challenges we overcome
  4. Effort we demonstrate
  5. Benefit we bring to others
  6. Friendships we sustain
  7. Greater learning we enjoy
  8. Lifelong success
  9. Unlocks our own potential
Conclusion

1. Character is more than behavior and academics.

2. Transformation is the vision:
   1. Receivers into givers
   2. Protection from selfishness & bad choices
   3. Unity through trustworthiness, wisdom, empathy, justice.

3. Another view of human nature:
   *We are cooperative and beautiful when education brings out our best qualities.*
1. Presentation Reference:
   doi: 10.1080/00094056.2013.830899

2. Ruhi Institute
   www.ruhi.org
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