PRODIGY: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Samsiah Mohd Jais, Ab. Aziz Md. Yatim, dan Mohammed Aziz Shah Mohammad Arip
Faculty of Education & Human Development Sultan Idris Education University
email: samsiah@fppm.upsi.edu.my

Abstract: The formation and development of healthy and effective characters among the students are closely related to the role played by a counselor at school. However, in the era of globalization, the role of counselor in the development of good character in students is more difficult and complicated. Thus, apart from the knowledge and skills, counselor should have an effective strategy in encouraging the development of good character in young children. The purpose of this paper is to introduce a 'Prodigy' as an approach to assist the guidance and counseling teachers as well as other individuals who play vital roles in the development and improvement of students' behavior. Prodigy is unique and innovative because it helps counselors to understand the essential elements for the improvement and enhancement of human development in schools; and comprehensive as they integrate the affective, cognitive and behavioral components of character development. This paper discusses relevant course modules for character development and touches the benefits of using Prodigy in fostering character development.

Keywords: *Prodigy, counseling, character development, character counseling, counseling modules*

PRODIGI: SEBUAH PENDEKATAN INOVATIF
DALAM PENGEMBANGAN KARAKTER

Abstrak: Pembentukan dan pembangunan karakter yang sihat dan berkesan di kalangan pelajar berkait rapat dengan peranan yang dimainkan oleh kaunselor di sekolah. Walau bagaimanapun, dalam era globalisasi, peranan kaunselor dalam pembangunan karakter yang baik di kalangan pelajar adalah lebih sukar dan rumit. Oleh itu, selain daripada pengetahuan dan kemahiran, kaunselor harus mempunyai strategi yang berkesan dalam menggalakkan pembangunan watak yang baik di kalangan kanak-kanak. Tujuan kertas ini adalah untuk memperkenalkan 'Prodigy' sebagai satu pendekatan untuk membantu guru-guru bimbingan dan kaunseling serta individu lain yang memainkan peranan penting dalam pembangunan dan peningkatan tingkah laku pelajar. Prodigy adalah unik dan inovatif kerana ia membantu kaunselor untuk memahami elemen-elemen penting untuk penambahbaikan dan peningkatan pembangunan sumber manusia di sekolah-sekolah dan juga menyeluruh kerana ianya mengintegrasikan komponen afektif, kognitif dan tingkah laku dalam pembangunan karakter. Kertas kerja ini membincangkan modul kursus yang berkaitan bagi pembangunan karakter dan menyentuh manfaat menggunakan Prodigy dalam memupuk pembangunan karakter.

Kata Kunci: *prodigi, kaunseling, pembangunan karakter, kaunseling karakter, modul kaunseling*

INTRODUCTION

Lately, the aspiration to produce young people who have character or good personality has become the main focus in community development. The Former Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had expressed the need for the citizens in this country to be successful without compromising on the values that support the civilization of a nation. He stressed that "hundreds and even thousands of twin towers can be built, but at the same time to shape the Malay personality that matches the great towers must be continued" (Utusan Malaysia, 2005). This is the biggest challenge for Dr. Shafie Mohd. Salleh, the Minister of Higher Education of Malaysia at that time, to assist

the government to produce students with good personality. According to him, "the building of human resources does not mean that we excel only in academic and thus become a useful man in the era of globalization, but it must be accompanied by our character, meaning that our soul – how we act and think… that counts". The role of the Ministry of Education is to produce quality manpower resources that are able to create something new, to be competitive and put national interest above individual interest. In fact, this has become the main thrust of the Ministry of Higher Education in the planning of allocation for the Ninth Malaysia Plan (RMK-9).

In this regard, school counselor is one of the main agents in producing students who are balanced and harmonious, as indicated in the National Education Philosophy. A counselor can help young generations to build good and balanced characters through guidance and recommendation. However, the current challenges of postmodernity (such as the advances in education, development of science and technology, and rapid socio-economic changes) have made the task of shaping the future generation, who can truly internalize the characteristics of superior personality, even more difficult. Realizing these obstacles, school counselors should continuously enhance their skills and knowledge and be proactive in searching for innovative and effective approaches in counseling.

Research literatures have been consistently supporting the notion that administrators and counselors are responsible for determining the best practices for guiding students to become ethical, productive, and responsible citizens (Benninga & Wynne, 1998) and they must plan for programs that are intentional, proactive, and comprehensive. In this aspect, I deem it appropriate to share an innovative counseling tool, known as 'Prodigy,' which has been proven effective (http://pusaka02.blogspot.com/) in helping school counselors to produce quality students.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

What is character? The dictionary describes character as "the complex interaction of mental and ethical traits marking a person." Character is thus who we really are and what we do. It is the accumulation of thoughts, values, words and actions. People say that we can achieve success by having good character. But what is really good character? A person of good character thinks right and does right according to the core universal values that define the qualities of a good person: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, care, and citizenship. Whatever we would call them, counselors (including parents, educators and leaders) play an important role as a character developer to guide the students' thoughts, words, actions, and habits toward these values, which all people share, regardless of their differences.

In the National Education Philosophy, it is stated that *"Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible for and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large."*

The importance of the development of a holistic student is clearly defined in the National Education Philosophy. This shows

that the education and development of student character has long been practiced in Malaysia, especially in the teaching of Civics, Moral Education and Islamic education. Recently, as societal moral problems worsened, character education has been gaining attention and has made a comeback. Today we realize that the young adults need moral direction, and parents and teachers have a responsibility to pass it on as a moral heritage. Similarly, the school counselors have the responsibility to inculcate the good values (such as respect, responsibility, honesty, care and fairness) and help students build up their characters around such values.

What do we mean by character and character development? There have been numerous views of what constitutes character, as well as character education and development. According to Al-Ghazali, character is "an established state (of the soul) from which actions proceed easily, without any need for reflection and deliberation. If this state is such that good actions – i.e. those which are praiseworthy and the Shari'a – proceed from it, it is called good character. If the actions which proceed from the state are evil, the state from which they derive is called bad character." Character therefore is the result of ethical training (Syed Othman Alhabshi, 2005).

The ideas from Associate Professor Dr Tajul Ariffin of the National University of Malaysia (2008) on character development is in line with Malaysia's National Philosophy of Education. He states that the focus of character development is on the concept of soft. The meaning of soft should always refer to the concept of integrated education and values. Specifically, the concept should be integrated with seven components, namely ethics and morals, leadership, communication, entrepreneurship, thinking skills, learning and continuous information management, and teamwork. Character development is implemented "through a global thinking approach but according to the Malaysian mold". With this strategy, it is hoped that Malaysia can produce world-class scholars and intellectuals.

Lickona (1991), a psychologist educator defines character education as "everything that a school does that influences the character of their students and includes the school's deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values". Lickona (1991) has descrybed good character as consisting of three interrelated dimensions: moral knowledge (knowing the good), moral feeling (desiring the good), and moral behavior (doing the good) – or the habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action, respectively. In his book "Character Matters", Lickona has listed 10 essential qualities – wisdom, justice, fortitude, self-control, love, a positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude and humility. He lays out a blueprint for building these core virtues through a partnership of families, schools, and communities.

In terms of the moral development for college students, Louise McBee (in Saunders and Cooper, 1999) has proposed the following virtues as components of character: honesty, responsibility, fairness, dependability, consideration, courteousness, diligence, and self-discipline. The process of character development refers to "the progression of an individual's capacity for understanding what is right or good in increasingly complex forms, and the willingness or courage to act on those concepttions" (Whitely, in Saunders and Cooper, 1999).

242

PRODIGY

Many studies have shown that counseling services are well received by students (Samsiah, 2011) and effective in addressing problems faced by students (Borders & Drury, 1992; Jacobs et al., 2003; Gadza, 1989; Santrock, 1990; in Samsiah (2011). In this regard, a counseling program such as 'Prodigy' has been proven effective (http://pusaka02.blogspot.com) in helping troubled students and developing quality personality among those students. Prodigy was established in 2003 by Aziz Ab. Yatim, a lecturer and counselor from the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia.

Prodigy is an interactive and integrated Guidance and Counseling training module which aims to assist counselors to be more efficient and skillful in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. It offers vital and effective materials which are useful to teachers (especially guidance and counseling teachers) and trainers from relevant professions. This unique and innovative software is invaluable as it helps the users to understand the essential elements in human development and improvement in any setting particularly in a school setting. This module integrates the affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects of learning in its development and implementation stages.

Prodigy consists of 2 sections: (1) The Management of Guidance and Counseling Services; and (2) the Course Modules. The Management of Guidance and Counseling Services section offers assistance to guidance and counseling teachers as well as other individuals who play a vital role in the development and improvement of students' behavior. It sets out to lessen the burdens of these individuals in program planning and preparation of documents, proposals, program analysis, bulletin publications, e-counseling, reports, schedules, certificates and other related counseling forms. Meanwhile, the course modules section comprises a step-by-step course module for the purpose of conducting the following activities: ice-breaking, unconditional love, personality development, communication, team building, career development, 5-domain study skills, creative thinking, creativity in multimedia production, subconsciousness, relaxation, alternative discipline management, and treasure-hunt.

PRODIGY AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

How can Prodigy enhance character development? Responses from participants have revealed that almost all of Prodigy course modules are relevant in helping counselors develop students' personality (http://pusaka02.blogspot.com). In this paper, five course modules are discussed based on the writer's involvement with Prodigy programs and the review of literatures. The six course modules discussed are: (1) the 5-domain study skills; (2) the unconditional love; (3) the creative thinking; (4) the alternative discipline management; and (5) the leadership.

The 5-Domain Study Skills

The 5-domain study skill (audio, visual, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) is based on "Gardner's Multiple Intelligences" theory by Howard Gardner (1983) in (http://pusaka02.blogspot.com). The aim of this module is to assist students to learn effectively in any situation via learning techniques that suit their individual personality. Research has demonstrated that students with effective learning techniques were more excellent, disciplined, and positive toward learning (Dunn and Dunn, 1992). This study showed that there was a

positive correlation between study skill and academic achievement in students.

In relation to character development, it is known that the way a student studies is a reflection of who he or she is and how much he or she is willing to put forth in his or her study. Every small decision that a student makes is a reflection of his or her brain pattern and character. Study skills require a combination of certain characteristics such as creativity, dedication, punctuality and self-discipline in order to be effective. Like other learning skills, the 5-domain study skill has several positive impacts on students. Students are trained to use insight to solve problems. Students are also trained to use the right perception to build a rational way of thinking. Besides improving students' understanding and achievement, this study skill can also enhance the students' learning and intellect. Another personal quality that can be nurtured through this study skill is self-discipline. Students will learn to manage their time more effectively (making timetable, studying at the scheduled time, etc.). Students can also collect and process information accurately and improve memory by mastering the right learning skills. Students can also enhance their individual performance to achieve their goals. Finally, students are able to build a culture of effective learning that will lead to excellence in academic and non-academic fields.

The Unconditional Love

The concept of agape love is taken from the lifestyle practiced by the Red-Indians during the reign of their great chief known as White Eagle. The story of White Eagle has a profound impact on the students who attempt to emulate the lifestyle of the Red Indian society at that time. In this course, students will be introduced to a rarely known concept of agape love which is the concept of application of unconditional love. Students are taught the value of love which is applicable to all people regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, ideology and lifestyle. Through this concept, it is hoped that cases such as bullying in schools will no longer arise because students have been conditioned to understand and accept human differences, the uniqueness of each individual and why people should live in harmony and peace. Through understanding and practicing this concept, students will be willing to give unconditional love so that their lives (be it in dormitory, school and elsewhere) will be more meaningful. Students will be able to enjoy living together after they adopt the concept of agape love.

Through this activity, it is hoped that students will adopt and practice such concept in society. Students will experience the love between brothers and sisters, students and teachers, employees and community in schools and lives will be more harmonious. Overall, this module helps in fostering love, care, selflessness, mutual assistance and other moral values regardless of race, religion and culture.

The creative thinking

Creative thinking is associated with the original thinking and the existence of new ideas. Halpern (1984) defines creativity as the ability to build a combination of ideas to fulfill a need. Perkins (in Rajendran, 2000), also relates creative thinking to the production of something new and original. Creative thinking is there in each individual, but some individuals are able to demonstrate creativity, while others keep it as a hidden talent. As suggested by Hilgard (1959/1960:62): *"The capacity to create useful or beautiful products and to find ways of*

resolving perplexity is not limited to the highly gifted person, but is the birthright of every person of average talent ".

As such, this module aims to assist students to generate out-of-the-box thinking and to enhance self innovation. Through experiential learning and practical exercise students are trained to utilize maximum self-potential to generate new ideas. Creative thinking can foster positive characteristics because creativity requires time investment, preparation and diligence. The prerequisites to creativity are accuracy, diligence and get into an issue for a long time. Creativity requires concentration and a strong determination, dedication and self-discipline. In addition to effort and time, creative people are taking risks to achieve their goals and to reject alternatives because they want to look for something else that is unusual. They are not satisfied if something which is only 'about' or average, but always looking for something better, more efficient, more time-saving or more smooth-running (Rajendran, 2000).

Creativity also requires an intrinsic motivation such as being dedicated, willing to work hard and wanting to engage with ideas. Moreover, creative individuals determine their own criteria for evaluation and do not like to be judged by others. In this module, students are trained and challenged to think creatively towards attaining a goal.

Alternative Discipline Management

Generally, the approach used to handle disciplinary cases is through 'love'. This approach is taught to teachers and students through programs in focus groups such as developmental or prevention group. The aim is to build a close relationship between teachers and students, and among students. The rapport between a student and his/her peers is emphasized because of the strong influence that peers have upon them. This is consistent with the assumption of psychologists that the behavior of adolescents is an outcome of contact with others based on cultural, social, biological and physical demands (Powell in Aziz, 2003). The attachment that exists among students and between students and teachers to some extent influences the behavior of particular students in particular groups (Aziz, 2003). The following programs are available in Prodigy and have been conducted in schools with significant effects in reducing disciplinary problems in schools.

FAJAR COURSE

FAJAR carries the connotation that a person who wants to succeed in life should begin his or her work early in the morning. This course is conducted for at-risk students. For each program, approximately 40 at-risk students are selected according to certain criteria. They are termed as 'High Risk Undercover' (HRU) and will be given special treatment from a counselor or discipline teacher. Through this program, the HRU students will get closer to the counselors, teachers or discipline teachers. Gradually, they will realize the mistakes that they have made and eventually this will help the school to reduce their disciplinary problems.

These students are also the mediators between teachers and other students who have problems in school because some of these students (HRU) can be very influential due to their charisma. It is of utmost importance to make students feel appreciated and to compliment them for their good behavior. This method has been found effective in lessening disciplinary problems in schools.

GALUS COURSE

This course is conducted for students who are weak in examinations. GALUS is an abbreviation of fail (GAGAL) and pass (LULUS) in the Malay language or more specifically, students who are at the borderline of passing and failing in school examinations. In this program, students who are weak in academic performance are given proper attention and treatment. Courses in study skills, motivation, learning network are provided to them.

MOTIVATIONAL COURSES

Motivational courses are conducted for students who have not attended any previous Prodigy course. They are given training on learning skills, effective communication, motivation and application of agape love. In this way, students who have gone through the courses would be able to adopt and share the same values and culture. This will facilitate the school counselors and discipline teachers in shaping the students' attitudes and behaviors. At the same time, students will realize the price that they need to pay for the problems that they have created.

Establishing 'Networking'

Apart from making the trained students as a liaison between teachers and other students, we are also providing students with a special complaint box at places convenient for them to hand in their complaints such as in the cafeteria, resource center and counseling room itself. Students can also email (azizmysmtk@hotmail.com) their complaints, interact or exchange information through Internet portals (http://www.techboard.cjb.net). This will also assist the counselor in identifying students who are involved in politics (or anything that threatens or endangers the

school) in the hostel or school compound. By engaging students as trainers, we will make it difficult for other students to violate school discipline as their actions can more easily be detected by other students (their peers).

The Leadership

Through this module the group leaders and trainers are created. These leaders are inculcated with the Agape Love concept and eventually will be trained to become facilitators. They are trained on how to run programs on motivation, study skills and career training, for instance. As trainers and facilitators, they will be able to guide other students with the skills that they have picked up. Indirectly, the schools will be able to adopt the culture of love, respect, knowledge and cooperation among their students regardless of race, religion and social-economic status. This will help prevent the feeling of jealousy and hatred among students

Basically, a group of trainers is composed of prefects, peer advisors, hostel bureau staff, student representatives and a number of high-risk students who have been identified to be helpful in creating harmony in schools. When the Form 4 students are enrolled, this group of trainers will run the programs for them. They will become the brothers and sisters to the new students. They are taught various skills such as communication techniques, effective facilitation, study methods and counseling. The trainers will see to it that disciplinary violations will not occur.

CONCLUSIONS

Good character, positive attitude and desirable values of the young generation are important aspects that we need to shape and preserve. According to Tan Sri Lee Lam

Thye, Vice Chairman of the Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation, we need to think seriously about how the leaders of the future generation in Malaysia are being developed. We need to build skills and character to prepare them to face the world.

The success of our Malaysian education system is not only measured in terms of academic achievement, but also the extent to which our education system is able to produce quality citizens who possess integrity, discipline, character, knowledge, positive attitudes towards work, ability to work in a team and a sense of responsibility for and commitment to the community. In this era of globalization and rapid changes, to develop our younger generation into one with high intelligence (IQ), stable emotion (EQ) and spiritual values (SQ) is not an easy task. However, for educators, especially school counselors, this is not an impossible task to achieve. Due to the challenges faced by counselors, a counseling tool known as Prodigy has been created to help teachers, especially school counselors, to deal with problematic students while developing their character and morality.

In the field of guidance and counseling, Prodigy is known to be the first of its kind, making it the only one ever produced in Malaysia. Prodigy will benefit individuals and institutions alike as it will alleviate the process of conducting courses related to the field of guidance and counseling. Besides facilitating the work involved in documentation, management and administration, Prodigy is able to assist counselors in reducing and preventing maladaptive behaviors, inculcating and refining acceptable social behaviors, enhancing culture and religion and instilling love and care among the people.

Despite the importance of excellent results in examinations, the holistic development of a student perhaps deserves more of our attention. All parties must join hand-in-hand to ensure that the development of personality of our youngsters will be a well-balanced one completed with the necessary moral, cognitive, physical, social, spiritual, and aesthetic elements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Aziz Mohd Yatim, Abd. 2003. *Prodigy: Integrated Guidance and Counseling Training Module.* Malaysia. Sultan Idris Education University.

Borders, L. D. & Drury, S. M. 1992. "Comprehensive School Counseling Programs: A Review for Policymakers and Practitioners". *Journal of Counseling & Development.* 70, 487-498.

Dunn, R. & Dunn, K. 1992. *Teaching Elementary Students through Their Individual Learning Styles: Practical Approaches for Grades 3-6.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Gazda, G. M. 1989. *Group Counseling: A Developmental Approach (4th ed.).* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Halpern, D. 1984. *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hilgard, E. R. 1959. "Creativity and Problem-Solving," in *Creativity and its Cultivation.* H. A. Anderson, ed. New York: Harper Brothers.

Lickona, T. 1991. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility.* New York: Bantam Books.

Perkins, D. N. 1984. "What Creative Thinking Is". Excerpt from Perkins, D. N. Creativity by design. In *Educational Leadership* vol. 42,1 (pp18-24).

Rajendran, N. 2000. *Teaching Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Classroom: Learning from the Experiences of Malaysia.* Paper presented at the Thinking Qualities Initiatives Conference Hong Kong 2000, Hong Kong.

Samsiah Mohd Jais. 2011. *Malaysian School Counselors Perspectives and Approaches in Identifying and Assisting at-Risk Students through Counseling Intervention.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of South Australia.

Santrock, J. W. 1990. *Adolescence* (4th ed.). Dallas, TX: Wm. C. Brown Publishers.

Saunders, S.A. & Diana, L.C. 1999. "Developing Students Character: Practicing the Ethics We Preach". *Campus Activities Programming.*

Utusan Malaysia. 13/02/2005. Terap Budaya INTAN di IPT Membina Ketrampilan Diri Pelajar Sebaik Sahaja Masuk Kampus.