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“Diversity is not enough; we have to move to equity” – Follow-Up Seminar of the TDDT Project on the Power of Picture Books

By Anna Gausepohl, Widyastuti Purbani, Kordula Schulze

The Kick-Off Seminar at the end of May (see [Newsletter June 2021](#)) left a great need for discussion behind: the multi-national participants had recognized differences and commonalities in literacy education in different parts of the world and had acknowledged the need for more inclusive children’s literature. Certainly, political developments restricting restricted LGBTQ+ rights for hetero-normative family designs also demonstrated the urgency of the continuing international discussion. Thus, on July 1st 25 international students, staff, teachers, and illustrators engaged in the “Follow-Up Seminar”. Special emphasis was put on the constituents of problem-oriented picture books to assess their didactic value.

Since the beginning of this year, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) supports the project „Teaching in Diversity – Diversity in Teaching“ (TDDT) in the program „University Dialogue with the Islamic World“ with funds from German Federal Foreign Office. The cooperation between the Institute of German Language and Literature (University of Münster, WWU) and the Graduate School of Yogyakarta State University (UNY) promotes intercultural dialogue and understanding in teaching and research in the context of diversity. Long and intensive cooperation between the representatives of both institutes preceded the joint project.

Under the scientific project management of Prof. Dr. Juliane Stude (WWU) and the didactic management of Kordula Schulze (WWU), an international proposal on this topic of global importance was approved with the co-applicant Dr. Widjastuti Purbani (Prorector Graduate School UNY).

In a short review, **Prof. Dr. Juliane Stude** summarised the main controversies of the previous events. She emphasizes the deficient literacy socialization in Asia as well as in Europe. In addition to social differences, traditional life concepts of parents and educators opposed problem-orientation in children’s literature. Dialog has a key function in this regard: on the one hand, this must take place with the children in the process of exploring the picture books. On the other hand, it must be conducted with educators and parents to promote problem-oriented children’s literature as a resource for value education.

Two stimuli followed, unravelling how diversity unfolds in Indonesia and Germany and, in a broader perspective, on both continents. The extent to which the cultures’ children’s literature takes this into account was analysed.

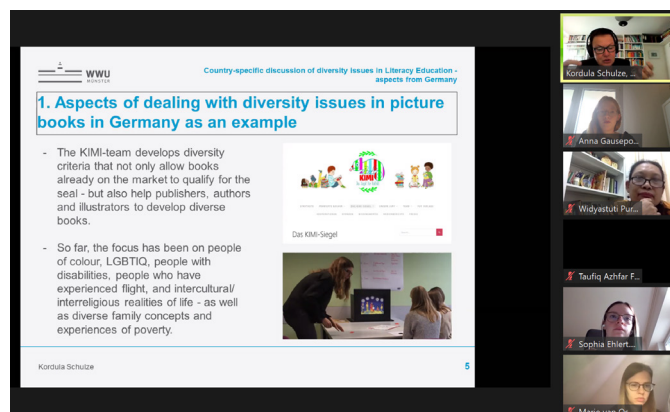
Dr. Widyastuti Purbani elaborated on the diverse composition of Indonesian society: a presented tourism video advertised hundreds of ethnic groups and religions and succinctly promoted the country’s motto „unity in diversity.“ Diversity is celebrated,

Purbani acknowledged, but the flip side of the coin is rarely addressed: some groups are valued more than others. Various religious conflicts, social-economic disparities, children with special needs not integrated into the common school system or widespread language death cloud the advertised idyll, she elaborated. Thus, Purbani demands: “Diversity is not enough; we have to move to equity”. According to her, problem-oriented picture books serve as powerful tools to open the hidden feelings about inequality. Therefore, it is important not only to provide problem-oriented resources, but also to engage in fruitful dialogue about them.



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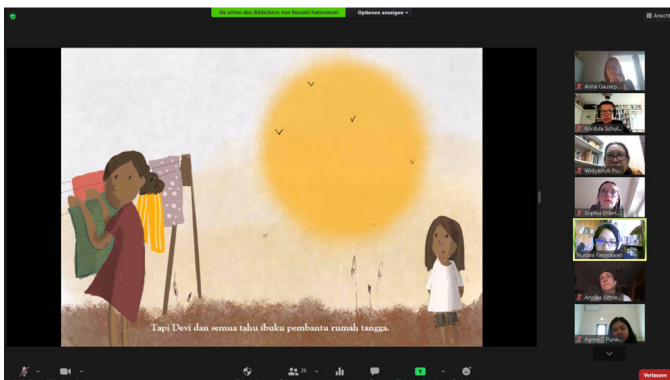
Kordula Schulze presented contemporary research results from Germany and the United Kingdom that both underpinned the need for dialogue with children and educators as well. The third Reflecting Realities Report by the CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) was just published in November 2020 and gave evidence on the strong under-representation of ethnic minorities in British Children’s Literature. The results can be found in German as well as in Indonesian Children’s Literature, emphasising how much work is yet to be done. The only way to correct such misrepresentation, Kordula Schulze stressed, is international collaborative diversity education. As a tool of support, she presented the KIMI-seal of diversity, being composed of various criteria to classify diversity-oriented children’s literature. This may help publishers, authors, teachers, and parents to evaluate literary resources more easily.



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In the following **spotlight discussion**, participants were asked to reflect on the issue of diversity in their own culture's children's literature. Most participants remembered solely normative books. In Nigerian and Indonesian children's literature traditional folklore was stated to be a prominent tool of moral education. This is problematic, because if minorities are represented at all, they are usually characterized as foreign or portrayed as exotic. Also, German participants rather recalled the "lullaby" picture books, in which a happy traditional family was in focus. Most participants, having little experience of problem-orientation, raised the subsequent question: How does good representation of diversity in children's literature then look like?

To answer this, two examples of problem-oriented Picture Books were presented. The Indonesian illustrator **Nuraini Fahmawati**, illustrating under her alias **Fahmanina**, introduced her latest work „Cerita Keluarga“. The children's book was written by Widyastuti Purbani and will be published by UNY press at the end of 2021. The female protagonist Ani experiences the hardship of living in a society that claims to be diverse but rejects diverse individuals. Luckily, she receives love and comfort by her friends and family.



The second example was presented by **Kordula Schulze**. "Felix's New Skirt" was written by Kerstin Brichzin and Igor Kuprin and is accessible in English (2018) and German (2020). The work challenges gender roles children absorb unreflectively from their environment and advertisement. The male protagonist experiences rejection and mockery for wearing skirts and invites children to think about their uncritical takeover of gender stereotypes. Also, the importance of parental support for their children is focused. Kordula Schulze acknowledged that many teachers and parents are afraid to read problem-oriented books to children. Presumably, they want to protect their children from the injustices surrounding them. To facilitate a didactic discussion with a child about the presented problems, Kordula Schulze put together several guiding questions. Although even problem-oriented picture books may seem trivial at the beginning, parents and educators must learn how to work with such texts. Dialog, she stressed once more, is crucial to reach equity.

In a last step, intensive discussions in **multi-national breakout rooms** were held. Participants assessed the pedagogic value of

both books and considered whether to use the book in a lesson of their own. Some expressed hesitation regarding „Felix's New Skirt,“ as their own insecurity to speak about the topic became clear. It was agreed that Picture Books do only serve as a fruitful teaching and learning material if educators are didactically prepared to stimulate dialogues on controversial topics.



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To conclude, Picture Books have the potential to help children in facing diversity and to potentially support their self-esteem as a diverse individual. They might reduce discrimination and bullying from early childhood onwards and promote appreciation for individual differences. The team agrees that teachers have a social responsibility in this regard: against the backdrop of current research and didactics, educators and trainee teachers must not only teach diversity in the classroom, but also conduct educational work with parents. Values of egalitarianism and equity must be defended against conservative attitudes and parents have to be involved in the process. This is the only way to encourage parents to continue diversity education themselves. This is one of the working points of the ongoing workshop series.

In line with the process orientation of the seminar series, participants requested further workshops, also on teaching materials. The continuation of the series will start at the beginning of the winter semester in October.