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Review of “Can Library Use Enhance Intercultural Education?”

Keywords

Libraries, intercultural Education, library resources

Review of “Can Library Use Enhance Intercultural Education?”

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Pihl, Joron, 2012, “Can Library Use Enhance Intercultural Education?” *Issues in Educational Research*, Volume 22, Issue 1, pp. 79-90.

<http://iier.org.au/iier22/pihl.html>

Or

<http://web.archive.org/web/20130409032744/http://iier.org.au/iier22/pihl.html>

Globalization has infiltrated conversations in practically every corner of academia; education is no exception as the classroom has become increasingly globalized as a result of several factors, such as immigration and distance learning. Educating every child is an ever-changing and ever-growing endeavor. This paper places the library in the spotlight—in a discipline that remarkably does not consider often the library as a piece of the puzzle—as a potential resource to address the challenging issue of providing a quality education for students regardless of social, linguistic and cultural background.

To the librarian’s avail, the paper by Joron Pihl, “Can Library Use Enhance Intercultural Education?” (see: *Issues in Educational Research*, <http://iier.org.au/iier22/pihl.html>) aims to investigate the use of library resources within education in general, and in intercultural education particularly. The paper is published in a journal jointly edited by the Western Australian Institute for Education Research and Australia’s Institutes for Educational Research in New South Wales, Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

To begin, Pihl searched for publications in the international databases, Educational Research Database for Pedagogy and Psychology (ERIC) and the Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts using a selection of search terms to identify those publications that address the topics “library” or “learning resource center” related to elementary education, or primary education/primary school. Searches were limited further by the following concepts: school library,

learning resource center, library resources, literacy, information literacy, and intercultural education. The quantity of results in each database was analyzed to answer the question, “To what extent does education research address library use in education?” To answer the question, “Does library use enhance intercultural education?” two projects that made use of extensive access to literature and other library resources in ethnically diverse classrooms were discussed.

By and large, Pihl makes the point that there is not sufficient research in education that explores the ways that the library can be used in education and, more specifically, in intercultural education. Interestingly, the author uses the term “intercultural” versus the more common term used in the United States “multicultural.” The prefix “inter” is telling of how Pihl or the Australian educator community views cultural differences. The prefix gives an impression that the cultures are interconnected or interdependent whereas the term “multi” does not address the connections between the cultures.

Incidentally, the use of meta-analysis as a tool to examine the extent to which educational research and intercultural educational research address the use of library resources is rather ironic since the process involves the use of traditional “librarian” skills. To find the most appropriate search terms to capture the best search result is part and parcel of a librarian’s work routine. The findings revealed, indeed, that education research addresses the use of library resources only to a very limited extent. By contrast, the Library Information Science & Technology Abstracts database referred to a significant quantity of articles on library use within education.

Unfortunately, the article does not expand on how the search terms used for the database searches were determined. It is important to keep in mind that the terms to describe a school

library vary from country to country. For example, in the United States a school library is often called a "media center." Given the terms listed, it is unclear if the range of terms used in Europe to call a school library were considered. The omission of a term could change the results of a meta-analysis and potentially overlook a significant quantity of articles.

In addition, although the intention behind this method is strictly quantitative, this paper could have been enriched by including qualitative research. A set of interviews of teachers concerning their experience with school libraries would capture a clearer picture of how teachers use libraries in their classroom and thus better answer the question, "What do we know about the use of library resources within education?" In other words, to get an accurate idea of what is actually happening in the classroom in regards to library use requires more than a quantitative search of databases.

Next, two separate projects developed in Sweden and Norway were modeled as successful initiatives for the use of library resources in intercultural education. The following common strategies were key to their success: 1) collaboration between numerous stakeholders, such as teachers, school principals, institutional leaders, school librarians, and public libraries; 2) having a library collection reflective of the students' native languages; and 3) student engagement by stimulating the pleasure of reading by providing access to a robust collection, including fiction. Both projects reported success through high scores, such as comprehension of words, reading ability in the country's language, higher book circulation, and increased visits to the library for personal and educational needs. For librarians in the profession, these results come as no surprise. These studies reflect the growing need for teachers and librarians to collaborate more intentionally, especially as communities become less homogenous and the teachers find it more challenging to meet the diverse literacy needs and interests of every child given a traditional classroom textbook collection.

To sum up, the discussion section of this paper presented a list of best practices for the use of

library resources in education. While the use of libraries in schools in the United States has been a tradition since the late 1800s at least, the practice of incorporating libraries and librarians in the pedagogical framework is fairly recent. Moreover, the deliberate use of school libraries to enhance learning equity in ethnically diverse classrooms is even more recent. Thus, there is a learning curve for educators (including librarians) in applying this approach effectively while the need for these types of studies continues to grow as technology and demographics change.

Finally, the author challenges the common use of the theory of cultural deprivation to address issues of achievement gaps between ethnic minority children and their peers. Instead, the author moves the responsibility back to the educator and urges her to find more effective ways to close these gaps by rediscovering the school library in an age when library budgets cuts are widespread.

All things considered, the answer to the question, "Can library use enhance intercultural education?" is "yes!" The need for further research to answer subsequent questions, such as "How can library use enhance intercultural education?" is warranted and would be best addressed by engaging both educators and librarians. This paper is a call for librarians to realize their value and to be unafraid to showcase the library as a critical piece in addressing issues of intercultural education.