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Jennifer Cooper

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Jennifer Cooper

Honors Project Proposal 2012

Adoption is Good: A Story For Children

Adoption is often a very touchy subject. Some talk about adoption in negative terms while others speak of it with a very positive light. When it comes to parenting an adopted child the appropriate time and place to discuss adoption may be hard to figure out. The goal of my honors project is to create a resource for families to utilize when discussing adoption with their adopted children. I will be creating a children's book that parents can read to their children. This book will be appropriate for ages five through seven years so that the child will be able to not only keep interest but also be able to comprehend the concepts portrayed. The book will also contain a note to the parents on how to introduce the book and the idea of adoption to their child.

The reason for creating a children's book about adoption is because of the importance of openness and honesty between parents and children. "It is generally held that having an open and honest dialogue regarding adoption, termed communicative openness, between adoptive parents and their child is beneficial to all" (Hawkins, 123). By having this communicative openness between adoptive parents and their child, the children will learn to trust their family and feel as though they are loved. While reading many different children's books about adoption, I have discovered that adopted children around the ages of five, six, and seven struggle with the concept of why they were given up for adoption and therefore most often feel they were not loved ("Tapestry Books"). Children may grow to not trust parents or adults in general if there is information held from them or the intentions of the adoption are not clarified. By keeping the lines of communication open and completely honest, children will be able to trust their adoptive

parents and in turn their parents will more easily be able to support their children during these times of identity searching.

The children's book that will be created will have to be age appropriate for five through seven year olds. Communication is important but "the degree of communication is also likely to change throughout the child's development, with older children wanting more information about their adoption" (Hawkins, 133). Specifying the age of the book and creating the book for that age will more easily help the child understand their adoption. "...Adoption understanding grows according to a systematic progression that parallels general cognitive development and determines the type of questions and comments that children may have in the course of early conversations" (Freark, 4) The content of this book will be appropriate for Erikson's psychosocial development as well. Erikson's eight stages of development involve psychosocial conflicts that human beings pass through. Successful completions of these stages are beneficial to a person's life. The book will be created so that the content will aid in the child's success of their current stage. I will also make sure the content of the books aligns with Piaget's theories of egocentrism and multiple classifications, meaning a child see's things from their point of view and has a hard time classifying things. For example, an adopted child around five years old will most likely have a hard time understand they have their adoptive parents but also birth parents. Additionally, the children's book itself must be age appropriate. The page length must be kept within limits and the pictures must attract attention. Children must be able to sit and listen or read the book without becoming distracted or bored. Age appropriateness is crucial when creating or picking a children's book. My project will be suitable for young children by being interesting in both the content and visual aspects.

The general plot of the children's book will involve a young boy's adoption story. The story will explain how the boy's birth mom loved him and knew she couldn't take care of him. Then the boy is adopted and his adoptive parents love him and give him everything he needs. The point of this story is to help answer a child's question of "was I loved?" and "was there something wrong with me?" The book will be around twenty pages so it is short enough that the child does not lose interest. The pages will be fully covered with art so that the child's attention is caught with every page turn. The colors will be light and soothing along with rounded lines in the artwork so that child and parent feel calm while reading. The book will help the family talk about adoption in a positive and caring way.

At the beginning of the book, before the story begins, there will be a parents' note. In this piece of the book, I will write important information for parents to know when talking with their child. For example, "While early adoption conversations may be framed by the parents, discussion may quickly evolve in directions guided by the child's reactions and responses. The child's responsiveness and ability to articulate reactions and questions in reply to the parent's statements shape the co-construction of the adoption story in terms of its content and emotional tones" (Freemark, 4). I will explain that they must speak to their child in a way so that conversation is led by the child. Also, I will share with parents that they need to provide comfort and loving support to their child. "Stressed exposed during childhood appears to be associated with adult volume and functional deficits in the hippocampus, a brain region associated with memory and learning" (Hedges, 123). When children experience high stress at an early age it affects their brain function when they are older. Therefore, parental support during these young ages is crucial. "Studies of children with a history of institutionalization suggest that intellectual and cognitive deficits most likely resulting from early environmental deprivation may improve

following adoption” (Hedges, 125). Finally, according to Freeark, “When parents have an understanding of the child’s emotional experience and cognitive understand, they may meet the child’s needs more confidently and successfully” (5). Through this information given to parents and the book’s content to help initiate a positive discussion on their child’s adoptions, families can successfully support the adoption children and the children will feel more confident in their current situations.

In conclusion, I propose that this project will not only allow me to gain insight on the psychological stages children and families go through with adoption but also how children’s picture books can help portray difficult concepts. The children’s book that I am creating will inform children that they are not alone and the feelings and questions they have are normal. Parents should know that children need time to think about their adoption and they should make sure their adopted children knows they are supported and open for question. This book will give adoption a positive light and help children and parents talk about this hard and confusing subject.

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