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## English Language Learners and Their Relationship to the Middle School Library

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## English Language Learners and Their Relationship to the Middle School Library

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
LIBRARY

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Submitted to the  
Division of School Library Studies  
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English Language Learners and Their Relationship to the Middle School Library

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts.

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### Abstract

English language learners significantly impact the deployment of resources in U.S. schools, and their numbers are growing. While this population is often at risk academically due to the rigorous subject material delivered in secondary schools, educators continue to struggle with effective pedagogy. Public libraries have studied the nuances of this sub-group and have been successful in serving immigrant populations through the decades. Therefore, this focused study examined the relationship of secondary students and their school library. This study found that ELL students access materials from special collections more frequently than from the general collection. Students reported no negative stigma associated with their use of designated collections. Student motivations for using the special collections were primarily academic in purpose. ELL per-student circulation counts exceeded those of general education students, indicating frequent use of the library special collections.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

English language learners constitute the largest growing population in the United States educational system. Currently, approximately one in five school age children are from immigrant families in the U.S. (Capps et al., 2005) and every indicator predicts that this number will continue to grow substantially. The U.S. Department of Education & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development projects that by the year 2030, up to 40% of the school population will speak English as a second language. While attention has been given to the pedagogy and the politics surrounding the ELL population, little has been reported regarding how the school library can be an influential, if not a pivotal, element in assimilating students to a new culture and language. The purpose of this mixed method study is to explore school library activity with a designated ELL collection for seventh and eighth grade ELL learners at a middle school in the Midwest region of the United States.

#### *Rationale*

This study examined the results of a middle school dedicating and separating a specific collection that had been cultivated to meet both the curricular needs and reading interests of ELL students. Middle schools center their schedules around content areas, and thus students are not exposed to the traditional library instruction skills experienced in an elementary setting. Yet these basic skills of research and inquiry are expected, if not assumed, for success in academics. As ELL students are often more transient than traditional students and often experience periods of sporadic or no formal education at all, they frequently arrive at schools without a recorded history of their prior literature exposure, library skills, or inquiry instruction (Rance-Raney, 2009). In fact, ELL students are at greater risk of academic underachievement than English speaking students because they have a greater likelihood of exhibiting a combination of risk factors leading to substandard performance (NCES, 1995). Studies have shown that the academic gap between ELLs and non ELLs increases beginning in middle school, yet researchers are unable to pinpoint the reason (Viadero, 2009). Knowing that some ELL students may have never previously used a library, scaling down the perceived enormity of the school library by providing a dedicated collection may facilitate use for an already at risk population and enhance their overall academic experience.

### *Significance*

This study examined how current ELL students used a school library with a dedicated ELL collection and evaluated their overall perception of the school library. Currently, most middle school libraries offer a combined collection for all students who attend their school. Little prior research had been conducted to determine if a general collection is in fact the most effective method for reaching out to ELL students. According to data gathered by the U.S. Department of Education in 2008, the total enrollment of limited English proficient students grew at a rate of 57.1% during the 2005-2006 school year, while overall PreK-12 enrollment increased a mere 3.66% (as cited in Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix & Clewell, 2000). The past eleven years have seen dramatic and continuous growth. The percentage of foreign-born immigrant children in secondary schools now exceeds that of foreign-born children in elementary schools: 5.7% versus 3.5% of the total school population (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000).

### *Research Questions*

In order to maximize the effectiveness of English language instruction and the cultural transition to American schools, this study explored how ELL students used and viewed the school library. The primary research question was: what relationship currently exists between the school library and the ELL student? To evaluate the current relationship experienced when a separate ELL collection exists, the following secondary research questions were asked:

1. For what purpose do ELL students approach and use a special ELL collection?
2. To what extent (if any) is there stigma attached to the use of the ELL collection?
3. How do ELL students proceed when their needs are not met by the ELL collection?

### *Terminology*

As many acronyms exist within education to describe students not fluent in English, for the purpose of this paper, the term English language learners (ELL) is defined as those students who are currently identified by their school district as qualifying for instruction in English as a second language regardless of the level of interaction.

A designated library collection referred to any area of a middle school library that is identifiable and solely dedicated to house materials acquired to benefit ELL students. While all students have access to the materials, it is a

designated place that is easily identifiable to the ELL population.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school library activity when a separate ELL collection exists. While this researcher found no study specifically designed to explore this usage, recent work has been done in related areas: public libraries that strive to welcome adult ELLs; the status of secondary immigrant students within the United States public school system; and research compiled by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) that solely focused on exploring the best method(s) to educate ELLs in public schools.

#### *Public Library Services for ELL Patrons*

Recently, the American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Research and Statistics completed a comprehensive study surrounding typical programs and services available for non-English speaking patrons of public libraries. Acknowledging that approximately 21 million people in the United States have a limited command of the English language, yet frequently require assistance as they try to assimilate to a new culture and career through English dominant public agencies, library staff must be prepared to meet the needs of this population on a daily basis so that literacy skills are developed and the patrons become comfortable in the library and in society as a whole (ALA, 2008). English language acquisition is vital for immigration assimilation. Chu (1998) noted that it is even more important in today's information laden world that people must be able to read and write using multimedia and that their communications occur in English. Her study was funded through the 2006 World Book – ALA Goal Grant to ascertain exactly what services were provided to ELL patrons of the United States' public libraries; it was modeled after the study done by the Geo Lib program for the ALA in which "levels of poverty around libraries were assessed within U.S. Census categories" (ALA, 2008, p. 16).

A letter explaining the purpose of the ALA study accompanied a 15 question survey that was mailed to the attention of the library director of 1,844 public libraries situated in 41 states and the District of Columbia; 586 responding surveys were usable, 82% of which agreed they served a market that included ELLs (ALA, 2008). Appendix B of the ALA survey included a copy of the questionnaire and cover letter from the survey. Two questions of interest to this study specifically focused on services to the ELL community:

Question 16: What are the THREE most frequently used services for each language group? (ONE more frequently used, THREE less frequently used)

- Outreach
- In-Library ESL classes
- Special language collections
- Special programming (please describe)
- Other (please describe)
- None (please explain)

Question 17: What is your most successful activity for each language group and why? If the activity is the same for each group, please indicate that by writing “same” in the appropriate column (ALA, 2008, p. 38).

While the libraries identified their in-house ESL services as being most successful, the overwhelmingly most used service identified was special language collections; collections providing material written in either native languages or with lower lexile English. This was true in all language groups. “Literacy in the dominant language is considered essential for linguistic minorities to prosper and thrive and contribute” (ALA, 2008, p. 13). Researchers concluded that this basic effort attacks some of the major hurdles ELLs face, most basic being their undeniable lack of knowledge about the make-up and organization of a library. Special collections bridge that gap and provide immediate resources to this growing population as they learn English (ALA, 2008).

Previously, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Institute of Museum and Library Services suggested that special collections would improve service to immigrants and ELLs in their 2004 working group (USCIS & IMLS, 2004). Tapping the expertise of representatives from public libraries across the country, community-based immigrant organizations, and adult educators who work with ELLs, they formed a focus group and discussed library services for immigrants over a two day period. While the scope and methods varied considerably, many of their findings concurred with the ALA study. Both studies concluded that the use of special collections is a positive step toward educating ELLs.

### *Secondary ELL students in the United States*

Ruiz-de-Velasco (2000) summarized the trends in American immigrant student populations, documented findings from several demonstration projects that occurred at various sites, and suggested recommendations to improve education to students with limited English proficiency in his study titled *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools*. Of special interest to the study were two groups that are growing but continue to receive little attention: immigrant teens not fully literate in English and students who have not yet mastered basic English but have been in the U.S. school districts for a longer time. The results confirmed the assessment that ELL learners are increasing in U.S. schools and that educators are still searching to best meet their needs, especially at the secondary level.

Recent census information revealed that Spanish speaking children constitute three-quarters of all ELL students (Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2000). During the 1970's the largest population of foreign-born students came from Europe and Canada (59%), but today 58% of foreign-born students come from Latin America or Mexico. Educators must always be cognizant of the diversity of ELL learners when discussing how best to serve this population. Despite the fact that foreign born immigrant children from all countries represent a larger percentage of the total secondary population than they do of the elementary population (5.7% versus 3.5%) more spending and research is devoted to the K-6 grade range resulting in a mismatch of appropriations of funding in relation to educational need (Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2000).

This societal miscue of resource allocation may be detrimental as middle or high school ELLs will likely arrive with greater literacy gaps and will have experienced more interrupted schooling than their elementary counterparts. These disadvantages are compounded at the secondary level where instruction is content driven and segmented into chunks with English language instruction (if provided) administered intermittently. High achievers are also at risk. Even when ELLs have a high proficiency in English and exhibit academic prowess, they often are unaware of postsecondary opportunities or the financing available to them (Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2000).

While some ELL students frequently do receive diplomas, approximately 20% of Mexican ELLs drop out; twice the rate of the English speaking population (Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2000). Ruiz-de-Velasco (2000) delves into the statistical differences among three identified ELLs: foreign-born; U.S. born; and first generational students, mentioning that quite possibly the linguistic isolation may extend into social avenues as well, as evidenced by a

dramatic academic improvement between generations. However, the same study found that typically one-third generation immigrants are fully proficient in English and when they are not, other factors must be examined.

Ruiz-de-Velasco (2000) illustrated the serious deficit we currently face in ELL education in America. While much attention in the study focused on census statistics, academic performance, academic fortitude, and instruction, one small paragraph mentioned the school librarian as a sort of “gatekeeper to complex information” (p. 57). Indeed, librarians are the gatekeepers to information and have the expertise to select and provide appropriate and necessary materials.

#### *Improving Academic Instruction to ELLs: 31 Research Projects*

From 1991 to 2001, 31 research projects dedicated to better understand the special educational needs of ELLs in America were commissioned by the Educational Research and Development Program, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) and administered by the Institute of Educational Sciences. The projects centered around six central themes: language learning and academic performance; professional development; family and community; instruction in context; integrated school reform; and assessment (Genesee et al., 2006). This enormous undertaking was important as the researchers understood that the academic performance of ELLs has lagged significantly in the United States. While Genesee introduced the importance of improving the educational product delivered to ELLs, one congressionally mandated study by Moss and Puma (1995) was cited, commenting that “ELLs receive lower grades, are judged by their teachers to have lower academic abilities, and score below their classmates on standardized tests of reading and mathematics” (p. 1).

While a multitude of variables were explored using various research methods, each spelled out specifically within the meta-analysis, it was concluded that more research must be done. English language acquisition is critical to full participation within society and full realization of personal abilities (Genesee, 2006). Genesee pointed out a strong need to explore non-instructional opportunities to interact with ELLs to strengthen their English language abilities and comfort level including: family and community story time (parents reading to children); after school programs dedicated to literacy or academic work; and ensuring that public libraries are well stocked with materials appropriate for ELLs. While the school library was not recommended explicitly, clearly the recommendation for appropriate materials could be extended to this library collection as well. ELLs are a diverse group; many endure

socio-economic issues that may obstruct their ability to find time to visit the public library or to travel to the nearest public library. The school library is located at a familiar location, typically close to home, and should be easily accessible during the school day.

Genesee (2006) observed that further research regarding ELLs who enter middle or high school is important due to the extenuating circumstances of their various backgrounds and the curricular demands presented. Acknowledging that the academic rigors of secondary education are “arguably language-dependent” and more complex in subject matter, and more abstract, it becomes even more important to understand ELLs in order to help them to succeed.

### *Moving Forward*

It has been established that public libraries provide a much needed service when they provide separate collections for ELLs and that these special collections circulate well among populations for whom they are designated (ALA, 2008). Historically, public libraries have consistently and consciously strived to serve the changing faces of immigrants. In 1911, Wendel wrote that “the library can be made the middle ground on which all of the races that make up our population may meet on a basis of equality” (ALA, 2008). One hundred years ago, our immigrants had a different physical presence but the same critical needs as today’s immigrants. Public libraries are aware of their pivotal role in serving America’s changing population and are committed to success with special collections being one tool.

Ruiz-de-Velasco (2000) emphasized the needs of secondary ELL students in his study. Academic gaps between ELLs and non ELLs increased in middle school (Viadero, 2009) yet a disproportionate amount of money was spent on secondary students despite their numbers being proportionately higher than the elementary segment, and having higher academic expectations and the increased likelihood of little or interrupted past schooling (Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2000). Much is expected with few resources.

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE), a United States government funded research group committed an enormous set of resources to study how best to educate K-12 ELLs, the fastest growing segment of school age children. The meta-analysis of the 31 research studies concluded that more needs to be done to help secondary ELL students especially in light of today’s tumultuous political climate where many states



do not look favorably upon instruction being delivered in any language other than English (Genesee, 2006). “The learning demands on these students are especially challenging, and educators need more research on these particular students if they are to respond effectively to their needs,” Genesee concluded. Further, Genesee pointed out the current lack of research done to explore non-instructional ideas that may foster English language proficiency, one of which included ensuring that the public library be well stocked for diverse populations, including material in native languages.

Public libraries successfully serve ELL populations with special collections and other programs (ALA, 2008). Secondary schools typically house a school library staffed with a trained librarian, and secondary ELL students are the largest growing population of students at risk of academic failure (Viadero, 2009), understanding the relationship between school libraries and secondary ELL students may provide an under-utilized venue for supporting the academic progress of ELL students.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

School population growth among the ELL population is unprecedented. Christian commented that “they represent the fastest growing segment of the student population in the United States by a wide margin” (as cited in Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006, p. 1). As this population acclimates to America and educators strive to meet their academic needs, it is critical to provide appropriate materials necessary to fuel the pursuit of current academic expectations to enable ELLs to be competent in society. Through this study, this researcher examined the use by seventh and eighth grade ELL students of a dedicated, separate ELL collection in their school library. The study was conducted at a middle school in the Midwest in a suburban school district.

#### *Mixed Method Study*

This exploratory mixed method study included quantitative data reporting circulation statistics and descriptive surveys to ascertain how ELLs used the special collection as well as documenting their feelings associated with their use. Quantitative studies are important as researchers examine relationships; Creswell (2008) noted that “relationship questions seek to answer the degree and magnitude of the relationship between two or more variables” (p. 134). This researcher collected quantitative data from the library circulation system database, Destiny, to ascertain the exact circulation patterns of ELL students. Printed patron reports for each identified ELL students and indicated the area of the library accessed for each circulated item as identified by the sub location field. The descriptive surveys in Appendix A and Appendix B collected user affect data critical to this study as Issac (1979) acknowledges that “a descriptive survey aims to collect detailed factual information that describes existing phenomena and to either identify problems or justify current practices” (p. 18).

#### *Population*

Forty four seventh and eighth grade ELL students attending a suburban middle school in the Midwest during the 2009-2010 school year constituted the population studied. Total enrollment at the school was reported to be 637 students in the fall of 2009. In the school district studied, students were identified as ELL using a home language survey followed by a personal meeting. While various levels of services are provided for students living in this district, any student who received any level of language support service was included in the population for this

study. The special collection was located on seven shelves located near the periodicals and consisted of 414 nonfiction and fiction books in both Spanish and English. Besides Spanish, no other language materials had been added to the collection at the time of the study although other languages were represented in the student population by four students.

#### *Qualitative Data: Circulation Patterns*

This study sought to understand the ELL students' use of a special collection within the school library. Data from the collection management software, Destiny, were analyzed to determine the number of books circulated to ELL students and non-ELL students. The identifier "bridge books" was suggested by the ELL department at the school as it was voiced that the special collection was there to help "bridge" the acquisition of English. These books have been marked with a yellow spine label for ease of shelving. The circulation data collected by Destiny addressed the following questions:

1. What are the circulation counts from the ELL collection to ELL students?
2. What are the per student circulation counts for non-ELL students from the general collection?
3. What are the per student circulation counts for ELL students from the general collection?
4. What is the breakdown of circulation in regards to fiction versus nonfiction?

While circulation statistics may vary over the course of a school year based on curricular demands, a semester summation provided insight into how often the ELL collection was used and for what purposes. Per-student circulation data for ELL students was compared to per-student circulation data for general education students. This study assessed the use of the school library by ELLs when compared to non-ELLs and further explored whether or not ELLs utilized the special collection.

#### *Descriptive Survey: How did ELLs use the Special Collection?*

Data were collected to further explore how ELLs used the special collection. Surveys were distributed and collected from the circulation desk asking ELLs why they chose the book checked out (Appendix A) over a 6 week period beginning in mid October. The study began approximately six weeks into the school year to allow time for students to become familiar with the layout of the library. Creswell (2008) noted that surveys are appropriate in research that seeks to understand trends in a specific population and are most effective when trying to "learn about

individual attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and practices; evaluate the success or effectiveness of a program; or identify the needs of a community” (p. 414). This research sought to ascertain whether the book was chosen for a specific assignment or represented self selection chosen as a pleasure read. Surveys were anonymous and voluntary.

Lastly, at the end of the semester ELL students completed a user affect survey (Appendix B). This researcher attended all ELL classes scheduled over a three day period and requested the completion of the survey. Students were informed that the intent of the survey was to help the librarian understand how the current Bridge Book collection was being used, ascertain how students felt about using the special collection, and to explore how the librarian could make the collection better suited for ELLs so that they may achieve academic success and explore pleasure reading. While collecting circulation and use statistics was crucial, the question of motivation for students to use a special collection complemented the quantitative data on usage. Two purposes for use of the the special collection were studied: 1) to complete assignments or 2) to browse the general collection. In addition, questions sought to assess degree of stigma or comfort level associated with using the collection. If students felt uncomfortable or awkward using a special collection, that issue must be addressed prior to acquiring more materials.

This study combined the circulation data and descriptive survey data from ELLs to better understand the current utility of the special collection. As suggested by Creswell (2008), the triangulation of data “among different data sources enhances the accuracy of a study” (p. 266). This study corroborated circulation statistics of ELLs and non-ELLs and combined multiple data collection tools including circulation statistics and surveys.

### *Informed Consent*

This study did not jeopardize the privacy of any individual involved. This researcher completed the online certification training course, Protecting Human Research Participants, by the National Institute of Health: Office of Extramural Research and received approval from the University of Northern Iowa’s Institutional Review Board prior to collecting data. The surveys and procedures used conformed to the district policy of the participating school regarding collecting data from students and teachers and protected the privacy of students and teachers.

No personal information, including names, from the data collected from Destiny were retained. Surveys did not request personal names and were completely voluntary.

### *Limitations*

This exploratory study was limited to use of a specially designated collection in a single library in a single semester. As such, it constituted a systematic exploration into a question of patterns of school library use among ELL middle school students in this particular setting. The study afforded opportunities to examine how such use might be investigated and what patterns and purposes of use might be investigated in future studies. The size and scope of the study did not afford opportunities for generalization to ELL populations at large. Circulation data for one semester cannot show all circulation patterns as circulation varies over the course of an entire school year based on curricular needs that vary by content unit. Circulation surveys were voluntary for ELLs, therefore the number completed was subject to the willingness of the identified middle school students and their perceived time availability. Data were collected from all identified ELLs; some were very high functioning English language learners while others had been identified as academically at risk and be dual classified as ELL and special education. Further, regardless of need, parents had the option of refusing ELL services in the district. Finally, the special collection studied was relatively new, having just been acquired in 2008.

### *Data Collection*

Circulation statistics were summarized at the end of the first semester of the 2009-2010 school year. Under the *Circulation* tab in the Destiny circulation system, patron histories were printed for each identified ELL student by selecting the *View History* option. Next, each material barcode was checked to identify which section of the library was accessed by the student to find materials; options were main library, Bridge Book collection, or English Library. Tallies were totaled for a grand total of circulated items then categorized to indicate locations within the library.

In addition, data comparing per student circulation data of ELL students to non-ELL students provided frequency patterns. Destiny's *Back Office* provided the circulation counts for all enrolled students. The researcher subtracted the ELL circulation counts to provide a net total for non-ELL students. The Destiny system locates these data under the *Reports* option under *Back Office* at the *Patron* tab and *Collection Statistics Summary*. ELL data were manually gathered rather than by creating a subgroup of students to protect the anonymity of the ELL students observed.

The survey data showed what types of materials were chosen from the special collection. Types were categorized as either fiction or nonfiction.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

English language learners significantly impact the deployment of educational resources in the United States, and their numbers are growing. This population is often at risk academically in secondary schools due to the delivery of rigorous subject matter and educators continue to struggle with effective pedagogy and appropriate resource allocation. While public libraries have studied the unique needs of this population and continually strive to adequately serve English language learners, public schools in the United States have not yet examined how the school library may effectively supplement and enrich the academic and social endeavors of this diverse population.

#### *Data Collection*

Findings in this study were revealed in both quantitative data and descriptive survey data collected in a middle school in the Midwest that serves 637 students, among whom 44 individuals had been identified as English language learners and received services within the district. Between the beginning of the research and the time of the survey, the school had one student move, changing the total number of identified students to 43. Descriptive data were collected by surveys that were available at the circulation desk within the library and distributed by the teacher librarian during the fall of the 2009-2010 school year. A total of 34 students responded to the Circulation Survey (Appendix A), and 28 students completed The Bridge Book Collection survey (Appendix B). Circulation statistics of all ELL enrolled students were gathered from the Destiny library system to compare circulation activity. The patterns of use by ELLs of the special collection were compared to their use of the standard collection for both fiction and nonfiction selections.

The books in the Bridge Book collection were selected to match the curricular content of the school while simultaneously meeting the needs of an English language learner; visual illustrations are frequent and strong with simplified text supplementing the content; definitions of key vocabulary words are easily identified and readily available on the same page. Fictional material within the Bridge Book collection is of high interest to the middle school adolescent, but is written at lower lexile levels. As both seventh and eighth grade English classes at the middle school explored various genre studies, the special collection provided access to genre studies at a lower reading level. The Bridge Book collection allowed students to strive for the same academic success as their peers.

### *Circulation Results*

Per student circulation patterns were accessed from Destiny using data from the *Reports* section under *Back office*. The Patron tab allows users to evaluate *Patron Statistics Summary* information. ELL data was manually subtracted from the total student information provided. On average, non-ELL students checked out 7.54 books per student during the study period while ELL students averaged 10.65 items per student. The frequency data illustrated the high value a library has for all students, but especially the ELL population as they checked out roughly 40% more items than non-ELL students. The ELL population represented just 6.9% of the total population of this school, however their library use was significantly higher and cannot be ignored.

A Circulation Survey (Appendix A) was available at the circulation desk from mid October until the end of first semester in December (December 18, 2009). During library orientations for ELL students, the teacher librarian explained the purpose and scope of the survey and showed students where they could be found at the circulation desk. Completed surveys were dropped in a secure box. Surveys were written in both English and Spanish and completion was voluntary. A total of 34 students (79% of the ELL population) completed the survey; eight students completed the survey written in Spanish. Results were tallied by counting check marks on the surveys and are shown in Table 1. Multiple reasons could be checked by an individual.

Table 1

#### *Student's reasons for choosing a book from the special collection*

Reason	Responses (n=34)	Percentage of Responders
To complete an assignment	24	70%
Cover made it sound interesting	21	62%
You liked the topic	17	50%
Looked good	16	47%
Teacher recommendation	13	38%
Heard about it at school or home	5	15%
Friend recommendation	2	6%



The most popular reason for choosing a book from the Bridge Book collection (70%) was 'to complete an assignment'. The second, third, and fourth most popular reasons in descending order were: 'you like the topic,' 'looked good,' and finally 'teacher recommendation.'

The high percentage of respondents indicating that the selection was intended for a school assignment suggests a strong relationship between the Bridge Book collection and students' desires to achieve academic success. ELL students use the collection as a supplemental resource when the standard content area textbook or literature from the general school library collection may have been too complex or did not sufficiently meet their needs. This researcher observed that the special collection was often used by ELL classes within the library without specific books being checked out to individuals. There were tables near the books, and the ELL teacher brought her classes to the library to use the resources. This usage was not included in circulation data collected.

The next three most popular reasons for accessing the Bridge Book collection; 'liking the topic,' the book 'looked good,' and a 'teacher recommended it' suggested that students may also go to the Bridge Book collection for pleasure reading. As multiple reasons could be checked on any individual survey, it is plausible that students may enjoy what they are studying, are asking teachers for pleasure reading suggestions, or simply want to please a teacher. It is important to consider that students indicated pleasure in their responses; 'liked the topic' and 'looked good.' While pleasure or enjoyment is not typically a measurable or quantified emotion, it can contribute to the overall academic success or inquisitive nature of any student. Achieving success and deriving pleasure at school while completing assignments may pave the way to creating and supporting a lifelong learner. These responses may suggest that students applied criteria to their book selection by examining the book's appearance and by previewing the book prior to committing to a selection.

Book cover information influenced selection in 37 responses. This is not surprising; however it is very important that all students become adept and comfortable with browsing the shelves of a library and making choices based on personal opinions.

The least selected reason for choosing a book from the special collection was identified as 'friend's recommendation.' Of the 34 responders within the population each has a different level of reading comprehension, may have a different native language, a different educational background, variant amounts of English spoken at

home, and variant amounts of written English exposure at home; it is not a homogeneous group. While a standard classroom is full of various learning levels, generally the ELL classrooms entertain more diversity. A student in a regular education classroom can make some general assumptions about the majority of readers within a given classroom and thus reading recommendations may occur more naturally. ELL students may not have a network of similarly leveled reading peers that would support recommendations by friends.

*The Bridge Book Collection: Affective Survey*

The user affect survey was developed to examine reported feelings associated with using a part of the library that is segregated from the majority of the collection. Serving minority populations involves more than acquiring materials. It is conceivable that middle school students may feel uncomfortable doing something or using something that is atypical of their peer group. The user affect survey addressed the question of whether possible stigmas might be associated the Bridge Book Collection.

This researcher visited the ELL classroom as the teacher librarian during the final days of first semester to distribute The Bridge Book Collection survey (Appendix B), a user affect survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather data concerning how ELL students use the special collection as well as how they feel about using the special collection which is physically separated from the general collection. Completion was voluntary, and 65% of the students participated; 28 of our 44 identified students completed surveys. Surveys were only available in English, and both the ELL teacher and the ELL associate read questions as necessary. The majority of ELL students reported that they did use the special collection (see Table 2)

Table 2

*Percentage of ELL students who did access the special collection*

Response	Responses (n=28)	Percentage of Responders
Yes	16	57%
No	12	43%

Four surveys had internally conflicting responses. Four students responded that they had not used the special collection but continued to indicate in subsequent questions how and why they had used the collection. It is possible

that these four students misunderstood the first survey question. The students with conflicting responses may have used the books while in the library. Perhaps, because they didn't specifically check out a book in their name, they did not consider a "yes" answer appropriate. With these four students added to the self-described users of the collection, 70% of ELL students used the special collection.

As shown in Table 3, half of the respondents reported that the Bridge Book collection was used to support their academic needs to complete teacher assignments. This concurred with the results from the circulation survey, which showed that 70% of our students surveyed used the Bridge Book collection to complete teacher assignments.

Table 3

*Reasons cited for using the special collection*

Response	Responses (n=28)	Percentage of Responders
Teacher Assignments	14	50%
Pleasure Reading	5	14%
Other	5	14%

The second most popular reason for using the special collection was for 'pleasure reading' and 'other.' Again, this concurred with the data collected from the circulation survey, which demonstrated that students' second most common reason for using the special collection was for pleasure or enjoyment.

This research sought to explore whether or not ELL students found the special collection to be helpful. Results from question #3 of the Bridge Book Collection Survey as shown in Table 4 indicated that the special collection was found to be helpful by a majority (68%) of students surveyed.

Table 4

*Percentage of ELL Students who found the Special Collection Helpful*

Response	Responses (n=28)	Percentage of Responders
Yes	19	68%
No	6	21%
No Response	3	11%

As shown in Table 5, responses illustrated that students associated no stigma with using the special collection.

Table 5

*Percentage of ELL Students Who Felt Comfortable Using the Special Collection*

Response	Responses (n= 28)	Percentage of Responders
No Special Feeling	14	50%
Comfortable	12	43%
Uncomfortable	0	0%
No Response	2	7%

Respondents indicated that they either felt comfortable or had no special feelings when using the special collection.

Not one person indicated an uncomfortable feeling associated with using the special collection. Given that the special collection is physically off-set from the regular school library, located near the periodicals, this finding offered insight into the willingness and motivation of these students to access materials of potential use to them.

Demonstrating an interest in pleasure reading, ELL students (36%) predominantly requested more fiction titles be located within the special collection, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

*ELL Student Requests for the Special Collection*

Request	Requests (n=28)	Percentage of Responders
More Fiction	10	36%
More Graphic Novels	6	21%
More titles in Native Language	6	21%
More nonfiction titles	6	21%
No Response	0	0%

Graphic novels, more materials written in native languages, and requests for more non-fiction followed close behind. While the majority of the identified students in the study were Hispanic, some students' native languages were Bosnian, Chinese, African dialect, Arabic, and German. One student requested text written in Chinese.

The final question asked students to provide comments about the special collection. Of those surveyed, 35% responded to this open-ended question. Answers varied, as shown in Table 7, but 30% indicated that the special collection aided their academic goals with words or phrases that included *help*; 30% indicated enjoyment and pleasure with words or phrases that included *like*, *fun*, and *thank you*; and 30% indicated individual specific requests for additions to the collection.

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Table 7

*Open-ended Responses from Students*

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"It helps me."

"It is really helpful and easy to find stuff."

"It really helped me."

"I like these because they are easy and fast to read."

"Add books about jokes or comics."

"Thanks for the books we check out."

"I think the books are really fun to read."

"Horse."

"Scary books. Chinese."

"No."

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The data from the Bridge Book Collection survey (Appendix B) indicated that ELL students used the special collection in their school library. The special collection was mostly used to complete teacher assignments, and a large majority of students surveyed found the special collection to be helpful. Special collections bore no

stigma for ELL students even when located separately from the main library collection. Students in this setting actively sought the resources required to progress academically without reporting any associated negative stigmas.

### *Circulation Statistics*

At the time of the study, the school library had 9,308 titles, 14,179 copies of various materials, and 818 active patrons including both students and faculty. Materials could be checked out for two weeks, and no student was allowed to check out books if he or she had an overdue item that was unaccounted for.

The general library collection housed 13,734 books excluding the special collection, audio visual and periodical materials. Of those 13,734 titles, 8,845 (64%) were circulated from the beginning of the 2009 school year until January 18, 2010 (roughly one semester of activity). The special collection (Bridge Book) housed 445 titles of which 223 (50%) were circulated during the same time frame. The Bridge Book collection experienced use that approached the use of the regular collection, and appeared to carry no stigma for use by its intended clientele.

The highest number of check outs to a single ELL student during the study was 25 books. While five of the total ELL population checked out 25 books, only one of these five used the Bridge Book collection. A review of the titles circulated illuminated an interesting phenomenon. The majority of ELL students used another special collection within the library that was not specifically included in the study, however it was identifiable during the review of patron circulation histories; the English collection. The English collection is a collection of novels often used by the English department for literature circles. This collection was physically segregated from the general collection by a door due to space constraints; the library utilized a conference room for extra shelf space. Students needed permission to gain access to the collection or could request that a title be pulled from that area by the librarian or aide.

In Table 8, ELL student circulation transactions from three collections are shown; Bridge Book, English, and General Collection. These data reveal that 15 ELL student circulation records showed use of the Bridge Book Collection and 39 ELL students records revealed borrowing from the English Collection. A total of 40 out of 43 students used at least one of the special collections during the observation period. Among ELL students, 35 borrowed at least one item from the General Collection. Of these, two were ready to exit the ELL program. Further, the general collection accounted for 38% of their borrowing.

Table 8

*Circulation Statistics of ELL Student: Fall 2009*

Student	Total Circulations	Bridge Book Circ	English Library Circ	Gen Coll Circ	Special Considerations
A	0	0	0	0	twice identified
B	1	0	0	1	
C	1	0	0	1	
D	3	3	0	0	
E	3	0	2	1	
F	3	0	2	1	
G	4	3	1	0	
H	4	0	4	0	
I	4	0	2	2	
J	5	2	2	1	
K	6	6	0	0	
L	6	3	1	2	
M	6	0	6	0	
N	6	0	4	2	
O	6	0	3	3	
P	6	0	2	4	
Q	7	0	5	2	
R	7	0	4	3	
S	7	0	4	3	
T	7	0	3	4	
U	8	6	2	0	
V	8	0	8	0	
W	8	0	5	3	
X	8	0	3	5	
Y	9	1	7	1	
Z	10	0	7	3	
A1	11	2	4	5	
B1	11	0	4	7	
C1	11	0	3	8	one book limit
D1	12	10	1	1	
E1	12	4	6	2	
F1	13	0	6	7	
G1	14	0	6	8	
H1	15	6	4	5	
I1	15	0	11	4	
J1	17	10	4	3	

K1	18	1	2	15	
L1	20	8	6	6	
M1	21	0	16	5	
N1	25	7	9	9	
O1	25	0	23	2	
P1	25	0	14	11	
Q1	25	0	9	16	ready to exit
R1	25	0	7	18	ready to exit
	<b>458 (100%)</b>	<b>73 (16%)</b>	<b>212 (46%)</b>	<b>174 (38%)</b>	<b>TOTAL CIRC DATA</b>

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A majority of ELLs (62%) choose books that were located within sub collections of the school's regular collection.

While the average number of circulations for ELL students was 10 items during one semester, the mode was 6. Total circulations ranged between zero and twenty five.

Further investigation into the titles circulated indicates that very few nonfiction titles were circulated. Of the 458 titles circulated, only 67 were nonfiction titles accounting for just less than 15% of the circulation figures. The 67 nonfiction titles were circulated among 25 students. ELL students reported that they used the Bridge Book collection primarily to complete homework assignments. This determination might suggest that students checked out the high interest, lower lexile fictional titles housed within the collection to meet the English curriculum requirements of genre studies more often than other core areas such as science or history. Perhaps students merely used the nonfiction titles while in the library to complete assignments, but must check out the fiction as they require more time to read.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful education of English language learners at the secondary level is continually being critiqued as this identified population is rapidly growing and is at risk of failure within the public school system. This study sought to examine the relationship between middle school students and a special collection of materials within the school library. Each title within the special collection was chosen to meet curricular demands while keeping presentation of information at a lower reading level, infused with illustrations, and offering text in native languages when available.

#### *Conclusions*

To better understand the relationship between ELLs and the secondary school library, this researcher examined the following questions:

1. For what purpose do ELL students approach and use a special collection?
2. To what extent (if any) is there a stigma attached to use of the ELL collection?
3. How do ELL students proceed when their need are not met by the ELL collection?

#### *Use of the Bridge Book Collection*

Survey results from the Circulation Survey (Appendix A) clearly show that the most popular reason for using the Bridge Book collection was to complete a homework assignment as did the results from the Bridge Book Survey (Appendix B). Circulation patterns comparing ELL students and nonELL students also illustrated that ELL students used the library more often than nonELLs (40% more items circulated per student). Students viewed this collection as a resource to help them with their school work. The majority of titles circulated were fiction. However, it must be noted that teachers also personally checked out the nonfiction materials for research in their own classrooms and that use was not accounted for in this study. Students associated academic value with the Bridge Book collection. The special collection was found to be helpful to 68% of students responding. This finding had implications for future selection criteria for this collection as students relied on the resources located within it to

help them complete homework assignments and to succeed academically. The emphasis of academic use observed signals the critical need for collaboration between teacher librarians and classroom teachers. It is imperative that the teacher librarian be well versed in the curriculum of the school so that the collection will be responsive to students' academic needs.

Personal interest was the next most popular reason for accessing the collection as students indicated that the book looked or sounded interesting. This finding broadened students' reasons for using a school library from the expected school assignment reason to personal reasons which may lead to intellectual growth. If schools can create a positive, comfortable library environment for ELLs, perhaps the positive relationship will extend or transcend to the public library in their lives beyond school. The mean number of circulations in the study was 10.7 items per student over just less than a semester long period. These ELLs are using the library more frequently than nonELLs.

#### *Bridge Book Collection: Stigmas*

Not one student reported any negative feelings associated with using the special collection. Indeed, review of the circulation patterns of ELLs revealed that they also frequent a collection that required more involvement with staff and less anonymity or self sufficiency. The English collection was located in a more remote location than the Bridge Book collection. The school library is a comfortable place where ELLs know they are welcome and can independently access information and materials as needed. Noting patterns of use for the English collection, it can be deduced that the ELLs did not feel uncomfortable asking for specific help when needed. This behavior may reveal a personal strength and fortitude within the ELLs as well as a positive environment created by their teachers and peers. Anecdotal evidence of the positive environment could be observed during a book talk in the library, when the Spanish version of popular titles such as *Marley and Me* and *A Child Called It* were the sole remaining copies on the shelves and many English only readers were audibly disappointed that they can't read Spanish.

#### *Unmet ELL Needs*

The circulation data showed that not all ELLs use the special collection. When the Bridge Book collection did not meet the needs of the ELL student, he or she used the regular collection. Only 9 of the 43 students (21%) in the study did not access items from the regular collection.

Of the nine students who did not use the regular collection, only one did not check out any books from the library. This exception may be attributed to the fact that the particular student had been twice identified and worked almost exclusively with staff in a one-on-one situation and rarely was mainstreamed. The remaining eight students actively used either the Bridge Book collection or the English collection. ELLs are a diverse population, however, and it should be noted that while the mode of circulations was at 6 circulations per student (6 students) it was closely followed by 25 circulations (5 students). This wide chasm suggests that the abilities and needs of these ELLs varied greatly.

The 80% of ELL students studied who were comfortable using materials throughout the library used materials from all areas within the library. In fact, 38% of their circulation materials came from the regular collection. Even the students with higher circulation counts still circulated materials from the Bridge Book collection. The substantial use of another special collection; the English collection, was documented. This collection represented 46% of ELL borrowing. Knowing that students are not allowed access to the English collection without verbal permission as the conference room may be in use, one might speculate that this population of students enjoys the extra interaction provided by conversations with the librarian or associate. Furthermore, the English collection was well known by the school's English teachers as they use the titles for literature circles. Perhaps teacher recommendations were more frequently tied to titles within this collection.

A recent study on pleasure reading, *Peer Group Influences on Avid Teen Readers*, reported that "teens actively seek to read the same materials as their closest friends," (Howard, 2008, p. 107). Uncharacteristically, data from this study shows that only two responders (6%) selected 'friend recommendation' from the Circulation Survey (Appendix A). This phenomenon may be related to the wide range of reading abilities and backgrounds within an ELL population group as illustrated in the circulation mode of this study (6 circulations/student closely followed by 25 circulations/student). It may imply that ELL student abilities are so unique in needs and experiences that it is difficult to generalize the reading needs of these students, or to effectively group them in situations that would foster peer recommendations. This research indicated that middle school ELL students predominantly used the one collection that was most well known among reading and English teachers and required communication with the librarian or aide to access a title. Special collections that require conversations with teachers and library staff may take the place of peer recommendation within this sub-group of readers.

### *Special Collections*

A substantial 38 of the 43 students observed (88%) chose to check out titles from the English collection; titles that have been promoted over the years by English and reading teachers and used for literary circles. Using the Bridge Book collection and the English collection may provide a more comfortable, compact place to browse; with approximately 3,500 titles rather than over 14,000 titles. Continued use of these collections might suggest that past success (readability and enjoyment) had led the student to return to the collections for more materials.

In this study, ELLs had a higher circulation frequency pattern than nonELLs, they used special collections more frequently than the general collection, they used special collections to complete homework assignments, and reported that special collections were helpful. The majority of students observed preferred to check out books from the two special collections within the main library, collections that teachers were more familiar with, and the identified students felt no stigmas associated with using special collections.

Moving forward, middle school librarians should partner with core teachers and ascertain how they use the library to facilitate the learning needs of their ELL population. This study demonstrated that ELL students were using special collections to meet their academic needs. Research ascertaining the knowledge and use of special collections, where available, by teachers is a logical step forward. Educators could improve the effectiveness of instruction simply by raising staff awareness of available materials within their own building and locating those materials in a convenient space within the school library. Public libraries have already taken this step and found it to be successful (ALA, 2008). Administrators should be made aware that special collections can be valuable to a variety of learning needs; ELLs, reading intervention classes, and various levels of special education classes. The use will validate the expenditure. As the needs and numbers of ELL students continue to rise according to population trends, school libraries must use every tool available to help ELLs meet the rigorous academic challenges of middle school and beyond. Relocating current resources and training staff could positively impact the success rate of each ELL student in the American school system.

### *Recommendations for Future Studies*

Linguistic barriers need to be overcome in surveys of ELL students. In this study, two surveys were distributed. However, only one was translated to Spanish. When studying students whose primary language is not

English it would be prudent to offer surveys in each of the languages identified as primary to improve participation and aid comprehension. Of the 34 students completing the Circulation Survey, eight chose the Spanish version. Because the Bridge Book Collection survey was only available in English, students did not have a choice. Conflicting response data can be attributed to the language barrier despite the fact that interpreters were nearby. Anonymity can be difficult to maintain when another person is translating; students may prefer to pass an answer or guess rather than draw attention to themselves by raising their hands.

The Bridge Book collection was a new endeavor so the school librarian accepted a donation of 37 art biography books that, while in good condition and written at a lower reading level, are not specifically tied to the curriculum or may not be of particular interest to the middle school ELL population. When a collection is small any irrelevant items can negatively skew results. In this case, the art biography books made up 8% of the Bridge Book collection. Eliminating inappropriate titles, specifically the 37 art biography books, would affect the circulation statistics results raising the circulation of Bridge Books to 54% and reducing the circulation gap between the standard collection and the Bridge Book collection.

In order to gather a truer measure of use it would be prudent to tag all of the nonfiction Bridge Books for tracking in-house use as many teachers pull content area books for research either in their classrooms or the library. Such in-house use may indicate value in having a collection, if it is being used, whether or not a student actually checks out the material in his or her own name. Data should be gathered on true use, not only circulation statistics. As students can leave study hall to use resources within the library without checking materials out It would be helpful to track this usage as well.

One final adjustment this researcher would make is in regards to circulation procedures. The study examined students at a middle school where circulations were prohibited if there was an overdue book situation. In an effort to go paperless, the school sent email notifications regarding overdue materials to patrons. While the vast majority of students have emails, many ELLs either do not have computers to access their email on a regular basis or do not have current email accounts. Not being able to check out a book could negatively impact ELLs' circulation numbers, their ability to complete assignments, and their overall opinion of a library system they are still learning about. Perhaps a bi-weekly session with new ELL students would facilitate a better understanding of school library protocol.

These research design elements should be considered prior to launching another study. So little research has been completed regarding the middle school ELL student, yet the need is great. All learning must be shared so educators are able to act promptly and confidently as they strive to close the learning gap between secondary English speaking students and ELL students.

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## APPENDIX A

## Circulation Survey

**Why did you choose this book?**

- To complete an assignment
- Teacher recommendation
- Friend recommendation
- Front cover
- Heard about it at school or home
- Looked good
- Inside cover/back cover sounded interesting
- You like the topic



## Appendix B

**The Bridge Book Collection**

## Indian Hills Media Center

1. Have you ever used the Bridge Book Collection this year?
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. Why did you use the Bridge Book Collection? **Check as many that apply.**
  - Pleasure Reading
  - Teacher assignments
  - Other (please list)

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3. Did you find the Bridge Book Collection helpful?
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. How did you feel when you check books out from the Bridge Book Collection?
  - Comfortable
  - Uncomfortable (embarrassed or shy)
  - No special feelings
  
5. What would you like to see in the special collection?
  - More fiction
  - More graphic novels
  - More titles written in Spanish or other native language (please specify)
  - More non-fiction titles to help with research and class assignments (social studies, science, math)
  
6. Please provide any comments that you would like to share about the special collection.  

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