

Children's Picture Book Series on Exploring Children's Development of a Balanced Identity

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ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates the project of creating picture-book stories for two to five years old of Indonesian children, which highlight the issue of identity development in children. Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development will be the theoretical framework of this paper. In the first and second story, the main characters pass through the crisis of autonomy versus shame and doubt. They have strict and overprotective parents that caused them to doubt themselves. However, by believing in themselves and taking an action, they passed the crisis and developed a balanced identity. In the third, fourth, and fifth story, the main characters pass through the crisis of initiative versus guilt. They learn to be honest, to forgive, and to let go. Each action has its own risk, but by taking the initiative to do the right thing, they passed the crisis successfully and formed a balanced identity.

Keywords: children picture-books, children development, psychosocial development, autonomy vs shame and doubt, initiative vs guilt, balanced identity

INTRODUCTION

Balanced identity means that a person has a healthy ratio of syntonic (positive) and dystonic (negative) dispositions from each crisis in the stages of development (Erikson, 2014). For example, in the second stage (autonomy vs. shame and doubt), children are encouraged to make decisions such as picking their own clothes. However, they also need to have shame so that they can pick proper clothes. To build a balanced identity, children need to solve every crisis that comes in every step of the development. This will in turn enable them to have good social and emotional competence. A research has highlighted how this competence in children has enabled them to develop more friends, to have a better relationship with their parents and teachers, and to enjoy more academic and social successes (McCabe & Altamura, 2011).

A lot of research in various fields like education, psychology, neuroscience, and others have proven that early childhood is a critical period for development (Huntington, 2016). If there is no identity development in early childhood, there will be dangerous potentials that can affect the children when they have grown up (Erikson, 2014). This is fatal because a study done in Indonesia found that problematic children tend to have behavioural problems in the future (Izzaty, 2018). Worse than that, when children' development is neglected, it can lead to depression even when the children are only two to five years olds (Lenze, Pautsch, & Luby, 2010). Besides, children are the readiest to learn quickly and avidly during early childhood (Erikson, 2014). Thus, in order to develop a balanced identity, the process must start in early childhood.

However, precisely because of the young age, this foundational phase is often neglected or dismissed. Because of the importance of balanced identity development and the need to talk about it more, I wish to address it as the topic of my creative work. This creative work, then, is interested in analysing and exploring the crises of identity development in young children and how to overcome them.

Children's picture book is chosen as the form because it is the most suitable for the target reader that is two to five years old children in Indonesia, specifically children who learn English from a

young age. Their parents or teachers might use my work to be one of the reading materials by reading it aloud to them. Reading aloud can effectively improve the comprehension and language skills of EFL beginners (Ninsuwan, 2015). It will also significantly improve their reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge and will increase the children's interest in reading (McCormick, 1997). This is urgently needed because based on the "World's Most Literate Nation" study by the Central Connecticut State University, Indonesia is placed 60th out of 61 countries in terms of interest in reading (Miller & McKenna, 2016).

Aside from the benefits for children, a quarterly publisher research concluded that children's books make up more than 30% of book sales in Indonesia (Lingard, 2016). A research conducted by IKAPI (Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia) analysing the data from Gramedia's sales report also showed that the leading actor in the sales is children's picture books, comprising 22.64% of the sales (Wibisono, 2018). However, high quality children's books are not readily available in many parts of Indonesia (Room to Read, 2019). Based on the findings above, I have become more convinced of writing picture books for Indonesian children. I wish to give children high quality books that are educational while also increasing the sales of children books.

As for the genre, I will be using animal stories. Animal stories genre is where animals are given human speech and reason (Hunt, 2014). More specifically, I am using a type of animal stories in which the animals act and dress like human beings. The reason why I choose this genre is because animal stories provide flight of fantasy for the readers (Markowsky, 1975). It relies on figurative language, and it is distinct for its metaphorical enchantment. This creates a world for children, one that is detached from the real adult world (Lerer, 2009). By writing in this genre, I can explore limitless ideas because the characters and the world are not constrained by real world rules that apply for humans.

The characters can also be more interesting for children because there are so many diverse animals that they can see and learn about. More importantly, this genre will make it easier to send moral lessons to children. Since the characters are animals and not humans like them, they will not be defensive or block the story. By projecting themselves and their situation to the animals, it will help the children see their problems objectively.

For the theoretical framework, Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development is used for all five stories. Erik Erikson believed that each person would undergo stages of development from birth to old age. Each stage will present a new situation and new conflict or crisis for the individual. If the children can deal with the conflict successfully, they will develop the needed skills to have a strong sense of self or a balanced identity for the next stages, and for the rest of their life (Erikson, as cited by Cherry, 2018). Failure in dealing with the crises in the developmental stages will stunt the development of personal identity, resulting in an unbalanced sense of self-regulation and the inability to comprehend self and others (Erikson, as cited by Batra, 2013).

The stages of development are important because of two reasons. First, the early stages are the foundation of later stages. Each stage has a crisis that will be the turning point for the children. A balanced identity cannot be completed without the fulfilment in early childhood (Erikson, 2014). Failure in dealing with the crisis in the early stages will impact later stages in a negative way.

Second, this development influences all aspects of the children's lives, such as social, cognitive, and affective aspects. This means that it heavily correlates with children's identity and maturity in later stages. However, identity development in children has often been an ignored aspect, even though it is the basis of identity development in the long run. For Erikson, "the manner in

which this 'turning point' is negotiated is the crux of the development of a balanced personality" (Erikson, as cited by Batra, 2013). As such, it is important to ensure that children can pass all the stages well.

For the creative work, I will be using the second and third stages, namely Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (occurring from the age of one and a half to three) and Initiative vs. Guilt (occurring from the age of three to six) (Erikson, as cited by Batra, 2013). I will focus on those two stages because my creative work will aim for two to five years old children. Because of that, it is crucial to base my work on the development that is happening to children in that age range. The second and third stages of development will give insight into the conflicts that children face and how to overcome them.

Stage number two (Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt) occurs during the age of one and a half to three. In this stage, children acquire physical mobility. Children will want to be in control of what they do. However, their desire to explore the world is often limited by the anxiety of the adults around them. As a result, the conflict in this stage is to develop autonomy that does not violate the boundaries of the social order (Erikson, as cited by Batra, 2013).

When there is strict external control that is inconsistent without explanation, the children will doubt their own needs and urges. This will lead to the feeling of self-doubt and shame. The way to help the children pass this stage is to give them space to explore their world by themselves. Allowing children to make choices and have control will help the children to develop a sense of autonomy (Erikson, as cited by Cherry, 2018).

This sense of autonomy also plays a role in making decisions and making friends. Developing a relationship with their peers is one of the most prominent challenges that children in this age range face. Children who doubt their sense of self will feel ashamed to choose anything by themselves or to make any friends. That is why children should learn to overcome the crisis in this stage in order to develop their sense of autonomy.

The next stage is stage number three (Initiative vs. Guilt) that occurs from age three to six. Children at this age love to play pretend, and these playing experiments are done to find a sense of meaning that will then construct a sense of purpose (Erikson, as cited by Batra, 2013). However, when the children take the initiative too far, like exerting too much power over their friends, they will meet disapproval. This will result in a sense of guilt (Erikson, as cited by Cherry, 2018).

Therefore, the goal of this stage is to develop a balanced sense of initiative that conforms to morality values (so it does not create guilty feelings). If they fail, the children's identity will be muddled with resignation, guilt, and anxiety (Erikson, 2014). However, if the children pass this stage, they will have a sense of purpose that will strengthen their identity. Since children at this age range love to play with their peers, the crisis that they face will revolve around relational issues concerning their peers. The main characters of the stories must take the initiative of being honest, forgiving, and letting go to not feel guilty and to develop a balanced identity.

The stories planned in this paper present five characters who face different crises in their journey to develop a balanced identity. Each character, namely Satria, Laras, Widia, Manda, and Dimas, is facing his/her own crisis related to friendship, family, and school. Once they took the right actions, they will overcome the crisis and develop a healthy ratio of syntonic and dystonic disposition from that stage to have a balanced identity.

THE CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The theme of this creative work is children will face crises during their development, but they can pass the crises and develop a balanced identity by doing the right actions. The theme can be seen from how the five main characters in my stories will face different crises or problems that push them to do actions such as making friends, being confident, being honest, forgiving, and letting go. After doing the right actions, the characters can pass the crises and develop a balanced identity.

Plot

Since my creative work will be a series that consists of five books, I will have five different plots.

Finding a Friend

Satria is excited to start his first day of school, but he has difficulty making friends. His parents are overprotective, and they usually make decisions for him. However, his parents are not there with him, so Satria must try to do something by himself. On the first day, he just stands in the corner without speaking to anyone. The next day, he tries to speak to a bunch of his friends that are playing with a ball. However, they are too loud, and they do not really listen to Satria when he speaks. Satria is about to give up, but then he sees someone reading a book with a picture of colourful rocks on the cover. Satria really likes rocks and collects them, but he is afraid of getting rejected again. However, he finally tries to be brave and speaks to his friend. It turns out that they like each other, and they become best friends. Satria finally passes the crisis and develops a balanced identity.

Choosing a Color

Laras is enjoying her first day of school. However, there is a problem in art lessons. The teacher tells everyone to draw and colour anything they like, but Laras feels confused. When she plays in her house, her mother always tells her what to draw, where to colour, and what colour to use. She tries to apply her own ideas several times, but her mother always says that it is bad. Laras tries to look at her friends' drawings. She sees that they are all different but beautiful. She is encouraged to try. At the end, the teacher praises her work. Laras is happy, and she is not afraid of making choices anymore. Laras finally overcomes the crisis and can solve her identity problem.

Telling the Truth

Widia and Santi are good friends. One day, Widia visits Santi's house to play. Santi takes her favourite toy and shows it to Widia. It is a pretty doll with big black buttons as eyes. Widia plays with it while Santi goes to the bathroom. Accidentally, one of the button eyes gets pulled loose. Now the doll only has one eye. Widia panics and hides the loose button in her pocket. She also tells Santi that she needs to go home. On the next day in school, Santi tries to ask Widia about the doll, but Widia lies. Throughout the day, Widia avoids Santi. However, doing so makes Widia feel sad, so she finally confesses. They look for a way to fix it together, and they finally become good friends again. Widia faces the problem well and overcomes her problem between being honest vs. feeling guilty.

Forgiving a Friend

Manda and Risa are good friends. One day, Manda and Risa go to the park together. Someone is selling balloons there. Manda buys the pink balloon. Risa asks to borrow it, and Manda lets her. However, the balloon slips from Risa's hand and flies to the sky. They try to chase it, but they cannot reach it. Manda goes back to the balloon seller, but there is no balloon left. Manda cries and gets angry at Risa. Manda goes home and leaves Risa alone. On the next day in school, Risa

tries to apologize to Manda, but Manda ignores her. However, Manda misses Risa and wants to play together again. She finally decides to forgive Risa. Manda finally overcomes the problem and builds a balanced identity.

Letting It Go

Dimas is very happy because his mother finally lets him keep a little cactus as his plant. He puts it in his bedroom and says good night to it every day before he sleeps. One day, the little cactus looks weird. It turns out that it dies because it has too much water. Dimas becomes very sad. He does not allow anyone to move the cactus. He still waters it every day, hoping that it can be alive and grow again. However, the cactus stays dead. This makes him sad and stressed out. After some time, it starts to rot and has unpleasant smells. Dimas finally lets it go and brings it out of his room. He draws it and hangs the drawing in his room instead. Afterwards, Dimas finally develops a balanced identity by overcoming the crisis.

Characters

Satria, a 3 years old Orangutan, is the only child of his parents. He is shy, quiet, clingy, and easily scared. However, when he finds someone whom he is comfortable with, he can be talkative. He lives together with his parents, and he is supervised by them in everything. His parents really love him and act overprotective as a result. Satria loves all kinds of rocks. He often walks around trying to find good ones to be added to his collections. He does not like sports, public speaking, and loud noises.

Laras, a 3 years old Balinese Starling, is the only child of his parents. She lives together with her parents. Her mother is a perfectionist. She always dresses her and picks everything for her all the time. Her father is a very neat person who hates mess. Laras is a curious child. She likes colourful things and sweet food. She does not like when people are angry at her or dissatisfied with her. She always tries to be a good child.

Widia, a 5-year-old Babirusa, has a baby little sister. She is clumsy, awkward, and easily panicked. She often drops her things or even injures herself, and her mother scolds her harshly every time. She likes playing tea parties and hugging squishy dolls. She is funny and fun to be around, but when there are problems, she tends to run away from them instead of facing them.

Manda, a 5-year-old Cendrawasih, lives with her mother, father, and an older brother. Everyone loves her and she always gets what she wants. She is brave, stubborn, and a little bit spoiled. She likes pretty dresses, flowers, and dolls. She also likes to organize things around her house and leads her friends when they are playing together.

Dimas, a 5-year-old Komodo, lives with her mother. Her mother loves gardening. They have a beautiful garden in the backyard of their house. Dimas wants to try gardening too, but he is not allowed to do anything with her mothers' plants. Dimas is an extrovert, and he loves to play games with his friends. He also likes sports. However, beyond his cheerfulness, Dimas sometimes feels alone in the house, especially when her mother is working.

Conflict

The conflict that happens in the creative work is an internal conflict, also known as 'Man vs. Self' conflict. This type of conflict usually exists in the character's mind (Lughu, 2019). This type of conflict is chosen because an identity crisis happens inside the children's minds. However, even though the struggle is internal, this will affect their actions, motivations and interactions with others (Arvind, 2013). Even though the characters face unpleasant situations because of external factors, the externalities are just the start or the trigger. The struggles that happen afterward are all internal conflicts.

By applying the type of internal conflict in my creative works, I want to highlight that developing a balanced identity is a matter of how we think and how we act, rather than external factors that are outside our control. In the stories, the conflict is applied by showing what the characters feel and think when they face problems. This will be shown through the characters' actions and interaction with others. The characters must decide whether to be brave or shy, kind or sulky, honest or lying, forgiving or hating, and letting go or holding on. All struggles are related to their internal feelings and thoughts.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this creative work is to show the causes of crises for young children to develop a balanced identity and the ways young children can overcome the crises to develop a balanced identity. This is clearly shown in all five stories. In first story, I showed that parents' overprotectiveness in sheltering their child resulted in shame in socializing as opposed to the autonomy to make friends. In the second story, I showed that a mother's strict control and critics resulted in self-doubt as opposed to autonomy of making choices. In the third story, I showed that children felt guilty when they did not have the initiative to be honest. In the fourth story, I showed that breaking up a relationship because of a fight would bring guilt, while taking the initiative to forgive would bring happiness. Lastly, in the fifth story, I showed that sometimes children felt guilty about letting things go, but they could feel at peace again after they took the initiative to remember the loss in other healthy ways and let it go.

More importantly, I also showed how the young children can overcome their crises. In the first story, I showed that children who felt shame should be brave and keep on trying to socialize. In the second story, I showed that seeing the reality and listening to others' opinions beside the strict parents could help remove doubt and restore confidence to exercise autonomy. In the third story, I showed that the initiative to be honest would absolve the children of guilty feeling. In the fourth story, I showed that the initiative to forgive would mend the relationship and ensure that there would be no guilty feeling. Lastly, in the fifth story, I showed that the guilt of letting go could be countered by the initiative to remember the loss in other healthy ways. I would also like to highlight that once the children have overcome their crises, they will feel better and they will develop a solid identity foundation for the next stages. Starting from Satria, his courage to start a conversation results in his having the new best friend. Laras also completes her assignment well after she decides to choose colours by herself. Widia does not need to avoid her friend after she tells the truth. Manda gets her best friend back after she forgives her. Finally, Dimas feels more comfortable after he lets his plant go. I showed this because I would like my readers to understand that the crises that the children face can be solved, and that solving them can help the children to be better and to develop a balanced identity.

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