

Economic inequality : Parallels between children's understanding and children's literature in two cultures

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Abstrak

ABSTRACT

This research examines the parallels between children's understanding about economic reality and the nature of economic information that is available in their environments. Previous studies» conducted mostly within a Piagetian's framework» found that children had a restricted range of accounts about economic reality and this was attributed by cognitive developmental theorists to the children's immature or infantile cognitive structures.

This thesis argues that children acquire understanding about economic inequality through social transmission. Piaget has largely neglected the role of social-cultural factors in children's cognitive development» while Vygotsky emphasises the social origins of cognition. One set of potential sources of economic information for children is fairy tales and reading books. It was hypothesised that economic information communicated in children's literature was limited and simplified, and that different cultures were likely to present different economic ideas. Older and high SES children were predicted to be more stereotyped in their reasoning about economic issues because of their presumed greater exposure to» and familiarity with this literature.

Three cross-cultural studies were carried out in Britain and Indonesia. In the first study, children aged between 5 to 11 years were interviewed about their understanding of

economic inequality. There was evidence that children's restricted range of accounts of economic reality was a reflection of society's scripts. Analysis of children's fairy tales and reading books in the second study revealed that limited and stereotyped information about economic reality was presented in this literature. Parallels between children's reasoning about economic reality and the economic information communicated in their books were indicated in the third study.

The implications of the research findings were discussed in terms of each culture's idiosyncrasies and in relation to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory as well as Vygotsky's sociohistorical approach.