ARTICLE

SCHOOL LIBRARIES ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF ELL STUDENTS

Enhancing Language Acquisition, Confidence, and Cultural Fluency in ELL Students by Developing a Targeted Collection and Enriching Your Makerspace

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In 2009 the American Library Association included in their annual survey questions that focused on English Language Learners. The survey found that although 14 percent of the schools responding had student populations that included at least 25 percent English Language Learners, school library collections had few materials to support those students. Although many librarians agreed that encouraging free-reading choices was the most effective initiative for supporting English Language Learners, 58 percent of those responding indicated that less than 1 percent of the materials in their collection is in a language other than English. Respondents indicated that 97 percent of the collections contained less than 10 percent non-English materials (AASL 2009). As a past president of the American Association of School Librarians Cassandra Barnett said, "With such high concentration of ELL in our schools and free-choice reading indicated as a successful learning initiative, [school librarians] are in the unique position to make significant contributions to this unique student population. Clearly resources…can greatly impact the success of ELL" (AASL 2010). Although school librarians articulate the vital role a school librarian can play in addressing the needs of ELL students (Adams 2010), many are struggling to include the needed materials in their collection.

Why Are So Few ELL Resources in the Library?

In a survey conducted by *School Library Journal* and Rourke Educational Media in 2015, librarians stated two basic reasons for the lack of materials. The first, predictably, is funding. Only 40 percent of schools surveyed have a dedicated ELL budget (Barack 2015). This circumstance requires librarians to use already stretched library funds to purchase ELL materials, and foreign language books tend to be more expensive than English versions. As Donna McAndrews, a school librarian from New York said, "I find that ELL materials are more expensive. Sometimes it is hard to justify the expense" (Barack 2015, 36). The second cited reason for having few ELL resources is that the materials are hard to find. While many English Language Learners want to read in their L1 (first) language as well as their new language, materials such as popular new books that their peers are reading are often either impossible to find in languages other than English or prohibitively expensive.

When new students come to my school, one of the first places they visit during their tour is the library. I watch students and parents as they are shown our small foreign language section. I see the students light up. I know it makes them feel that they are not quite so alone. They realize that Wyandot must have other students who read in their language, and as a school we must care enough about them to make sure they have reading materials in their language. My students particularly love reading the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series and Harry Potter books because, although they are reading in Korean or Japanese, they are reading the same books as their peers. This sentiment has been

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echoed by Sandra Park, a middle school librarian in Harrisonburg, Virginia: "Having something in a student's native language makes an important connection with that student—it says we know where you are coming from, and we are glad you are here" (Barack 2015, 36). The school librarian is in a unique position to have a positive impact on ELL students. The careful development of the collection and library program can help in that role.

Collection Development for ELL Students

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011 the achievement gap between non-ELL students and ELL students was 36 points in the fourth grade and 44 points in the eighth grade (2012). One way to address the achievement gap is by cultivating students' interest in reading. Several studies have indicated that for young people reading is a social process (Krashen 2004; Gramstorff and Hayden 2000). Yet, as students get older we progressively require that they read independently. Educational research is now suggesting that this forced independence is a major contributor to the reading decline that begins in the upper elementary grades (Knoester 2009). This is one of the reasons it is important to continue to expand a school library's collection of foreign language books that are of interest to ELL students. Ideally, this collection includes the same titles that ELL students' peers are reading. However, ELL students also need English language texts that will help cultivate English language proficiency and interest in reading in English as well as in their first language. One type of text that researchers and librarians suggest are graphic novels. Stephen Krashen has pointed out that the visual narrative accompanying the text in comic books "can provide

Graphic novels also allow ELL students the opportunity to engage in critical literacy. Often we focus only on an ELL student's ability to comprehend, but to be successful in school a student must be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate text. Graphic novels often address social, cultural, and historical content, but make it accessible to readers with limited language proficiency.

clues that shed light on the meaning of an unfamiliar word or grammatical structure" (as cited in Chun 2009, 146). The pictures help give context and meaning when a reader comes across unfamiliar words, and provide the multimodal experience that many young people find engaging. Graphic novels also allow ELL students the opportunity to engage in critical literacy. Often we focus only on an ELL student's ability to comprehend, but to be successful in school a student must be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate text. Graphic novels often address social, cultural, and historical content, but make it accessible to readers with limited language proficiency.

The other type of text that the library would benefit from is what English teachers affectionately call hi-lo books. These are books that have high interest but are written at a low reading level. The great things about hi-lo books are, not only are they engaging, but they also appear to be regular books. One of the problems educators encounter, particularly with students from third grade on, is that learners become very conscious of not wanting to appear to be reading "baby books." Students are embarrassed to walk around with a book they perceive

to be below the reading level of their peers. Some suggestions for hi-lo books include *Basketball Bats* by Betty Hicks, the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series by Jeff Kinney, the How to Train Your Dragon series by Cressida Cowell, *Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick, *Lost and Found* by Andrew Clements, and the Maze of Bones series by Rick Riordan. For new readers, Scholastic has created several series within the Branches line that are appealing but can be used for either first chapter books or for those with limited reading experience in English.

While building a collection or looking for a supplement to your print collection, try using the International Children's Library site <www.childrenslibrary.org> where students can read books in fifty different languages. Also, just as older students like to read books in their native language that other students are reading in English, so do our youngest emergent readers. Books from authors such as Mo Willems, Eric Carle, and James Dean are available in languages other than English and could be added to the collection. As emergent readers, these young ELL students do not read well in any language, but we should encourage students to learn to read in both

languages. As Lily Wong Fillmore said, "Parents and teachers should be working together to find ways to support children's development and retention of their primary language" (2000, 208). The word "development" is key. As a young person's reading skills and language skills develop, we do not want them to leave one of their languages behind.

Makerspace Benefits for ELL Students

Useful for All Students Regardless of English Proficiency

Another library trend that can be used to benefit all students, including ELL students, is the creation of makerspaces. A makerspace is a place containing tools and materials for the creation of innovative, practical, or artistic objects. They can be physical objects or created in a digital space. Makerspaces are also places to pursue ideas, hypotheses, and passions. In schools, makerspaces have generally been used to encourage the study of STEM and to teach students critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. STEM-based makerspaces have materials such as computers, audiovisual equipment, 3-D printers, and electronic components. They also tend to include lots of building materials or electronics that are made specifically to encourage the use of STEM skills. However, a makerspace does not

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have to be geared toward science and technology.

Some makerspaces have sewing machines, arts and crafts materials, painting supplies, and other low-tech materials that still encourage making, critical thinking, and problem solving, but are not STEM focused. As Shirin Vossoughi et al. (n.d.) have pointed out, makerspaces can also "promote social interaction through shared activity and play." Although the maker movement has been embraced—and in some instances usurped—by STEM, the idea of making has been around since time began as has its social aspect. As makerspaces proliferate throughout schools and in libraries, teachers of ELL students are starting to see how these spaces can be used to support their students who have limited proficiency in English.

Queen Victoria School

A group of teachers in Ontario formed a personal learning community to explore how makerspaces enhance student learning. In blog posts, the teachers describe how surprised they were to find that the making experience was impactful on their ELL students. One of the teachers wrote, "Our goals for this project are to enhance our learning about makerspace and design process, but there are so many opportunities for learning that are unplanned and unintended. It's these opportunities that excite me the most, because I don't see them coming!" (Astanfie 2017). What they did not see coming was that their ELL students would excel in making. The teachers mention that they went on several trips to learn how to use the hand tools in their makerspace, but that many of their ELL students were already familiar with and had experience with these tools. This experience allowed ELL students to shine and even help

teach their peers. This circumstance gave the ELL students a great deal of confidence, and they were able to engage with their peers on an equal level. All students were able to use videos on the YouTube *Instructables* channel to learn skills they needed to complete their projects, minimizing the language barrier. Because what they were doing was very visual, all students were able to communicate with their team members. The concept is very similar to project-based learning. Students are able to continue to learn content and skills while they are learning the new language. These are often forms of learning, "such as design, multimodal practices, creativity" that are not necessarily taught in a regular class setting, and that failure can be an opportunity in the school library (Barton, Tan, and Greenberg 2017).

Evergreen School

The Evergreen School requires that all of their students begin learning a second language in first grade. Although this is an example of English-speaking students learning another language, the principles used there apply in the context of working with ELL students. In Lindsey Own's 2016 article she describes how the school administrators began encouraging teachers outside of the STEM subjects to use their makerspace. They believed that "the tinkering, iteration and physical connection to content afforded by a makerspace can be brought to every subject area." This kinesthetic aspect to learning can certainly be applied to language acquisition, and what better place to connect physically to learning than a makerspace? The students at Evergreen School used green screen software applications to create postcards, telephone conversation videos, commercials, weather reports, and interviews. With Makey Makey products, learners created rainforest dioramas with audio, so

not only did students put their language skills to work but they also learned about the rainforest. They used Scratch free programming language to create games using the second language they were learning, and then the other students played the game. An arts and crafts project had the students making jewelry and then setting up a market to sell their creations. The market was a Spanish market so no English was allowed! Interestingly, Own's article points out that most of these projects focus on using the second language as a way to learn about the culture and way of life of the people who are native speakers of that language. The focus is on cultural fluency because the educators at the school believe that people who speak a second language even with perfect grammar cannot effectively communicate with people who think in another language without understanding those people's culture. This is an important point and one worth more study.

My Experience with Makespace

Although I do not have a designated space in my school library for making, I have collected many items to encourage my students to make. Some of the items are high-tech, and some are geared towards arts and crafts making. Each Friday, my students and I participate in Challenge Friday. These challenges vary greatly, from engineering challenges that require them to create an electrical circuit to crafty challenges where they figure out what to make out of a toilet paper roll. While working on these challenges one thing I have learned is that different cultural groups are attracted to different materials. This is something to which I did not give a great deal of thought until I read an article by Angela Barton, Edna Tan, and Day Greenberg about equity in the maker movement. In the article the researchers "wonder if individuals who do not see their cultural

repertoires of practice reflected in makerspaces—in the people, practices, tools and artifacts produced—will be attracted to makerspaces" (2016). Last year a friend gave me a bag of materials. I had no idea what we were going to do with them, but I have learned over the years the wisdom of the saying that "one person's trash is another's treasure" so I put the stuff in the library cabinet. For weeks the kids just ignored it. Then one afternoon a group of Japanese girls were in the library making, and they used these materials to make beautiful lanterns. Originally, it just did not dawn on me that certain materials could be more interesting or attractive to some cultures than others.

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students introduce us to games and crafts that are traditional to their culture and challenge us to learn them. For example, as part of the maker culture in my school I started a Knit and Crochet Club. I crochet because most of my family is Appalachian, and needlecrafts, including quilting and embroidery, are still a large part of the traditional culture. Dozens of girls from at least four different countries stay after school every Monday to knit and crochet. For some it is a social experience; for others it is a connection to a grandparent; for many of my ELL students it is an opportunity to interact with English speakers and to participate in something they consider to be an American activity. All makerspace administrators should be asking themselves these questions: What materials should I include in my makerspace to engage all of my students in the making process? Am I taking advantage of and honoring the cultural and social aspects of makerspace?

Priceless Smiles

Although ELL students are sometimes a small constituency, many resources already in the library can be used to enhance their language acquisition, confidence, and cultural fluency—resources such as graphic novels, hi-lo books, and makerspace materials. Buying popular books written in foreign languages may be expensive, but just a few books can make a difference. The smiles are well worth the expense.

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