



PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

I WANT YOU TO HAVE THIS:
A COLLECTION OF
OBJECTS AND THEIR STORIES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

An Evaluation of 826 Boston's Young Authors' Book Project in Partnership with Boston International High School 2012-2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the beginning, we were a little afraid to start writing this book. Language is a struggle for us, Boston International Newcomers Academy is 100% ELL. Also bringing back memories of loss and transition was at times devastating. But it was worth it. We had the courage to write our stories and are proud of them.

— From the student Editorial Board letter, published in the book



YOUNG AUTHORS' BOOK PROJECT OVERVIEW

In the spring of 2013, 826 Boston published *I Want You to Have This*, a professionally designed collection of memoirs written and edited by sixty 11th graders over the course of the 2012-13 school year at Boston International High School (BIHS). The book is the product of 826 Boston's first major Young Authors' Book Project (YABP) focused entirely on English Language Learners (ELL). Located in the working class neighborhood of Dorchester, BIHS serves students who are recent immigrants to this country and who started their school careers in the United States with limited English proficiency.

As in many other cities throughout the U.S., Boston's immigrant population is growing dramatically, having increased almost 50% since 1990. Nearly 28% of students in the city's public school system are in the process of learning English, presenting opportunity and challenge to the school district. These young immigrants are critical to the success of our overall society.

826 Boston, and the seven additional chapters in the 826 network, are motivated by the belief that creating the impetus for creative expression and then scaffolding a careful process of writing and revision produces a constellation of positive outcomes for students: greater enjoyment and persistence in the act of writing, increased confidence in the ability to write, belief that their own writing has value, and, ultimately, improvement in the quality of the written work. It is with this motivation that the YABP was carried out. The book is a testament to months of concentrated ef-

fort on the part of 826 staff and volunteers and BIHS teachers to support BIHS 11th graders on their journey to becoming published authors.

FINDINGS OVERVIEW

The vast majority of students gained new skills as writers, with 96% reporting that they learned to be a "good writer". Moreover, statistically significant increases were found for students who reported that the belief that "writing is fun", and "I am proud of my writing" increased after their involvement in the YABP (see Figures 1 and 2). The survey data was further reinforced by data from our pre-and post-focus groups, in which students spoke glowingly about the impact of this project on their self-confidence as writers, as well as their feelings of accomplishment. A large number of students told us that they now know how to approach new writing projects, which is critical to their future academic achievements, including classroom writing as well as writing college essays.

CONCLUDING EVALUATION OF YOUNG AUTHORS' BOOK PROJECT

Based on a rigorous mixed-methods evaluation, Arbor Consulting Partners conclude that the YABP is fully aligned with the Boston Public School system's agenda of strengthening ELL services, and stands out as a model program that makes an extraordinary contribution in engaging ELL youth. Implemented at an international high school, the YABP has demonstrated that it leads not only to educational advancement, but also increases the confidence of students as learners and writers.

The key to the success of this project is multifold, and includes: the leadership provided by 826 staff to ensure that the program was run smoothly, the well-tuned structure of the program, the impressive level of collaboration between 826 and the participating teachers, and the one-on-one support from tutors. This layering effect provided a culture of support and learning for students, which we conclude will have lasting effects on both the students and participating teachers. Students gained skills, felt supported in their endeavors, and learned the value of revision in the writing process. And teachers benefited from the additional resources provided by 826, via staff and volunteer tutors, to support their students in strengthening their writing skills. All in all, our evaluation affirms the efficacy of this program and its positive impact on participating students and teachers, who benefit in both academic outcomes and personal outcomes.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION AND DETAILS

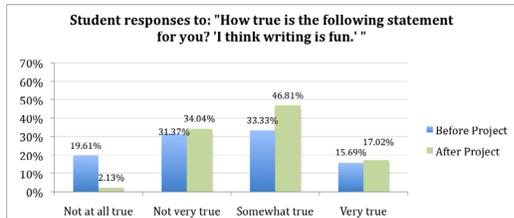


FIGURE 1. Change in student responses from before the start of the project (n=51) to after the completion of the project (n=47) on how much they identify with the statement, "I think writing is fun."

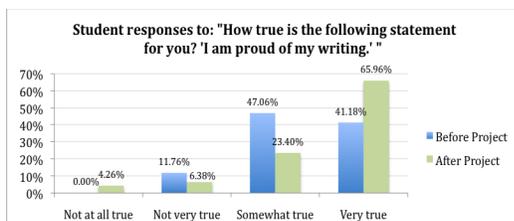


FIGURE 2. Change in student responses from before the start of the project (n=51) to after the completion of the project (n=47) on how much they identify with the statement, "I am proud of my writing."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM DATA

- * After completing the YABP, analyses indicated significant increases in how much students reported identifying with the following statements (see Figures 1 and 2):
 - "I think writing is fun."
 - "I am proud of my writing."
- * 96% of students reported that it was either very true or somewhat true that they learned new things about how to be a good writer as a consequence of their experience with 826.
- * 96% of students believe that they can use what they learned during the YABP with other writing assignments
- * When assessing performance on the Test of Written Language (TOWL 4; Hammill & Larsen, 2009), an objective measure created by external researchers, after the completion of the YABP students (n=31) improved an average of...
 - 12.8% in "story composition" (e.g., vocabulary, prose, plot).
 - 2.6% in "contextual convention" skills (e.g., noun-verb agreement, punctuation).

TEACHER OBSERVATIONS

One student from the Dominican Republic overcame his reticence about school and emerged as a very capable writer. According to Ms. Gersch, BIHS teacher, this student had a poor attendance record but the book project changed that.

"It was really surprising! When I said you are writing in a really interesting way, he suddenly saw himself through my eyes. In that moment, he thought to himself: What I write is good. And that did it! Ever since that time he has been in class every day."

The BIHS teachers involved reported that they mainly drew on their existing skills for curriculum development but that the project helped them to refine their teaching tools and focus instruction on revision. Mrs. Russo observed that she is a better writing teacher as a result. Ms. Gersch learned that models of the final product are not as helpful for creative writing instruction as generally assumed. Texts that students themselves create work better for analysis and critique, she said.

Both BIHS teachers agreed that students aimed higher with their writing after the completion of the YABP, in part due to the ability to learn and apply effective revision strategies over the course of five months.¹ Frequent focused feedback from tutors and attention to a single piece of writing through multiple rounds of revision helped students to identify what elements in their writing needed improvement and what techniques to deploy. It also gave them a new appreciation for constructive criticism. According to Ms. Gersch, students are now more likely to seek feedback from teachers and from peers because they have discovered that this helps them produce better work.

STUDENT TESTIMONY

"I learned a lot. I learned the whole strategy...that you got to put ideas in and take them out ...and go back all the time and revise. And now I'm a better writer, because when I'm writing I have an idea of how to make something special or to put details into it and get the reader's attention." – 17-year-old student from the Dominican Republic

"I love to work with my tutor because she was the one who told me not to give up... Yeah, she says, 'Ivany, go deeper because after you're done, you're going to feel proud of yourself. I know it's not easy. It's hard to do it because English is your second language.' And I was like, 'Okay!'" – Ivany Gomes (19 years old) from Cape Verde.

¹ Revision strategies were those that teachers habitually introduce to students in their ELA classes (e.g., "show, don't tell") as well as those that teachers developed or refined for the project.

Student Testimony Continued

“I learned how to communicate with more people, with adults. I don’t like to say what I think. But it was helpful, I learned how to express myself in front of other people.” – José Daniel S. Velásquez (16 years old) from El Salvador.

“The most rewarding thing was that I realize that even through of all the cutting I knew that it was for a purpose to make my story stronger and make my own self proud of what I had done, and my family too because what I had write is going to be published something that I never thought would happen which makes me feel proud of my own self and that all the work I had done was worth it.” – Johanny Baez (17 years old) from the Dominican Republic.

STRENGTHS OF THE BOOK PROJECT IDENTIFIED BY ARBOR CONSULTING PARTNERS

- * Students are empowered as writers and as storytellers.
- * The involvement of 826 Boston tutors lowers the student-to-teacher ratio from 20-to-1 to less than 5-to-1.
- * 826 Boston builds trust and develops positive, collaborative relationships with teachers and school administrators.
- * 826 staff members are willing to put in long hours, work collaboratively with the teachers, and know from many years of experience how to partner with and get buy-in from school administrators. This commitment to the project from adults both in school and at 826 communicates to students that adults are on their side.
- * The YABP meshes seamlessly with teachers’ curriculum.
- * Working professionals were enlisted to facilitate the project, including a photographer, professional editors, and a designer, providing a sense of legitimacy to the students.
- * A professional author, Julia Alvarez, whose work relates to the students’ writing and who is recognized and respected by students and teachers, wrote a foreword for the book, giving students a deep sense of validation.



Design: subject-object



CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FROM THE BOOK PROJECT IDENTIFIED BY ARBOR CONSULTING PARTNERS

- * Writing about an object of personal or cultural significance was difficult for students initially but catalyzed a creative writing process that resulted in powerful memoirs.
- * The project was very time-consuming for teachers. It takes a special teacher who is willing to put in additional time for planning and follow-through during the project.
- * Working with 100% ELL presented unique challenges since it was often harder for students to convey the message they wanted to express in English which could be their 2nd, 3rd, or even 4th language. Additionally, tutor turnover undermined progress.
- * 826 Boston confirmed that 826 tutors for the YABP could benefit from additional training so that their constructive criticism includes “tough love,” where necessary. Teachers and 826 Boston Education Director, Jessica Drench, provided the students with more structure and were better able to encourage them to complete their revisions.

PROJECT CREDITS

Arbor Consulting Partners

Arbor Consulting Partners was formed in 2002 and have senior social scientists with over twenty years of experience consulting to governments, businesses, universities, and foundations as well as to community-based organizations. They offer superior analytical expertise combined with a firm knowledge base in six principal areas: Community Development, Environment, Public Health, Human Resources, Early Care and Education, and Arts and Arts Education.

826 Boston

826 Boston kicked off its programming in the spring of 2007 and hosts a variety of creative and challenging workshops. Located in Roxbury’s Egleston Square, a culturally diverse community south of downtown, 826 Boston is close to more than 20 Boston schools. 826 Boston’s storefront, The Greater Boston Bigfoot Research Institute, has all the necessities for your Bigfoot, Research, and Institute needs! Visit today before you end up in a hairy situation.

826 National

826 National is a nonprofit organization that provides strategic leadership, administration, and other resources to ensure the success of its network of eight writing and tutoring centers. 826 centers offer a variety of inventive programs that provide under-resourced students, ages 6-18, with opportunities to explore their creativity and improve their writing skills. We also aim to help teachers get their classes excited about writing.