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The Global Bookshelf for children: an interdisciplinary approach to promoting literacy and education for the global village.

Abstract

The aim of the project is to develop a global education model for The Global Bookshelf for children based on early childhood pedagogy and collection development and management principles from library and information science. Using an action research approach the researchers will compare use of The Global Bookshelf by practitioners in Leeds and Salem and examine how collaboration and information sharing can enhance professional practice. Outcomes will include collection development guidelines, resources and a model for good practice of global education in the early years.

1. Introduction

The aim of the project is to develop a global education model for The Global Bookshelf based on early childhood pedagogy and collection development and management principles from library and information science. This will demonstrate transformative teaching practices for global awareness and promote cultural sensitivity of the young bi-lingual learner. This research draws on international collaboration between early childhood educational specialists and librarians. The Global Bookshelf project examines information services, information literacy and the importance of library and other information settings in promoting education for global citizenship. The international interdisciplinary research team includes early year's education academics and a library and information academic.

Literacy skills are vital in society today, and an early introduction to literacy through storytelling and using the library can provide a foundation and confidence in the use of words and communication. There are many routes into reading and as practitioners we need to capitalise on all of them. (Brock & Rankin, 2008). Early childhood education and care is high on the political agenda in many parts of the world including the Americas, Europe and Australasia. The young citizens of the 21st century are living in on a planet that requires a globally literate workforce of creative thinkers who can solve mutual problems, explore avenues for living together respectfully among diverse lifestyles, religious beliefs, cultural manners and mores, and resolve conflicts with peaceful solutions. Early years librarians are well positioned to provide positive conditions for all children and their parents and carers. This international collaborative research will consider how best to support children's ethnicity, language, and culture through educational processes that values and builds upon what they bring to the educational processes.

2. Information beyond borders - international and interdisciplinary research strands

There are a number of strands of engagement which enrich this international interdisciplinary research project. Avril Brock and Dr Louise Swiniarski have collaborated on an international basis over the last fifteen years and both have developed and published early education curriculum models for teaching young children in diverse societies and a multicultural world. Their purpose is to assist teachers in educating all young children for global understanding and supporting young bilingual children in culturally sensitive curriculum approaches.

Carolynn Rankin and Avril Brock from Leeds Metropolitan University have collaborated over the last two years in researching and publishing on early years communication and language development and the role of the early years librarian in meeting the 'Every Child Matters' government agenda in the UK. Building on intercollegiate partnerships, the final connecting strand in this research project pulls together expertise and practice from the various disciplines to focus on The Global Bookshelf as a means of supporting literacy development and global citizenship. Teachers and early year's librarians will be encouraged to collaborate in developing, using and evaluating The Global Bookshelf.

The librarian's professional skills include the selection and promotion of materials, alongside this vested interest in developing language and reading skills. Collection development policies should ensure selection and acquisition of appropriate materials to meet the needs of the client community, and The Global Bookshelf model will encourage librarians to examine, and perhaps challenge, their own cultural practices, expectations and communication strategies. The resources for The Global Bookshelf should reflect language and cultural backgrounds. The early year's librarian is a significant actor in responding to child development and early years' literacy skills, alongside a range of other skilled professionals. The project will foster and encourage networking between school teachers and library staff to examine how collaboration and information sharing can enhance professional practice.

3. The story so far - international partnerships, building communities

International partnerships meet global challenges, and partnerships are the glue for establishing an educational environment that brings people together to share expertise and perspectives. Such joint efforts provide the connections that encourage people to work together and stick together. Brock and Swiniarski (2008) have written about their international collaboration in the field of early childhood education, describing how partnership between educators from a British university and an American state college has resulted in the sharing of the best practices of both countries. Each has developed and published early education curriculum models for teaching young children in diverse societies and a multicultural world. Their purpose is to assist teachers in educating all young children for global understanding and supporting young bilingual children in culturally sensitive curriculum approaches.

Swiniarski and Brock (2008) feel that international partnerships provide the three "C's" for contemporary institutions of higher education; connections, community and commitment to meet the challenges for teaching and learning in the 21st century. These institutions recognize the citizens of the 21st century are living on a shrinking planet that requires a globally literate workforce of creative thinkers who can solve mutual problems, explore avenues for living together respectfully among diverse lifestyles, religious beliefs, cultural manners and mores, and resolve conflicts with peaceful solutions.

In seeking to build a sense of community among and between their students, colleagues and constituents *"we recognized that the times in which we live require us to educate globally literate teachers who "respond to diversity issues, know of world happenings and concerns, think out side of the box and view the world from multiple perspective"* (Swiniarski, 2006: 42).

3.1 The role of the library and librarians in supporting literacy

The second strand in this paper relates to the role of the library and librarians in supporting literacy. Libraries and librarians are a vital aid to literacy development, they have the resources to help parents make sure their child has the best start in life. Early years librarians are well positioned to provide positive conditions for all children and their parents and carers. *"Libraries also perceive the importance of reading as contributing to the social and cultural development of the child and seek to develop this in different ways"* (Lonsdale

2000: 31) The generic message is that reading with young children is important no matter what your mother language or your cultural experience.

The Place for Children research (Elkin and Kinnell 2000) included in its coverage an attempt to assess how significant the public library service in the UK was continuing to be in supporting the reading developments of children and young people from birth through to 16 Elkin writes that *‘Every child needs the library: children are the future movers and shakers of the nation. Reading has a value in children’s personal, social and imaginative development.’* (Elkin and Kinnell 2000: 118)

A working group from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) provided an overview of library services to children and young people in the Start with the Child report published in 2002. This is at the centre of advocacy activity and argues that libraries can change children’s lives.

“Reading is a hugely important part of children’s and young people’s development. Books inspire their imagination, help them to grow emotionally, and develop their understanding of the world and their place in the local and global community, past and present.” (CILIP 2002: 9)

4. Overview of The Global Bookshelf Program – phase one

The Northeast Global Education Center at Salem State College (Massachusetts, USA) annually sponsors a school-based Global Education program-Building a Global Bookshelf. This storytelling program is designed for children from pre-kindergarten through the primary grades (ages 4 to 9) to promote literacy skills, to develop a global perspective, and to enhance cultural understandings in diverse communities.

4.1 Theoretical Framework - global education for citizenship

Swiniarski believes that ‘global education is an ‘interdisciplinary subject that traverses the curriculum array of academic areas’ and provides a ‘continuum of study and thought provocation from early childhood throughout an individual’s education’ (Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003:5). The Global Bookshelf project answers the call to globalize the school’s curriculum. The globalization movement of the late 20th century has impacted international politics and policies, businesses and the world economy, as well as population shifts and immigration. Nations are now scrambling to educate their young to become citizens of the world (Swiniarski, 2006). Global issues are evident in a growing number of international education reform movements. Standards-based approaches to curriculum adapted in many nations are infusing global perspectives in all academic disciplines. Starting at the preschool level, schools worldwide are charged to educate a diverse, highly literate and skilled future work force which can appreciate likenesses and differences among people, connect and collaborate in joint efforts, and build a sense of community among each other (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003, p.169)

The Global Bookshelf is an educational project with aims of “seeing things through the eyes and minds of others and [realizing] that while individuals and groups may view life differently, they also have common needs and wants” (Tye, 1990, p.5). Simply stated, the project embodies the global education theme of *unity and diversity*. Through the Global Bookshelf project, children connect with other peoples and appreciate other cultures in an activity-based curriculum of hands-on experiences that reveal the universals of childhood. A global education framework of twelve guiding principles provides a comprehensive foundation to the project and are outlined as:

1. Global education is basic education.
2. Global education is lifelong learning.
3. Global education is cooperative learning.
4. Global education is inclusive of all

5. Global education is education for social action.
 6. Global education is economic education.
 7. Global education involves technology.
 8. Global education requires critical and creative thinking.
 9. Global education is multicultural.
 10. Global education is moral education.
 11. Global education supports a sustainable environment.
 12. Global education enhances the spirit of teaching and learning.
- (Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003, pp.4-5)

The Global Bookshelf promotes language and literacy development through reading and storytelling. By doing so, the project speaks to the intention of infusing a global perspective in the basic cornerstones of education. Book and story selections are made to impart knowledge, enhance vocabulary, and acquire fluency in language and literacy. Outreach opportunities to English Language Learners, children with language developmental delays as well as reluctant readers are provided in this inclusive model for teaching and learning. The Global Bookshelf reflects the commitment of UNESCO to extend literacy to all children throughout the world. Literacy as a major global problem is acknowledged by the establishment of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012. UNESCO leads the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) under the slogan of "Literacy as Freedom. In declaring this Decade, the international community recognised that the promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, as part of efforts towards peace, respect and exchange in a globalizing world. (UNESCO, 2008). The Global Bookshelf project recognizes the benefits literature and narrative provide universally to strengthen language usage and reading skills as documented by numerous research studies (Jalongo, 2000).

4.2 Implementation of the initial project at the Northeast Global Education Center

The Salem College program began in 2004 with a series of storytelling sessions delivered by an experienced early childhood educator from the Northeast Global Education Center. To date, twelve story time sessions have been delivered to local primary schools. Books that depict a diversity of cultures around the world were carefully selected to represent a specific global theme for each session. At the end of each visit, the storyteller left a copy of the book (or books) shared that day. The books were placed on a special Global Bookshelf in the classroom for follow-up activities and readings. Teachers can add on other appropriate materials such as a collection of alphabet and counting books from different countries or familiar folk tales in their original languages along with other forms of media for re-enforcement of concepts.

Building a global education collection of resources to revisit, assimilate and accommodate is a critical feature of the project. The books are left with the children to become familiar additions to their personal repertoire and for future reference. Since this program is funded by a grant from the Northeast Global Education Center, further resources for sets of *take home* copies are being sought to encourage family literacy and to extend reading beyond the walls of the school.

Legends, folktales and myths are great resources to advance literacy skills, multicultural sensitivity, and global connections. Their stories can be told and retold through readings, puppetry, art, and drama. The presentations of such tales can be guided by asking essential questions that formulate hands-on activities to engage children in critical and creative thought.

4.3 Choosing the resources for The Global Bookshelf

Materials were selected by the early childhood educator; a major theme for the project is unity in diversity, other themes have been adaptation, change perspective taking, place-based learning, environmental issues and movement. The selection also reflected children's interests, recommendations, books with global appeal and topics that fit the curriculum. Teachers had choices among the selections but early year's librarians had not yet been

involved with the project and encouraging such collaboration is a feature of phase two of The Global Bookshelf project. Finding books about the world and how it works is an on-going pursuit. Researching books from places not represented in a school or library collections extends the children's notions of their world. It is important to use books that depict sensitivity to cultural differences, an accuracy of portrayal, and a rich array of heroes and heroines from all corners of the globe. Teachers and librarians should connect the books to topics and skills they are teaching and the communities they are serving.

4.4 Model Global Bookshelf program using the theme of movement

A model global bookshelf program on the theme of 'movement' has been designed for kindergarteners. To help concrete-thinking five year olds focus on the abstract notion of movement, an essential question was posed, "How do stories move ideas from one place in the world to you?" To help the children answer the question, a set of various editions of the Ukrainian folk tale, *The Mitten*, was read.

First the children located the Ukraine on a globe to identify the origins of the story and traced its possible journey to the children's community. At various legs of the journey, speculation about the story's adaptations was explored with further questions, "How might children in Poland, Germany, England or Holland tell about their missing mittens?" The children shared tales of their own lost mittens. Then different tellings of the tale were read and acted out to compare and contrast for cultural likenesses and differences. The books included classic editions by Jan Brett and Alvin Tresselt along with adaptations such as Yevonne Pollock's *The Old Man's Mitten* and Steven Kellogg's *Missing Mitten Mystery*. Outcomes included several responses:

1. Children retold their own stories in a bulletin board of storybook mittens.
2. Children drew a glove and a mitten and noted on each the likenesses and differences between the classic story of the boy who lost his mitten with the adapted version of old man who lost his glove. Their findings were posted on a bulletin board for all to read.
3. Children devised a chart noting the class' favourite versions of the story.
4. Children shared the story with take-home editions for family members.
5. Children read the different versions of *The Mitten* with an older child, on their own, or to each other at the school or library global bookshelf.

(Adapted from Breitborde & Swiniarski, 2006: 519)

Other themes have been explored. The following are a few examples. To help children appreciate different points of view, contradicting tales of the familiar *Three Pigs* have been told by the wolves' positions. Stories of the three pigs set in the bayou of Louisiana with a bilingual script in English and French added a new culture to the place of the tale. Humorous as well as classic renditions of *George and the Dragon* inspired one class of first graders to publish their own adventures when George's dragon visited their school. The mythology of explaining seasons in different places of the world were researched by American kindergarteners in the reading of adaptations from the Finnish epic, the Kalevala, along with new legends written for children's theatre productions in the UK.

4.5 Practitioner guidelines for building The Global Bookshelf

Based on the first phase of the project in Salem, Swiniarski has developed the following guidelines for teachers and librarians to consider when building a global bookshelf:

- Start with the familiar such as classic folk tales, legends, or stories from the children's own culture to help young children relate the readings to their own lives.
- Intersperse new works of current authors and stories from afar to broaden children's horizons.
- Be responsive to and inclusive of diversity.

- Encourage the children to use their own voices in the retelling of tales and follow-up activities.
- Help children “think outside the book” for creative responses.
- Learn together with the children about world happenings and concerns.
- Place the Global Bookshelf in a prominent place for easy access.
- Incorporate new technology and media in the Global Bookshelf.
- Return to stories read in the past for associations and links to present selections.
- Involve families to add to the Global Bookshelf or build one in their homes.

4.6 Follow-up and Assessment

This is the fourth year of the program which has been offered in both urban and small town communities, in the public and private sectors of education, and in classrooms of diverse race, ethnicity and socio/economic composition. Research into identifying appropriate books for the project was made through a worldwide search of children literature. Resources include English language books from numerous international collections as well as foreign language editions. Outcomes based on children’s work resulting from the project have been disseminated at state, national and international conferences. Advocacy for the project has appeared in parent and teacher publications.

The participating schools have endorsed the program and continue to request return engagements. Data on teachers’ responses to the effectiveness of the project are being gathered by the Northeast Global Education Center as phase two.

5. The story to come - The Global Bookshelf project phase two 2008-2009

This research builds on the phase one work already underway at Northeast Global Education Center at Salem State College and will foster and encourage networking between school teachers, students undertaking teaching practice and early year’s library staff. This is designed as a comparative study looking at experiences in Leeds in the UK and Salem, Massachusetts. What did the practitioners feel about the global bookshelf choices; how did they work together? What were the outcomes for the children?

5.1 Research objectives for phase two of The Global Bookshelf

The research objectives for phase two are:

- To encourage the partnership role between teachers and early year’s librarians in developing, evaluating and promoting The Global Bookshelf resources.
- To compare use of The Global Bookshelf by practitioners in Leeds and Salem
- To develop collection development guidelines for The Global Bookshelf
- To examine how collaboration and information sharing can enhance professional practice.
- To developing guidelines, resources and a model for good practice of global education in the early years [3 – 9]

It is intended that The Global Bookshelf model will encourage librarians to examine, and challenge, their own cultural practices, expectations and communication strategies. The librarian’s professional skills include the selection and use of materials and we have a vested interest in developing language and reading skills. The selection and acquisition policies should ensure the availability of appropriate materials for both children and their parents and carers. The materials should be acquired in a planned systematic way and should reflect language and cultural backgrounds. This project is not promoting a ‘tourist route’ approach to books about global issues. In gathering a resource base for decision making and selection we plan to use resources such as the International Children’s Digital Library. The ICDL Foundation’s goal is to build a collection of books that represents outstanding historical and contemporary books from throughout world.

5.2 Methodology

An action research approach has been adopted in exploring the potentially complex relationships between practitioners in the study. This is an iterative approach that feeds back into and informs practice. It recognises that research questions arise originally from the experience of people working in the field and reflecting on their work. Action research can be described as a family of research methodologies which pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time. In most of its forms it does this by using a cyclic or spiral process which alternates between action and critical reflection (Dick, 1999).

Swiniarski has gathered anecdotal evidence from teachers involved in the original Salem State project. In phase two we are interested in exploring and documenting the experiences and perceptions of a sample of teachers, students and early year's librarians as they collaborate to develop a Global Bookshelf in their settings in Leeds and Salem. Using field notes, video recordings and photographs the participating teachers, librarians and students will gather data about the children's responses to the books; their reactions to global dimensions in the books; their developing understandings of global identities. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the participating teachers, librarians and students about their experiences of collaborative working.

6. Future

The initial Global Bookshelf project developed by Swiniarski at Salem is seen as a collaborative stepping-stone to future developments. It will provide an opportunity to share practice between disciplines as global education gives a framework for teaching children to become world citizens. This research builds on the work already underway at Salem and will encourage the partnership role between teachers and early year's librarians in developing, evaluating and promoting The Global Bookshelf resources.

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