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Rich/Collins Final Report

BINCA Book Project Final Report

Narrative Report

Overview:

The BINCA Book project is a collaboration between Boston International Newcomer's Academy (BINCA) and Brandeis University to increase BINCA students reading access and excitement. The project has four main elements: 1) Building a multicultural and multilingual library 2) Visiting Copley Square Public Library 3) Completing a consent education workshop 4) Painting bookshelves for the new library 5) Celebrating the library at Brandeis University.

Background:

Boston International Newcomers Academy (BINCA) is a public high school in Dorchester that serves a uniquely vulnerable and diverse population of Boston Public School students: recent immigrants to the United States from over eighty countries, including large groups from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cape Verde, Somalia, Vietnam, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. A large proportion of Boston International students are refugees and/or have had a very interrupted formal education due to political, familial and economic instability in their home countries. These students are faced with the daunting task of "catching up" academically in a new country, within a new culture, and while learning a new language that for many of them is not merely their second but their third or fourth language.

The BINCA Book Project started in November of 2018 in Naomi Spector's 12th Grade "World Cultures" class. I asked her, "If you had \$5000 to help your school how would you spend it?" She replied that she would build a library. At the start of the semester, Naomi Spector (Brandeis '12), a BINCA teacher, reported that many students have told her that they have found it difficult or impossible to find books in their own languages at school. Unfortunately, it is also very difficult for them to access books in English. All books in English at the school are owned by the individual teachers who bought them and are not necessarily available to students. They are scattered in different classroom libraries and there is no system in place that would enable students to even know what books are available or to request to borrow them from the teachers they belong to. Neither the school nor the Boston Public Schools district offers teachers class sets of books or the money to buy them. And although in past years there was a small makeshift library at the school, it was closed due to lack of funding. Ms. Spector's student, a senior named Abdi who is Somali but was born in a refugee camp in Kenya, told her the following:

"I want to read a lot to improve my English. And I wish I could read Somali books too. But in most of my classes we just use handouts and papers, not that many books, and I don't know where to find books that can help me learn English."

Ms. Spector also reported that out of twenty two students in her senior World Cultures history elective, no one had a Boston Public Library card or any idea how to access books

through any online database.

Implementation:

In February, Ms. Spector ordered *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley and *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen for her "World Cultures" class. These were the first class sets that any of the 12th grade students had read from. In February, students developed and implemented a Google Forms survey to determine peer reading attitudes, reading frequency, book accessibility, and the genres, mediums, languages and topics that wanted represented in their new library.

The results revealed that students wanted to read the following genres: Graphic Novels, picture books, early reader chapter books, YA Fiction, Memoirs, Biographies, Comics/Manga, Poetry (esp bilingual), Mystery, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Romance, True Crime, Teen Drama, Horror, Historical Fiction, Business/Entrepreneurial/"Keys to Success," and books that have been made into movies. Students asked for authors from the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, Vietnam and from Black American and Indigenous authors. Students also asked for books in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Vietnamese and Haitian Kreyol.

During March, April and May, we purchased books. I acquired a further \$2500 in funding for the project through the generous donations of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy, Professor Ramie Targoff, Meehan Social Justice in Action Grant, Bernstein Festival of the Arts grant, and Brandeis Pluralism Alliance Grant. We purchased books from Frugal Bookstore, the only black owned bookstore in Boston and More Than Words, a bookstore that works with youth in Foster Care or the Criminal Justice system. Students visited Frugal Bookstore on a couple of occasions to pick out books themselves.

During, March, April and May, I solicited donations from Brandeis departments and local community organizations. We got donations from the following community partners: The Right to Immigration Institute, Newbury Comics, and Waltham Home Depot. We got donations from the following Brandeis partners: English Department, African & African American Studies (AAAS), Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies, Library, Romance Languages, Latino & Latin American Studies, Study Abroad Office, Segal Fellowship, Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship, Department of Fine Arts. I also received recommendations for purchases from Wangui Muigai, Emile Diouf, Faith Smith and Carina Ray in AAAS.

On February 1st, as part of students' misogyny unit, I led a "Consensual Ice Cream Sunday" making workshop. In the workshop students learn the nuances of asking for and receiving sexual consent by practicing making ice cream Sundays for their partners. In this activity students practice making ice cream Sundays for a partner. Students ask questions like "How many scoops would you like? What flavors? What kinds of toppings?" In a follow up discussion students discuss the nuances of consent such as the barriers to proper communication, that people can change their mind, that consent is on-going, and that consent actually helps people have the best sexual encounters possible.

On March 8th, all twenty-three students visited Teen Central in Copley Square Public Library. They learned research database skills and toured the facility, enjoying the video games, board games, collection of teen novels, and music production software. Then, we enjoyed a lunch together at nearby Shake Shack.

On April 11th, over 50 Brandeis community members joined eight students from BINCA to celebrate the book project. We shared food, music and student artwork. After, all eight

students stayed for a presentation about racism along the Dominican/Haitian border by Arlett Marquez ('18).

In March, April and early May, Justus Davis ('19) led students in designing and painting bookshelves for their new library. During the process students got to learn about Justus' Digital Arts and Culture major. The three bookshelves were donated from the Brandeis Library, saving us nearly \$500 in grant money. Students painted the bookshelves with flags from their home countries and other symbols including the pride flag, Muslim crescent, star of David, Christian cross, black power fist, pan-African flag and more. Aicha Tavares ('19), a Dorchester resident of Cape Verdean descent joined the painting process and taught students about Public Health issues based on her research.

"World Cultures" Students also enjoyed presentations from Professor Derron Wallace (Sociology and Education) and Dylan Quinn ('19), an environmental science major, during their regular class periods.

As we currently stand, over 500 books have been purchased or donated. The bookshelves will be finished painting on May 14th. Then, we will place all the books on the bookshelves in a designated writing room at BINCA. Over \$1500 of funding, from the other generous donors, remains in a Home Account at Frugal Bookstore, so that BINCA students and teachers can continue to order books for the library.

Evaluation:

Here are some numbers that speak to the success of the project: Over **500** books were donated or purchased for the BINCA library. Over **\$4000** was invested in local bookstores with social justice focuses. **Five** Brandeis students and **one** professor visited BINCA. **Eight** BINCA students visited Brandeis. **Twenty-three** students learned the nuances of sexual consent, received a public library card, and learned how to access and utilize research databases through the BPL.org website. **Five** BINCA students visited Frugal Bookstore and chose books in person for the new library. Over **fifty** Brandeis constituents engaged in the project in some capacity, from visiting BINCA to recommending graphic novels by African authors to creating book drives to attending the celebration.

The opening evaluation was developed and implemented by students. The goal of the assessment was to evaluate how much time students currently spend reading, how excited students are to read, whether and why they would like to see a library in their school, what kinds of books they would like to read, and whether they visit Boston Public Libraries. The survey was hindered by the students' inexperience developing surveys and language barriers. For instance, one of the questions asked "How much do you read?" but didn't specify the time frame. The survey was plagued by a lack of specificity. However, some helpful data points emerged.

One question students developed asked, "How many books do you have access to?" Of the 30 respondents, 10 responded that they had access to less than 100 books. Another third responded something along the lines of, "Many" or "A Lot." 56.7% of respondents said that they would be able to concentrate more on homework if they had a library at their school.

In response to the question, "Why is it important to have a library?" "What benefits are there to having a library in the school and not just outside?" and "What would a library add to your life if you had one in school?" Fifteen students expressed a desire to improve their reading comprehension and English acquisition with answers such as "We can practice our fluency reading" and "to help student improve their English." Twenty students expressed a desire for a quiet place to concentrate and work on their homework.

To the question, “How do you see yourself as a reader? On a scale of 1-10,” ten students ranked themselves as five or below and only five students ranked themselves as a 9 or 10.

In response to the question, “What genres are you most interested in?” nine students responded “Romance,” six students responded “graphic novels” or “manga,” four students asked for “sports” and four students asked for “mystery.”

In follow-up, individual conversations, students gave me more detailed answers that evolved into the current list of books that appeared in the “Narrative Report” section above.

Before attending Copley Square Library, only one student had a Boston Public Library card, and no students had experience using an online research database. At the end of the trip, all twenty-three students had BPL cards and in an oral survey every student responded that they now felt more comfortable using an online research database and could find them through bpl.org.

The biggest post-evaluation survey that I used was an informal ½ page to 1 page written response by students asking, “What did you learn from this project? What would you do differently next time?”

I am enclosing some of their responses below:

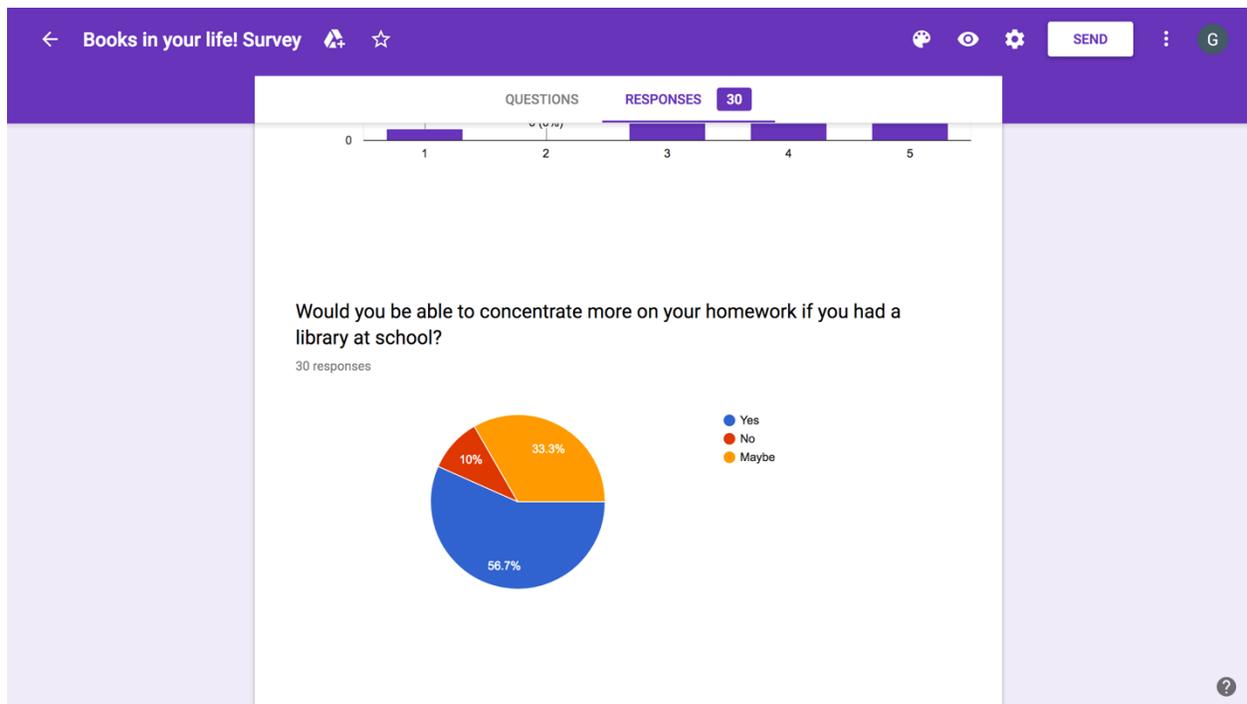
“What I really like was the surprise of coming and doing something different everyday like the Ice Cream consent. What we did help [our] class see things [in a] different way. It’s good to see that people still care about books.” - Antony

“The Brandeis celebration was so good, I didn’t expect to have a lot of fun and learn. So, I think this opportunities of know and meet people is amazing and I’m really glad that people outside of my school still give us support.” - Jhon

“I feel great building a library it was my first time... “ - Yohalinson

“We visited the library and I really enjoy it, cause I never went to a library before.”

Interestingly enough, no students chose to give constructive feedback and they only focused on the positive aspects of the project.



Books in your life! Survey

QUESTIONS RESPONSES 30

What benefits are there to having a library in the school and not just outside?

30 responses

- we don't have to go out to study we can stay in school to read.
- Because you can bring your friend and do homework together
- You don't have to move, sometimes is cold and you don't want to go outside. You spend a lot of time to commute their. If it's in school, is much easier, you don't even need to think about it. It's more encouraging.
- more time
- Easy to access, a quite place to for students who love to read
- you don't have to travel you save time
- Students will be able to access to books and computers without the need to be rushing because "the library will be close in 5 minutes".
- You don't pay for bus
- It help students that are willing to do good at school to have a place to go when they need to do HW.
- that if you need a book right now you can go to your school library instead of going out side and maybe that library is far away

Personal Growth/Reflection

This project has reignited my own love for books. When I see books now, anywhere, I see them through the lense of my students. Would they like this book? Is it accessible? How could it help them grow? I get giddy thinking of the doors it could open for them. Through my research in trying to find the right books for students I have come across a number of new titles that I want to read myself.

This project has showed me that I want to work with ELL students in the future. These students are different than any other students I have worked with. They maintain a curiosity and positive work ethic and don't take their schooling for granted. They tend to have a critical consciousness and understand power dynamics because of their experiences as immigrant and refugees. They express a yearning for social justice. They tend to be open-minded and open to changing their mind. I have yet to see any entitlement or "I'm too cool for this" attitude. By and large, students have bought in and recognized exciting opportunities.

Professionally, through this project, I have grown close to Toni Jackson, an administrator at BINCA. She has recruited me for an Americorps position at BINCA next year. I am strongly considering working at BINCA next year. I would do ELL and job readiness programming for students and their families. This project has given me an "in" into a notoriously competitive public school district.

At the Segal Citizen Leadership Fellowship, I learned through the StrengthsFinder curriculum that one of my biggest strengths is Connectedness. Connectedness is the faith in the link between all things and the ability to connect people from different backgrounds. The StrengthsFinder approach encourages people to build on their strengths. A leader who is able to utilize their strengths in their workplace is happier and more effective. During this project I have been able to build my Connectedness strength by building relationships between immigrant students and Brandeis students and faculty, Boston Public Library employees, and Frugal Bookstore, amongst other partners.

This project has helped me connect with my roots. I was born to an immigrant family. My father moved to the United States from Portugal when he was 24 and was the first person in his family to complete High School. Now he is a university professor. Through the hard work and sacrifice of my parents and grandparents, I have been able to attain a top rate education. Through this project I have been able to extend a little piece of that opportunity to other immigrant student. By building relationships with students, I have had ample opportunities to reflect on my own families sacrifices and empathize with their experience trying to assimilate into a new culture and leave behind their home.

This project has also connected me with the Jewish side of my family. Students have expressed a solidarity with Jews, especially after learning about the Holocaust. After expressing that I did not know if any of my family that stayed in Europe survived, other students made connections to their own experiences of leaving behind family and not knowing their roots – especially African. We have bonded over the importance of learning, recording, and sharing our own histories.

This project has also shown me how to make the most out of budgetary restraints. At the beginning of the semester, I was disappointed that I received \$2000 less than the \$5000 that I had asked for. However, the budgetary shortfalls forced me to be creative and bring more people into the project. For instance, in an effort to get an additional \$500 from the Bernstein Festival of the Arts committee I really built up the arts portion of this project. In another example, we saved almost \$500 by getting used bookshelves from the Brandeis library. The Meehan Social Justice in Action, Festival of the Arts, and BPA grants all required some type of campus event. I am so glad that I ended up hosting an event. It was an amazing community gathering. Every time, I reached out for donations I built another relationship and brought more people into the work.

Another small lesson that I learned was to simplify my language. ELL students could not parse through my academic jargon. Developing lesson plans with them forced me to get to the

essence of what I wanted to say and made me realize that if I can't say something simply, it's probably because I don't understand it that well.