

School Librarians Facilitating the Success of English Language Learners

Overview: The University of North Texas (UNT) Departments of Information Science, Learning Technologies, and Linguistics, in partnership with the International Association of School Librarians (IASL), will implement a national forum about providing services for English Language Learners (ELLs) in school libraries. UNT requests \$149,406 from IMLS. The forum will provide training and host a discussion to build the capacity of school librarians, allowing them to implement programming for ELLs using evidence-based practices. The anticipated outcomes are a white paper that incorporates the results of the forum activities and participant feedback about evidence-based practices for serving ELLs in school libraries, recordings from the forum posted online, and a website to host the white paper and forum recordings.

Statement of Broad Need: This exploratory, national forum project addresses a crucial training need that will build school librarians' capacity to provide services to ELLs. According to the U.S. census, the U.S. continues to grow in diversity, and approximately 5 million ELL students are attending public schools in the U.S.¹ When ELLs attend school, they are often fully emerged in the curriculum and expected to thrive². Zacarian notes that a lack of teacher training for working with ELLs results in a disproportionate number of ELL students being placed in special education.³ School librarians can help ELLs students by providing them with learning opportunities in safe, nurturing environments⁴. Linguist and ELL researcher Stephen Krashen^{2, 5} further asserts that libraries are essential for English language acquisition, and libraries should be supported by librarians that understand how to connect children to literature. School librarians can benefit from specialized training to provide effective programming for ELLs.

Teacher preparation programs offer full degrees or certificates for teaching ELLs. In some states, teachers complete professional development hours to add an endorsement. Many school librarians have prior teaching and training experience relevant to teaching diverse learners, and school librarianship programs include coursework about teaching diverse learners. Still, the prevalence of degrees, certificates, and endorsements for advanced training in the topic indicates that teaching ELLs is not covered in depth during teacher or school librarianship programs. If a teacher does not have a degree in teaching ELLs, they must seek additional training. Outside of professional development offered by school districts, acquiring additional training can be costly and time-consuming. The free white paper and forum recordings will offer school librarianship training programs and cost-effective resources to school districts, ELL teachers, and stakeholders.

In preparation for this proposal and in order to illustrate the need for ELL training, a pilot study was conducted with two groups: 1) 107 pre-service school librarians in a master's level program and 2) recently certified school librarians.⁶ While the results are based on self-reporting, they provide a window into school librarians' needs regarding ELL training. Most participants (94.39%) wanted to learn more about helping ELLs in the school library. The participants rated their skills and understanding of competencies related to working with ELLs on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating. A majority (79.43%) of responses indicated some level of difficulty (i.e., scores of 3 or below) using technology in the library to enhance learning opportunities specifically for ELLs. Most participants scored themselves between levels 1 and 3 in their knowledge of the historical and contemporary perspectives on culturally diverse education (68.22%), knowledge of the customs, beliefs, and values of different racial and ethnic groups (61.68%), and understanding of how to develop an integrated multi-cultural lesson plan for ELLs (64.15%). According to these results, more school librarian training is needed for these skills.

Moreover, the need for collaborative strategies for educating ELLs is urgent as the COVID virus has impeded their education. Schools are implementing remote learning, and teachers are using digital resources less with ELLs because of concerns about home access.¹ ELL teachers are also more likely to use general digital resources than those designed for ELLs. ELL teachers report receiving less professional development for using digital resources than regular classroom teachers.¹ The United States Department of Education has responded to the COVID crisis' impact on ELLs by issuing guidelines urging ELLs' education and services to continue through distancing learning.⁷ Recommended accommodations include captioned videos, accessible or translated reading materials, and other technological solutions such as software. Though there are recommendations, the lack of training for using digital resources with ELLs indicates that ELLs and native English speakers' educational gap will continue to widen during the pandemic. School librarians can facilitate teachers' training and education of ELLs by providing them with digital resources, reading materials, and programming to support multiple literacies. According to a School Library Journal study, the COVID virus has highlighted school librarians' role in offering professional development and providing digital resources for curriculum support.⁸ However, just 40% of school

librarians have received training for developing distance learning opportunities. The proposed forum can address these urgent training needs in reference to ELLs.

Project Design: The project will be implemented by an interdisciplinary team that includes school librarianship educators who research learning environments and STEM education in libraries, an ESL teacher, linguists (i.e., ESL and English language acquisition experts); an educational psychologist and technology expert, a school administration expert, and the president of the International Association of School Librarians. A nationwide forum invitation with an application link will be sent through listservs and state and national organizations. IASL will advertise to its members. Twenty-five funded face-to-face attendees will be selected. A nationwide online option will be available as well. At least ten stakeholders (school administrators, ELL teachers, school librarian educators, educational technologists, and ELL parents and students) will be invited to attend. Selected attendees will submit suggestions for best practices, challenges, and questions about serving ELLs before attending the forum. Responses will be used to plan for training, presenters, and a design thinking workshop for developing collaborative strategies for serving ELLs based on evidence-based practices. Linguist, ELL expert, and school library advocate Stephen Krashen has agreed to be the first keynote speaker. The team will collaboratively identify the remaining presenters and expert attendees.

The Project Plan is as follows: 9/2021– Meet team to develop announcement & application. 10/2021–Send forum announcement & open the application. 11/2021–Review forum applications. 12/2021–Notify participants. 1/2022–2/2022 Plan forum. 3/2022– Host forum.4/2022– Post forum recordings. 5/2022– Write the white paper. 6/2022- Request participant feedback on the white paper & forum; begin conference submissions. 7/2022–Complete the white paper. 8/2022–Post the white paper on the website and market it; submit the final IMLS report.

Diversity Plan: The forum application for face-to-face participation will include questions about ELL experience, the locations, and the populations served in order to facilitate diversity. IASL and UNT will promote the forum throughout the United States. UNT has established cohorts in CA, NV, SD, WY, ID, MT, TN, AR, VT, NH, ME, VA, NM, and the Pacific.⁹ Our interdisciplinary project team is involved in national and international associations that we will contact about the forum. The IASL will promote the forum through its conference, website, and newsletters. Also, the national forum will be simultaneously broadcasted and will include online audience engagement for the school library community and ELL stakeholders.

Broad Impact: School districts around the country struggle to provide optimal education for ELLs and will benefit from the forum results for professional development and certification programs. The results of the forum have the potential to assist school librarian education programming with developing training for librarians. The interdisciplinary focus could impact training for principals, ELL teachers, and advocates. Naturally, the team anticipates sharing the results with IASL and AASL. The project PI is an AASL Knowledge Quest blogger and the Educators of School Librarians 2020-2021 chair. She will remain on the ESLS board in 2022, assisting with developing the AASL research agenda and ESLS conference programs. IASL will disseminate materials and allow presentations at its conference. Materials will be shared with school librarian certification programs, school districts, state organizations, and listservs for all stakeholder groups. We will target interdisciplinary conferences for school librarians, education researchers, educational technologists, ELL educators, classroom teachers, and school administrators.

Budget Summary: The anticipated budget is \$149,406. This includes funding for: personnel (\$21,114), student support (\$17,356), PI & Co-PI travel (\$6,700), writing/transcription (\$4,600), participant support costs: meals, lodging, travel stipends for 25 participants (\$34,375), forum (\$11,000), Advisory Board Support: meetings, travel, meals, stipends (\$3,500), supplies (\$500), Project Evaluator (\$15,000) and, indirect costs (\$35,261).

References: ¹<https://bit.ly/30i0kjl> ²Krashen. S. (2018). Do libraries and teacher librarians have the solution to the long-term English language learner problem?. *California School Library Association Journal*, 41(2), 16-19. ³<https://bit.ly/3mUxM9H> ⁴Bush, G. (2003). Safe haven. *Voice of Youth Advocates*, 25(6), 438-439. ⁵Krashen, S., & Bland, J. (2014). Compelling comprehensible input, academic language and school libraries. *Children's Literature in English Language Education*, 2(2), 1-12. ⁶ <https://bit.ly/2FZLiDK> ⁷ <https://bit.ly/2Si8ELj> ⁸<https://bit.ly/36mNXGL> ⁹ <https://bit.ly/3cZUKI1>