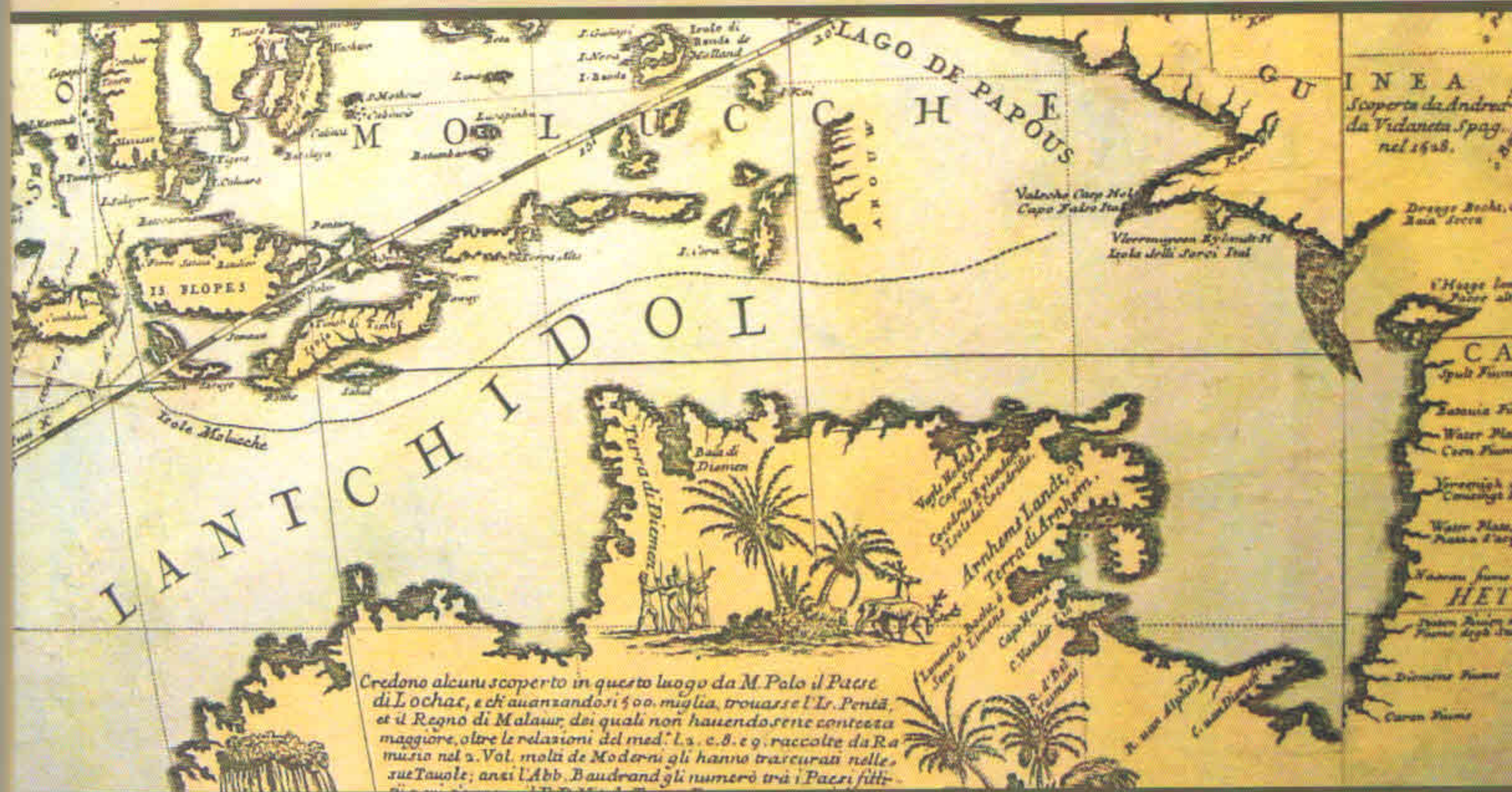


PROCEEDING

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON MULTI CULTURAL EDUCATION



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March, 2014

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

In the globalization era, it is impossible for a society to live without having interaction with other cultures, especially Indonesia as a multicultural country. Multicultural education in Indonesia has been viewed as an essential agenda now. As a young generation, children need to be introduced to values and ideology which will be useful in their future life. By teaching children the relationships between children's literature they are reading and their lives, they will "read the world through the word". Children's literature has a great potential to help children understand how to appreciate cultural diversity and build a nationalism. This paper discusses the importance of children's literature and its role in multicultural education.

Keywords: multicultural education, children's literature, literacy

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has many islands that make it one of the largest archipelagos in the world spanned from Sabang to Merauke. The considerable number of its islands is inhabited by numerous tribes, ethnicities, languages, religions, beliefs, and classes that also bring various cultures. Thus, we could infer that Indonesia is a multicultural country.

As a multicultural country, multicultural education in Indonesia has been viewed as an essential agenda now. Curriculum 2013 has been applied in almost all levels of education in Indonesia. As stated by the government that Curriculum 2013 plays an important role in realizing and strengthening Multicultural Education in Indonesia. Through the text book, there are at least six characters who depicted the diversity of religions, ethnics, etc.

It is important to start with multicultural education at an early age so that children as a young generation could gain positive attitudes towards minority members and are able to create their own opinions without prejudice and biases. Educating children to love their cultural diversity early could build a nationalism and be proud of their cultures.

However, the problem which is faced by Indonesians is most children only know that they live in a country with more than a hundred cultures without trying

to see things from different viewpoints. They only know that “Bhineka Tunggal Ika” means unity in diversity without trying to understand the existence from multiple angles. It indicates the lack of multicultural understanding among the young generation.

The diversity could be seen in numerous children’s literature throughout Indonesia. Under the age of twelve can be best time to teach children ideology or values, including multicultural values. Hence, this paper will reveal the importance of children’s literature and its role in multicultural education.

DISCUSSION

Multicultural Education

The word multiculturalism is derived from the word ‘multi’ and ‘culture’. By nature, culture is itself plural since in fact we do not live in a single culture. It is impossible for a society to live without having interaction with other cultures.

Multicultural become an important role in education. According to Banks (2001), there are five core dimensions that characterize multicultural education: (1) content integration—infusing the curriculum with material from diverse groups, (2) knowledge construction—an awareness of and focus on the way that cultural frames shape the identification and interpretation of educational content, (3) prejudice reduction—the extent to which the teachers and administrators in a school actively work to reduce prejudice and stereotyping by students in the school, such as through the inclusion of an explicitly antiracist curriculum, (4) equity pedagogy—pedagogies designed specifically to increase the academic achievement of lower performing students and to create greater equity between students, and (5) empowering school culture—altering school structures and processes to be more empowering for all students, with particular attention to eliminating institutionalized racism in school practices.

Banks (2001: 245-246) also conveyed that multicultural children’s literature does not only focus on heroes and discrete cultural elements, but also provides a space for readers to consider global socio-political issues. Here is Banks’ level of multicultural education content.

1. Level 1: The Contribution Approach
It focuses on heroes and discrete cultural elements, stereotypes aren’t necessarily explored. So, readers are looking from an outside rather than an inside perspective.
2. Level 2: The Additive Approach
Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.
3. Level 3: The Transformation Approach
The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable readers to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Here, readers’ opinions are challenged. Literature from a variety of different perspectives are read and discussed.
4. Level 4: The Social Action Approach
Readers reflects and make decisions on important socio-political issues and take actions for themselves.

Multicultural Literacy

Literacy cannot be understood in the narrow perceptive as unblinding one from reading and writing. According to Gopalakrishnan (2011:8), "Literacy is not just knowing how to read and write; it is much broader". In order to "be literate," therefore, one needs to know enough information to be able to participate and function fully within various contexts in that society or group.

Critical literacy is an extension of the aforementioned definition of literacy and grew out of a multicultural approach to education. Educators and theorists such as Anderson and Irvine (1993: 82) described critical literacy as follows, "Learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed withing specific power relations". Reading and writing are not isolated literacy events. The main aim of critical literacy is to unblind people and to make they understand about the context of history, what has happened before this point of time, what that means, and how we interact now. Literacy is not only viewed as merely basic skills in reading and writing, but critical literacy requires students to "question the assumptions of institutionalized knowlegde and to use knowledge to take action" (Banks, 2003: 18). Thus, critical literacy may be defined as the process of becoming literate about a society or group through questioning, through seeing things from various viewpoints, through uncovering biases and reading "between the lines," and through critically analyzing the workings of a society historically and culturally.

Critical literacy is related to multicultural children's literature through an issues approach. By teaching children the relationships between the texts they are reading and their lives, we help them "read the world through the word" (Shor, 1999: 1).

Multicultural Children's Literature in Indonesia

Literature is a representation of life. Literature is a powerful means for helping children understand their homes, communities and the world. Even before young children can read, family members, and teachers read them stories about people in faraway places, sometimes from the past and sometimes about people whose lives are similar to their own. The impressions and messages contained in these stories can last a lifetime.

Literature should be both a mirror in which children can see themselves reflected and also a window through which children can explore the world around them. Literature can illustrate the concept that people from diverse groups can play and work together, solve problems, and overcome obstacles. Multicultural children's literature helps children understand that despite our many differences, all people have feelings and aspirations. Those feelings can include love, sadness, fear, and the desire for fairness and justice.

These are some formats of multicultural children's literature such as pictures books, poetry, folktales, fairytales, movies, comics, etc. Although the need of multicultural children's literary works is very high, literature with multicultural characteristics are rarely available in Indonesia. Thus, writing and rewriting children's literature which is emphasizing multicultural should be put as a crucial educational agenda. Here are multicultural children's literature in folktales.

1. Princess Kemang

This is a folktale from Bengkulu. It told about a princess who was so independent and brave. She was fond of hunting, fishing, and hiking in the woods. She mastered sword fighting. She was excellent with the bow and arrow, and she handled a spear as well as any man. Her father never banned her hobbies. This story illustrates that men and women are equal creatures and being able to do the same thing. This story could be related to gender issues.

2. Why Shrimps are Crooked

In the area of Central Kalimantan, there is a well-known traditional custom which is called Mandep. It is a kind of working together, helping each other. Therefore, when people have been helpful to their neighbors, then he will receive help when they have any intent or big work to do in special occasion. The story of this folktale is about the custom of Mandep, the characters are a school of the fish. It is told that after the meeting of the fish, they then decided to take turns on duty of cooking. One by one the fish were carrying out their duties properly. Finally, it was shrimp's turn to prepare the food. When his friends asked him what he would cook, the shrimp arrogantly said that her cooking was as good as theirs, when in fact he did not know how to cook well. When it was time for having meal, the shrimp did not show up. All fish confused and tried to find the shrimp, but did not find it. Later on they discovered that the shrimp were plunged into the cooking pot. When his friends found the shrimp, he was already dead with crooked body.

We may also find multicultural children's literature in movies. The first is Si Bolang that is almost every day in our television station. The film told about a group of children who came from an area that portrays the condition of education in the rural area, spends time outside, plays a variety of traditional games, and depicts the local customs such as the local arts. Si Bolang conveys a message to us that Indonesia is very rich by having various cultures, ethnicities, language, customs, and so on.

Secondly, Denias is the movie which tells the life of the community in the Papua region with its cultural diversity. The film, directed by John de Rantau, tells the story of a boy named Denias who were keen on learning and going schools although in bad condition. Denias was born from the poor family and might not be able to attend a good school, only an emergency elementary school that could accomodate him. The local custom required a boy had to work to help their parents at home. Because of his persistence and enthusiasm in the school, eventually Denias could attend the prestigious school of the respectable and wealthy children. Here, therefore, the role of literature in the form of movie is essential in developing multicultural education. The numerous of cultures that are

exist could be learned by the children so that they would understand the significance of a difference. The gap between rich and poor, black and white, different religions, different levels of society, might be bigger and bigger if there is no some sort of education in the differences.

According to Nugraha (2011: 1), children's fondness of manga—Japanese comics—has seen in the bookstore during the school holidays. Seeing this, Purwanti (2012) made a project which is entitled The Making of a Manga Styled Comic Book "Satria: Love and Fury" an Adaptation from the Legend of Sangkuriang. This project aims to promote Indonesian folktales to be popular, not only in Indonesia but also throughout the world. This project also aims to complete the gap of lack of the Indonesian folktales that is written in English, especially in a form of comic. Through this comic, the children may also learn about multicultural issues.

Selecting good multicultural children's books begins with the same criteria that apply to selecting good children's books in general—the literary elements of plot, characterization, setting, style, theme and point of view must be tied to create a compelling story in an age appropriate manner. When deciding whether it is good or not to include a particular title in a collection of children's books, it is also important to review the illustrations or pictures, not only the text.

Good multicultural children's literature challenge stereotypes, provide a realistic view into the lives of diverse groups of people, help children learn to recognize unfairness, and provide models for challenging injustice. Therefore, it is the responsibility of adults to select literature that is entertaining, age appropriate, and that provides children with accurate representations of all people.

After reading, the adults should ask the children to imagine if they take a position the characters living in a different culture and having different cultural perspective. The discussion after the story told/read/watched should be focused on the multicultural issues.

CONCLUSION

Working with multicultural education through children's literature could be an encouraging, challenging, and thought-provoking issue for children. Nevertheless, it could be an alternative in developing multicultural literacy to assist children in better understanding others' life experiences and society's pluralism, and even building a nasionalism. In addition, it assists children in exploring and entering the lives. Therefore, multicultural education through children's literature needs to be considered and applied.

However, although the need of multicultural children's literary works is very high, children's literature with multicultural characteristics are rarely available in Indonesia. Hence, writing and rewriting children's literature which is emphasizing multicultural should be put as a crucial educational agenda.

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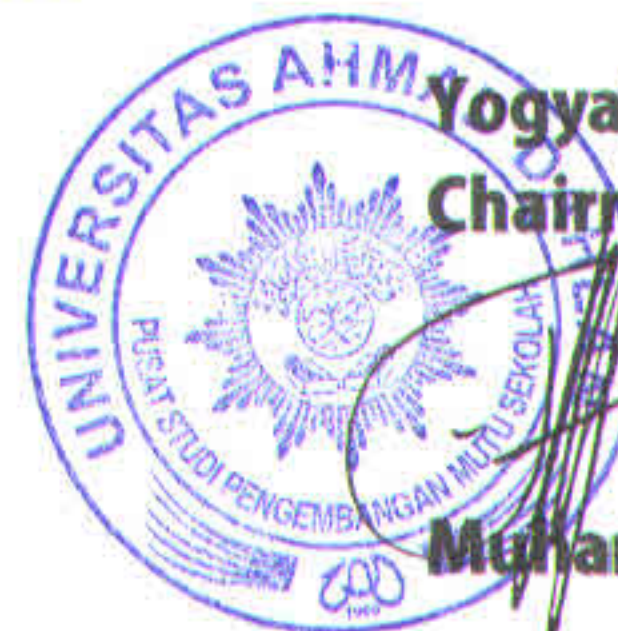
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