Selecting Reading Material for Teaching Children Literature

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Abstract—**Selecting an appropriate text is one of the important steps in teaching children literature. Thus, it is needed a scientific consideration especially based on the concept of educational psychology. As an applied psychology, educational psychology concerns on understanding of learning and teaching process and provides certain concepts to help education practitioners in solving learning and teaching problems. This paper mainly discusses theoretically and practically the dimension of educational psychology in selecting the text for teaching children literature in elementary school. Such dimension mostly focuses on children development in terms of cognition, personality, language, story and concept, and their implication on selection of reading material for teaching children literature.**

Keywords—educational psychology; children literature; children development

I.   INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the literature teaching in elementary school faces some crucial problems which need a specific treatment. The selection of reading material, for instance, becomes one of serious problems on the public discourse. This is triggered by the finding of porn content in a textbook of Indonesia language for elementary school students. The other phenomenon is the publication of comic which is categorized as an inappropriate text for children. The quality of children literature teaching which cannot improve yet students' reading interest also becomes another crucial case. The latter one is indicated by the fact that children literature teaching mostly tends to theoretical and memorization aspect, rather than as an effort of guiding students to achieve internal experience through reading literary texts.

One of the solutions for repairing the quality of children literature teaching is thorough engaging educational psychology dimension in the process of children literature teaching. As an applied psychology, educational psychology concerns on understanding of learning and teaching process in educational environment [1] . As a science, educational psychology is based on psychological researches which can a consideration for teachers in making a decision in the teaching-learning process. In this context, the concept of educational psychology can be used in children literature teaching-learning process. This paper is directed to explore the dimension of educational psychology conceptually and practically in selecting reading material for children literature in elementary school.

II.   DISCUSSION

In teaching children literature, teachers have a central role in selecting reading material for the pupils. Thus, the selection of reading text cannot be done perfunctorily. In the perspective of educational psychology, the selection process should consider children development stage and the evaluation on the literary text itself. Brady proposes some aspects in children development stage that can be considered in selecting reading material for children encompassing the aspect of logic, language, personality, moral, and certain questions to evaluate the literary text [1]. In line with them, Huck, et al adds two more aspects which are children physical development and story concept. In short, children development stage that can be considered in selecting reading material encompasses the development of cognition, moral, personality, language, story concept understanding, and evaluation on literary text [1-2].

The Foundation of Educational Psychology in the Selection of Reading Material

Cognitive Development

Swiss biologist and psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) observed children (and their process of making sense of the world around them) and eventually developed a four-stage model of how the mind processes new information encountered. He posited that children progress through 4 stages and that they all do so in the same order. These four stages are:

Sensorimotor stage (Birth to 2 years old)

The sensorimotor stage is the first of the four stages in cognitive development which extends from birth to the acquisition of language. In this stage, infants progressively construct knowledge and understanding of the world by coordinating experiences (such as vision and hearing) with physical interactions with objects (such as grasping, sucking, and stepping). Infants gain knowledge of the world from the physical actions they perform within it. They progress from reflexive, instinctual action at birth to the beginning of symbolic thought toward the end of the stage.

The infant builds an understanding of himself or herself and reality (and how things work) through interactions with the environment. It is able to differentiate between itself and other objects. Learning takes place via assimilation (the organization of information and absorbing it into existing schema) and accommodation (when an object cannot be assimilated and the schemata have to be modified to include the object.

Preoperational stage (ages 2 to 4)

The child is not yet able to conceptualize abstractly and needs concrete physical situations. Objects are classified in simple ways, especially by important features. The pre-operational stage is sparse and logically inadequate in regard to mental operations. The child is able to form stable concepts as well as magical beliefs. The child, however, is still not able to perform operations, which are tasks that the child can do mentally, rather than physically. Thinking in this stage is still egocentric, meaning the child has difficulty seeing the viewpoint of others. During this stage, children language development and the mastery of vocabulary improve rapidly. This allows them to express and think various objects and event [3]. Language functions as a foundation for creating social interactions through verbal communication.

The Pre-operational Stage is split into two sub-stages: the symbolic function sub-stage, and the intuitive thought sub-stage [4]. The symbolic function sub-stage is when children are able to understand, represent, remember, and picture objects in their mind without having the object in front of them. The intuitive thought sub-stage is when children tend to propose the questions of "why?" and "how come?" This stage is when children want to understand everything. In short, the characteristics of children development during the Pre-operational Stage lead to the phenomena: a. children learn to self-actualization through language (verbally), playing, and drawing (scribble down).

Concrete operations (ages 7 to 11)

The concrete operational stage is the third stage of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. This stage, which follows the preoperational stage, occurs between the ages of 7 and 11 (preadolescence) years, and is characterized by the appropriate use of logic. During this stage, a child's thought processes become more mature and "adult like". They start solving problems in a more logical fashion. Abstract, hypothetical thinking is not yet developed in the child, and children can only solve problems that apply to concrete events or objects [5]. Two other important processes in the concrete operational stage are logic and the elimination of egocentrism. Egocentrism is the inability to consider or understand a perspective other than one's own. It is the phase where the thought and morality of the child is completely self- focused. During this stage, the child acquires the ability to view things from another individual's perspective, even if they think that perspective is incorrect.

Formal operations (beginning at ages 11 to 15)

The final stage is known as the formal operational stage (adolescence and into adulthood, roughly ages 11 to approximately 15–20): Intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts. This form of thought includes "assumptions that have no necessary relation to reality." At this point, the person is capable of hypothetical and deductive reasoning. During this time, people develop the ability to think about abstract concepts and cognition reaches its final form. By this stage, the person no longer requires concrete objects to make rational judgments. He or she is capable of deductive and hypothetical reasoning. His or her ability for abstract thinking is very similar to an adult.

Moral Development

Instead of cognitive development, children moral development is also recommended as one of bases of selecting reading material. Moral development relates to the rule and convention of balanced interaction among individuals in terms of cognition, behavior, and emotion [4]. Cognition refers to how children think and understand the code of conduct. Behavioral domain focuses on how children behave in the actual situation. Then, emotional domain concerns on children feel a thing in moral perspective.

Kohlberg (1976,1986) proposes the stage of children moral development into three main levels: pre-conventional reasoning, conventional reasoning, and post-conventional. Pre-conventional level is the lowest stage of moral development in which children cannot internalize the moral values. Moral reasoning, during the stage, is controlled by the system of reward and punishment. In level of conventional reasoning, children tend to semi-internalization on moral values. They just follow the rules a certain moral rule which is handed down by authority figures. The highest level is post-conventional in which children can internalize the moral values. The moral development itself is not an absolute condition. It means that a child may show a certain moral development in a situation, but in another context they show the other moral development.

According to Piaget's original formulation, children between the ages of 5 and 10 years see the world through the lens of a "heteronomous" (other-directed) morality. In this moral understanding, rules handed down by authority figures (such as parents, teachers and government leaders) are seen as absolute and unbreakable. Starting at about age 10 or 11 and continuing through adolescence, children will have generally begun to view moral rules as socially-agreed upon guidelines designed to benefit the group. Children using this frame of reference still feel that it is important to follow rules, but these rules are viewed as complex, somewhat negotiable guidelines that are meant to improve everyone's lives. Children realize that making choices about following the rules should be based on something more than fear of negative personal consequences or desire for individual gain [4]. Decisions affect everyone; and can benefit and/or hurt everyone.

Personality Development

Personality development is the development of the organized pattern of behaviors and attitudes that makes a person distinctive. Personality development occurs by the ongoing interaction of temperament, character, and

environment. Personality is what makes a person a unique person, and it is recognizable soon after birth [6]. A child's personality has several components: temperament, environment, and character. Temperament is the set of genetically determined traits that determine the child's approach to the world and how the child learns about the world. There are no genes that specify personality traits, but some genes do control the development of the nervous system, which in turn controls behavior. Moreover, the temperamental traits that may contribute to reading material selection for children, encompassing: activity level (how active the child is generally); distractibility (degree of concentration and paying attention when the child is not particularly interested); approach or withdrawal (characteristic responses of a child to a new situation or strangers); and mood (tendency to react to the world primarily in a positive or negative way).

A second component of personality comes from adaptive patterns related to a child's specific environment. Most psychologists agree that these two factors—temperament and environment—influence the development of a person's personality the most. Temperament, with its dependence on genetic factors, is sometimes referred to as nature, while the environmental factors are called nurture. Finally, the third component of personality is character—the set of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral patterns learned from experience that determines how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. A person's character continues to evolve throughout life, although much depends on inborn traits and early experiences. Character also depends on a person's moral development.

Children Language Development

The theory of language development formulates that children get involve in certain stages of language development. From 5-6 years, children approximately can master vocabulary about 10.000 words and coordinate a simple sentence [4]. By the year of 6-8 years, the mastery of vocabulary and oral communication skill go rapidly. During the years, children can apply syntactical rule (sentence structure) and articulate their ideas verbally. At 9-11 years, the ability of comprehending synonym and speaking strategy improve, among children. At 11-14 years, children can comprehend abstract words and complicated sentence structure, the function word in a sentence, metaphor, and satire. By the year of 15 years, adult literary works begin to be comprehended by the children. The language children developments is a final stage, but tend to indicate certain characteristics of children literature.

The Comprehension of Story Concept

The comprehension growth of story concept among children is the gate to introduce them to literature. At 3 years and even more early, children may be introduced by a story and are happy when they are told a story. The Applebee's research indicates that children of 2-5 years are able to connect various evens [2]. Such ability is demonstrated orderly from the random one till more focused thing. Such orders are christened heap (the collection of items which are not connected each other), sequence (there is a connection arbitrarily among the similar events), primitive narrative (a simple story in which a story is connected based on a cause

and another complementary characteristic), unfocused chain (The connection occurs through general attributes in forms of changing of events) , focused chain (connecting interrelated various events into meaningful relationship), and narrative (connecting each events and items into certain theme and pattern). At 5 years, children can connect and organize events into meaningful theme and relationship to produce a whole story.

Selecting Literary Texts for Children: An Implication of Educational Psychology Perspective

Cognitive Development

The implication of children cognitive development towards the selection of literary texts for children is formulated as follows: (a) The literary texts contain simple pictures as interesting illustration; (b) The illustration in the text can be manipulated and modified by children; (c) The illustration provides the chance for children to know a certain object and situation which are meaningful for them, and (d) The character and plot of story reflect children behavior and feeling.

Donalson states that children of 3 and 4 years may be engaged to meaningful and concrete things [2]. The egocentrism which is found among children can be used to make them are able to respond the story and identify themselves towards the character of story. Thus, children begin to involve in assimilation process by seeing themselves and their world through a new perspective.

Moral Development

The possibility of implication of moral development towards literary text encompassing: (a) selecting reading material which is suitable with the characteristics of children moral development; and (b) selecting the text which contains and offers moral values as a role of behavior. Children who are in the stage of concrete operation tend to follow the moral values without having moral reason. In the stage of formal operation, children have moral reason in deciding the difference between right and wrong, use this knowledge to arrive at appropriate decisions when faced with complicated choices, and have the strength and independence to act in accordance with that right decision.

Personality Development

By considering personality development, the selection of literary texts must consider that the problems in the story can satisfy children in line with their personality development. For instance, pre-school children like the story which compares between a strong person versus a weak one in doing something successfully. Adolescents tend to read the story which the success of person or a community in a challenging journey to search and find something.

Language Development

In the context of comprehension and appreciation of literary text, some aspects should be involved in it, which are: children intellectuality, emotion, language ability, and structure of story content. It is a must that the selection of literary text is based on the understandable material by

children, written in simple sentence by still considering the simplicity and complexity of vocabularies and grammar. The effort to improve children language repertoire and ability also becomes another consideration in selecting the literary text for children.

III. CONCLUDING

As an applied psychology, educational psychology focuses on the teaching-learning process. The theory of educational psychology may be used to help the teacher in making a scientific decision during the teaching-learning process. The involvement of educational psychology dimension in the process of literature teaching is considered as one of strategies to improve the quality of children literature teaching. As a result, the process of children literature teaching in lines with children intellectuality, moral, personality, and language development.

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