

Overcoming Social Adversities and Resilience Building in RJ Palacio's Wonder

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to create a module to uplift self-worth using R. J. Palacio's "Wonder", with reference to the social adversities experienced by the characters, description of the characters based on the identified adversities, how these accounts of social adversities influence the characters, and the coping mechanisms utilized by the characters to become resilient. The major literary approaches to literary criticism utilized to analyze the novel in this study are psychological, sociological, and formalistic approaches. Since the novel focuses on relationships and behavior of people, the psychological approach was used. On the other hand, the sociological approach was used to determine the relationship between the work of literature and society. Lastly, the use of a formalistic approach was used to stress that art is artificial and that a great deal of acquired skill goes into it instead of the old classical maxim that real art conceals its art. The findings present the social adversities found in the novel in terms of familial challenges, jealousy, bullying, academic challenges, and social acceptance. August, as the main character, despite his physical defects is a confident, unique child amidst social adversities. Social adversities' influence to the characters in terms of personal values, relationships, and discernment. To cope up with the social adversities they experienced, they utilized projection of strong personality, habituation and neglect, avoidance, self-isolation, gaining independence, maintaining positive disposition and perspective, seeking and establishing support, and problem-solving. The module was designed to help learners be familiar and aware of these adversities and help them appreciate themselves more and uplift their value of self-worth.

Keywords: Content Analysis, literature, resilience building, social adversities

INTRODUCTION

Meant to develop life skills that will improve the students' habits of behavior in overcoming the adversities they faced is among the great responsibility of every educational institution. It must make sure that the whole community recognizes the importance of focusing not just on cognitive skills. Daily learning activities should incorporate strengthening their abilities to build relationships with adults and peers. This is to learn how to respond to stressful situations better and connect with a trusted and supportive adult who can serve as a role model and change agent, considering the utmost reputation of understanding the learners, delineating the adversities experienced by the learners is vital. To gain an understanding of these experiences necessitates an understanding of a natural phenomenon called growing up.

Childhood is when developmental changes happen – physical, mental, and emotional, which can have profound and lasting consequences for a child's life. Nature and nurture have long been debated as influential factors to children's development. While some argue that one is solely responsible than the other, some studies reveal the importance of how the two influence each other and play a role in children's development.

Part of the growing up process entails widening one's physical and social environment. An individual is expected to grow, learn, develop, and succeed. He has to be exposed to a multitude of opportunities and challenges. Parts of humans' experiences are the situations that may threaten one of their needs, which is safety and security (Martin, 2017). There will be instances where an individual can be vulnerable to threats and dangers present in society. As the basic unit of the community, the family serves as the first line of support and, at the same time, the defense of an

individual against threats and perils of life. It is from one's home that children first learn, and their parents are their first teachers. While home provides a sense of security to many, sadly, it is also a place where conflicts arise.

As children grow and develop, the family extends into other social institutions to take care of them – mainly through formal education. During these times, children started to be independent and started to leave the comfort and security that their family offers. At the same time, it is when they began to trust other people, mainly through building friendships. It is expected that children behave differently at home and in school. These experiences are what comprised the influence of nature and nurture on a child's growth and development.

Children are born unique and different from each other – even among their siblings. In a fast-changing world, children are also not exempted from challenges.

As one is unique from the other, some children are thriving in handling stressful and unpleasant situations, while some are at the end of feeling hopeless and weak. Flexible and resilient children can overcome these adversities, most notably when they are duly supported by their family and support system. On the other hand, the susceptible children can develop resistance, overcome these adversities, react negatively, or be overpowered by these problems. At the same time, defenseless children are prone to bullying, exploitation, and abuse of others. Among the susceptible children are those with deformities. They are often become the target of bullying because of their physical appearances. However, there are certain cases wherein individuals experience these threats and dangers right in their own families.

A large number of today's students face adverse and challenging childhood experiences beyond the control of educational institutions, and this furnishes great impacts on their learning and development. Familial challenges, jealousy, bullying, academic challenges, and social acceptance significantly affect students' ability to learn. Each of these mentioned variables can work against the goals for one's academic success. To overcome these challenges, the researcher needs to develop support and guided practices and implement them to address these risks her, or else, behavioral problems may occur and persist for a more extended period, affecting one's ability to function normally

With the premises mentioned, it can quickly be concluded that teachers play vital roles in the lives of the students inside their classrooms, and it starts with understanding them. In the process of coming to know students, a teacher first begins to build trust with the students, and then creates a safe environment that is conducive to learning- this will then be parallel to the school's mission of providing quality education for all, regardless of the diversity among others.

However, the process of becoming acquainted and being familiar with students is often complicated and challenging. To maximize learning, teachers need to establish a social relationship with students and vice versa. As the family extends its nurturing role to formal institutions, like the school, the parents also extend their nurturing role to teachers. Hence, they became part of the children's significant others. Besides their teaching roles, teachers also become mentors and nurturers, just like how parents are inside their homes and as part of their family. A sense of belonging and being valued maximizes the chances that students will learn the four critical pillars of education namely, learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together in harmony.

An essential concept in securing a safe learning environment for children is the child protection policy promulgated by the Department of Education. This Department Order mandate that all appropriate measures be undertaken to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity.

The presented aim of the department order is parallel with that of the Republic Act 7610, otherwise known as the "Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act." This act pointed out that children's best interests shall be the paramount consideration in all actions concerning them, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, and legislative bodies, consistent with the principle of child protection. It shall be the State's policy to protect and rehabilitate children gravely threatened or endangered by circumstances that affect or will affect their survival and healthy development and over which they have no control. The State shall intervene on behalf of the child when the parent, guardian, teacher or person having care or custody of the child fails or is unable to protect the child against abuse, exploitation, and discrimination or when such acts against the child are committed by the said parent, guardian, teacher or person having care and custody of the same.

It is safe to say that every effort shall be exerted to promote children's welfare and enhance their opportunities for a useful and happy life if people build programs based on the contents of these department orders. Special protection to children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty exploitation, and discrimination and other conditions shall be provided. Program for prevention and deterrence of and crisis intervention in situations of child abuse, exploitation, and discrimination shall be carried out.

As a school head in a private school, the researcher has the responsibility to make sure that the school recognizes the importance of focusing not just on cognitive skills but also on life skills that will improve the students' ability to overcome the adversities they faced. Daily learning activities should incorporate strengthening their capabilities to build relationships with adults and peers and learn how to respond better and react to stressful situations. They need to connect with a trusted and supportive adult who can serve as a role model and change agent. Thus, considering the utmost reputation of understanding the learners, the researcher wanted to focus more on delineating the adversities experienced by the learners.

The researcher is also not exempted from social adversities. Specifically, being a school head of a private school, he is faced with the burdens, worries, frustrations, and challenges of the stakeholders. Very often, the researcher's existing capacity could not equal what the school demands to do the task, hence, creating a gap in his performance. It is an indication of the inability to maximize his potential. As a result, his performance in resourcefulness, adjustment to change, problem-solving, and decision making has been affected. Additionally, adversity in the form of stress by the chronic burden is imposed by the demands to perform to his utmost human capacity, only to fall short of what is demanded when it matters most.

At present, many schools face emergent adversities with which educational leaders must contend – such as academic problems, parental problems, bullying, and discipline. Besides, advances and changes in technology, science, values, environment, bring different challenges and adversities in education. The response to these adversities affects not only the performance but also the performance of those around him.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to create a module to uplift self-worth using R. J. Palacio's "Wonder." Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions: What were the social adversities experienced by the characters in terms of familial challenges, jealousy, bullying, academic challenges, and social acceptance? How may the characters be described in terms of the identified adversities? How do these accounts of social adversities influence the characters in terms of personal values, relationships, and discernment? What are the coping mechanisms utilized by the characters for them to become resilient? How does the writer employ the following literary devices: figurative language, point of view, conflict, rhetoric, and thematic presentation? How are some literary criticism approaches applied in the novel? Based on the analysis, what module may be prepared to uplift self-worth?

FRAMEWORK

This research used the Input-Process-Output framework. Identifying and setting the investigation inputs served as a solid foundation in crafting and conceptualizing the output. The input is composed of the social adversities experienced by the characters in the novel, which were identified in terms of familial challenges, jealousy, bullying, academic challenges, and social acceptance. These social adversities were defined in terms of their existence in the novel. Much of the social troubles experienced by the characters are family-related and school-related difficulties.

Moreover, the effects of these struggles to the learners in terms of relationships, morality, and personal values were traced and identified. Through the analysis and of the novel, most of the events exhibited the effects that these social adversities created and affected their lives and socialization as a whole.

In general, the coping mechanisms employed by the characters in dealing with the identified difficulties were also delineated. These coping mechanisms were deemed essential and vital because the strategies utilized by the characters to handle and manage their difficult situations can reflect real-life experiences that can guide the creation of the study's output. The study's output is a learner's module to be utilized to help young adults and children to identify and be familiarize adults the common additives they might experience, or they are experiencing. There are decisions, and various activities and applications of the concepts learned from the discussion or activity part in the module.

Furthermore, the literary elements concerning point of view, conflict, rhetorical devices, writing style, and tone the author utilized in carrying out the message and literary effects of the novel were singled out and analyzed. These literary elements were deemed essential to be determined to delineate the message of the novel as connected with its styles, techniques, and strategies in the presentation accurately. These literary devices and narrative techniques were believed to be correctly utilized by the writer so that specific effects in delivering the message can be achieved, as braced and built up by the linguistic orchestration of string of words, as arranged into sentences, dialogues, monologues, and others. After the researcher singled out these variables, the chosen novel underwent content analysis employing psychological, sociological, and moral-philosophical approaches. Significant quotations and lines in the selected novels were extracted, then coding and categorizing extracted quotes and lines were selected.

The insights were conceptualized based on the Resilience Theory, which can be traced from the roots in the study of adversity and further examining how these adversities negatively affected the lives of people (van Breda, 2018). Moreover, Rutter (2013) emphasized that resilience is not related to individual psychological traits, but instead, it is an ordinary adaptation given the right resources. Thus, in the study, the characters' resilience can be traced from the available circumstances and situations presented and given and immersed in the various elements of the novel. As the book was read several times, there were multiple instances that the storylines unveiled numerous attempts of the characters who are experiencing social adversities in various forms and various circumstances. It can be expected that these characters could make possible reactions and strategies to cope up and to adjust to the conditions they have been experiencing, maybe as a result of the human tendency to survive. To strategically and comprehensively analyze these inputs of the study, the researcher employed several strategies in the literary analysis, such as sociological and psychological approaches.

In this study, the psychological approach was utilized in determining the psychological processes the characters undergo. This study focused on the psychological processes focused on the characters' behavior and emotions towards the adversities happening around them. This study tried to delve into the characters' minds as they experience difficulties and eventually, the methods on how these characters react and behave as regards the social adversities they have encountered.

Moreover, this study has emphasized the moral-philosophical issues present in specific literary writing (Hogan, 2000). The approach is deemed appropriate because the study also aimed to delineate adversities experienced and imposed upon by other people, much more likely concerned with moral issues and philosophical concerns. The moral-philosophical approach was used in this study in consonance with a psychological approach. With the use of a moral-philosophical approach, it is believed that studying and analyzing literature to be able to teach the learners about discernment and to probe philosophical issues.

During the critical analyses of the novel using the psychological approach, when characters' behavior and emotions were analyzed, their personal principles and ethics regarding how they deal with other people of all social status and physical appearance and what they value most and least were also delineated. Moreover, this study utilized such an approach to determine the influences of social adversities on the characters. This approach is in terms of their values, relationships, and judgment towards good or bad and the lesser evil.

The sociological approach, on the other hand, as mentioned by Bascara (2013), seeks to determine the relationship between the work of literature and society. It examines literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received, exploring the relationships between the artist and community. Sometimes, it examines the artist's culture to understand the author's literary works better; other times, it may consider the representation of such societal elements within the literature itself. The sociological approach to literary analysis facilitated the study's goal of situating the characters into the society where they live and socialize. Additionally, this study utilized the sociological approach to investigate further how the characters behave and react, and psychological approach, in the society, as they exist in different circumstances and experience various adversities, trials, and hardships.

The analyses were systematically arranged and laid down to form solid bases in developing a module geared towards uplifting students' feelings of self-worth. The whole module consists of three parts which corresponds to grade four, five and six in elementary basic education in the Philippines. Each part contains sub-modules that gradually give activities that aim to develop learners' self-worth in different contexts and in different circumstances that were deemed relevant to the grade level in the module.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To examine the novel comprehensively, the researcher used content analysis of qualitative research. As applied in the study, the material analyzed was a full-length novel.

Hence, the researcher described the lives of the characters and their adversities. The presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts and inferences about the messages within the texts were analyzed. The choice and use of words from which thoughts or images are interpreted and their relationships between were analyzed.

Material Used in the Study

This research focused on the novel *Wonder*, which was written by R.J. Palacio. The book is young adult literature, which has 310 pages and clustered into 123 chapters. Each chapter is told from different points of view. Succeeding chapters primarily talks about several instances about August Pullman, the main protagonist, but were seen differently by different people—in the eyes of his sister, his parents, his sister's friends, his sister's boyfriend, his classmates, his teachers, his friends, and the society as a whole.

The corpus of data served as primary sources of information was extract-ed from the text of the novel. Some related researches and studies contributed concepts and ideas about social adversities, influences of which, coping mechanisms, resiliency, literary devices, literary approaches, and module preparation. The novel mainly tackles the classic theme of being different in society.

Treatment of the Material

The major literary approaches to literary criticism utilized to analyze the novel in this study are psychological, sociological, and formalistic approaches. Since the novel under study focuses on relationships and behavior of people, the psychological approach was used. The psychological approach is an effort to determine the principal characteristics or defining traits of the characters. In the novel, human experiences manifested by characters were identified. These revealed human experiences were treated as a replica of human beings. Psychological relationship plus the conscious and the unconscious conflicts that exist among characters and how they view the world were also determined.

On the other hand, the sociological approach was used to determine the relationship between the work of literature and society. It examined literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received, exploring the relationships between the artist and community. In the novel, the society to which the characters belong was studied and examined to understand them better. The contexts into which each of the characters behaves, such as how they perceived themselves in the society was discussed.

Lastly, the use of a formalistic approach was used to stress that art is artificial and that a great deal of acquired skill goes into it instead of the old classical maxim that real art conceals its art. Thus, all the elements were necessary for understanding its contents. Of particular interest to the study were the details of form such as the style, structure, tone, and imagery. The literary elements used were also related to the point of view, conflict, rhetorical devices, writing style, and tone. How such elements work together with the text's content to shape its effects upon readers were similarly recognized.

To further analyze the novel using these approaches, coding was employed. Each segment was labeled with a code—usually a word or short phrase that suggests how the associated data segments inform the research objectives. When coding is complete, the researcher prepares a report by summarizing the prevalence of codes and discussing similarities and differences in related codes.

In this research, texts and dialogues delivered by the characters and the plot descriptions were coded and categorized. The lifted passages were broken down into manageable categories for analysis. Coding and categorization reduced the vast amount of texts presented in the novels to smaller groups of information. Finally, the significant findings harvested served as solid grounds for a learner's module.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data gathered through content analysis, the researchers answered the specific questions specified in the problem statement.

Social adversities experienced by the characters in the novel. The novel abundantly reflects social adversities that were experienced by various characters in the novel. The social adversities that were seen in the novel are challenges experienced within the familial context, an enmity that occurred between siblings, incidences of learners inflicting harm over others, academic difficulties, and struggles to achieve social acceptance. Thus, the findings present the social adversities found in the novel in terms of familial challenges, jealousy, bullying, academic challenges, and social acceptance.

Familial challenges. The characters in the novel experienced familial challenges. These are inadequate parental attention to a particular sibling, scolding mothers, insufficient parental care to their children, conflicts, and miscommunications brought by lack of family time, insecure family members, reduced children involvement to familial issues, and death of a family member.

Jealousy. In terms of jealousy, the social adversities that were seen are jealousy towards parental attention, indifference towards other siblings, and irrational jealousy. These were all brought about by lack of care, unfair and unequal treatment, and unfulfilled promises.

Bullying. Bullying, as a form of social adversity, was experienced in the following ways: indecent gestures and offending visible private gossips, belittling and insulting the victim, and an orchestrated bullying. These all happened in the school campus - in the classroom, laboratory room, and in the school canteen.

Academic challenges. Regarding academic challenges, the characters experienced difficulties related to individual abilities, pressing academic requirements, distractions, and diversions towards studying, lack of understanding towards school tasks, and activities.

Social acceptance. In terms of social acceptance, the experienced fantasizing and dreaming social approval, rejection, and condemnation are influenced by mature others and rejection from unsympathetic people who are insecure and jealous and have a difficult time accepting the differences and changes of others.

Description of characters in terms of the identified adversities. The characters in the novel can be described as a confident, unique child amidst social adversities, independent and understanding siblings, affection-seeking individuals from broken families based on the identified afflictions.

Social adversities' influence to the characters in terms of Personal Values. The familial challenges develop an intrinsic sense of generosity out from the characters' familial love to each other. Jealousy leads to the development of a deeper connection to each other after realizing that one's jealousy over other's parental attention is just but needed and rational. Bullies develop a primary mechanism of valuing and treating an individual through judging his physical appearance. Academic challenges strengthen an individual's endeavor towards evaluating and gaining an education. Failure to gain social acceptance can make him value his difference and himself, among others.

Social adversities' influence to the characters in terms of Relationships. Misunderstandings in the family bring about threats in familial relationships. Familial challenges can result in disengagement towards their own family. Jealousy exposed that sibling relationship develops from various positive and adverse events. Bullying can develop relationships among the bullies, those whose values are similar. Academic challenges that learners experience pave the way towards them to establish connections and relationships to positively and negatively cope with the adversities they are facing. Social acceptance brought about insecurities and jealousy to the people, like them, who both aim and give.

Social adversities' influence to the characters in terms of Discernment. Through generosity and understanding in times of familial challenges, characters get to judge the gravity of every problem they are facing. Siblings develop judgment over other's personal needs and who need more attention. Bullies failed to recognize that good manners should be consistent with time and should not be based on their appearance or status. Learners were unable to distinguish and delineate the importance of every academic activity, which led them to frustrations, disobedience, and misbehavior. People might be swayed by influential people regarding their judgment on social acceptance, but sooner or later, they can get critical on the effects that rejection brings.

Coping mechanisms utilized by the characters. To cope up with the social adversities faced, the characters in the novel developed mechanisms that helped them handle their situation. These coping mechanisms can be both positive and negative in nature. To cope up with the social adversities they experienced, they utilized projection of strong personality, habituation and neglect, avoidance, self-isolation, gaining independence, maintaining positive disposition and perspective, seeking and establishing support, and problem-solving.

Literary devices as employed by the writer. Primarily, figures of speech used in the novel were used to emphasize and convey meaning regarding the condition of the characters and circumstances they are facing. Point of view was used by the writer to establish the story's setting as experienced by the different characters—their feelings and emotions, inner thoughts, and sentiments. Conflicts were primarily used to emphasize and to highlight the various social adversities that were experienced by the characters as offshoots of different issues as well. Rhetoric was used in the novel by using ethos, pathos, and logos modes of persuasion. The thematic presentation was employed primarily through the use of point of view, lengthy narrations, and kilometric sentences.

Application of literary approaches in the novel. In the novel, the psychological approach was utilized primarily through the lengthy narratives of the characters, drawing out unconscious emotions and behaviors from the specific details of the characters. On the other hand, the sociological approach was applied primarily through distinguishing the social adversities and social interactions that existed in the society where the characters are situated.

Module prepared to uplift self-worth. The study has generated various findings relevant to the social adversities delineated from the novel, its effects on the characters, and the coping mechanisms they have utilized to manage their situations. Hence, a module that intends to uplift the self-worth of learners amidst the social adversities they experience is conceptualized and created.

Moreover, because these learners spend most of their time at school, it is expected that they find time to connect and to socialize with people. Socializing with people entails one's judgment and evaluation over other people. These judgments result in accepting or rejecting people around them, and this is called social acceptance. These adversities being experienced by the learners can make them feel stressed in all aspects of their lives. This module is designed to help learners be familiar and aware of these adversities and help them appreciate themselves more and uplift their value of self-worth.

CONCLUSIONS

Social acceptance and bullying were two of the salient adversities that were experienced by the characters. Through the social adversities experienced, the characters were identified as a confident, unique child amidst social adversities, and an independent and understanding sibling. Social adversities influence the characters to become resilient and project a strong personality and maintain a positive disposition in life. To cope up with the social adversities they experienced, they utilized projection of strong personality, habituation and neglect, avoidance, and self-isolation,

The literary devices help in bringing out and communicating the experiences of characters, producing effect to the novels, and conveying the story to the readers. Psychological and sociological approaches are instrumental in distinguishing the social adversities in the society.

Out of the various findings relevant to the social adversities identified and its effects on the characters, a module that intends to uplift the self-worth of learners amidst difficulties and challenges they experience is conceptualized and created.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Children's literature may be used to help young children develop their self-esteem. In the same manner, such materials may be used to teach values like resiliency among school children provided that these be appropriately interpreted. The module may undergo validation and approval from experts to refine its contents so it could be utilized in schools. Researchers may explore other literary pieces that tackle concepts related to young children's emotional and social development. They may also explore the implementation of the proposed module to improve the learners' resiliency and uplift their self-worth.

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