

CASE STUDY



A hand-drawn budget chart on a piece of paper with a yellow star and exclamation mark at the top. The chart lists various library transformation costs in different colors. The total is highlighted with a yellow box.

Bookshelves	\$11,131
Furniture & Decor	\$4,000
Book Cataloging	\$23,000
Library Manager System	\$5,500
Annual License for system	\$850
Donated Books	\$18,000
Purchased Books	\$11,124.65
Total:	\$73,606

Cara Fitzgerald,
Librarian/Literacy Coach and Academic
Coordinator, who spearheaded the
transformation of her school's library.

"I would absolutely recommend Follett's genrefication services to other schools! If you have a clear vision of the reading experience you want to offer your students but aren't entirely sure how to make it a reality, the Follett team will help you navigate the logistics to ensure that your dream comes to fruition."

CARA FITZGERALD
Librarian/Literacy Coach
and Academic Coordinator

"GENREFICATION" IN THE LIBRARY

EQUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL
BRONX, NEW YORK

FOLLETT TEAM HELPS CREATE A CULTURE OF READING THROUGH "GENREFICATION"

Overlooking the Hutchinson River in the Bronx, NY, you'll find Equality Charter School, where the students are all referred to as "scholars" and the academic rigor is challenging. The school welcomes all students, regardless of prior academic performance or needs, and provides a fully inclusive learning environment to help each achieve success and ensure college or career readiness. Equality is centered around a unique hands-on learning progression. Despite the fact that the school is relatively new, it boasts many success stories of students who've moved beyond the Bronx into successful, productive lives in college and career.



Parents, scholars, and community members explore the new library during the grand opening celebration.

When Cara Fitzgerald, Librarian/Literacy Coach and Academic Coordinator, first joined ECS in May of 2014, the library was really not what she wanted it to be. “There was a small collection of books that were spread out across the school in classrooms, cabinets, and scholar backpacks,” said Fitzgerald. “A great deal of time and energy had been devoted to collecting and sorting the books we had, but limited resources and an ineffective tracking system made organization challenging.” As Fitzgerald explained, there was a room that housed the majority of the independent reading books, but the setup was not conducive to student selection.

Soon Fitzgerald received the green light to expand the library, and began researching software programs, speaking to local librarians and testing various interfaces. “It quickly became clear that Follett offered all of the services we were looking for, as well as phenomenal customer support,” she said. “We made the move to Follett Destiny® and relied heavily on Follett’s help in ‘genrefying’ the

library. In October 2015, with scholars, staff, parents, board members, and donors present, we celebrated the official grand opening of our library – a fully cataloged and carefully curated collection located at the very center of our school.”

MORE THAN JUST A NEW LIBRARY – A NEW APPROACH TO PROMOTE A CULTURE OF READING

As Fitzgerald dove headfirst into her new job and new software, she continually asked herself myriad questions in an effort to make Equality’s library the best it could be for her students. Her primary goal was to promote a culture of reading and create the most authentic reading experience possible. This included using “genrefication,” a technique in which library books are shelved and arranged by genre, rather than the Dewey number, to increase circulation and encourage further reading.

Without any previous experience as a librarian, she called upon her background as a middle school ELA teacher. “In the classroom libraries I created as a teacher, I

always avoided organizing books by level,” she explained. “Instead, I wanted the library set up to reflect the questions I asked of my students: What kinds of books do you like? Do you like to laugh when you read or do you like an adventure? Do you want to read about kids who live like you or do you want to read about a different time and place? What’s the best book you’ve read recently? Is there a particular author you like? As a teacher, I used these questions to better understand my students’ preferences. In order to honor those preferences, to respect all of my students as more than Lexile bands, I had to have books at every level in every genre. I wanted our new library to offer the same diversity, the same level of universal accessibility. I wanted our scholars to feel like they were walking into a bookstore, where there is something for every type of reader.”

Fitzgerald’s goal was to pull together a genrefied library over the summer of 2014, but quickly found that deadline to be a bit overly ambitious. “I was lucky to have the full support of the



Ed Hubbard, Equality's Board Chairman and Assistant Professor of Practice, Rutgers Business School, welcomes staff, parents, and scholars to the new genrefied library.

administrative team, but as enthusiasm spread, so too did the extent of the undertaking,” Fitzgerald said. “Our original goal was just to relocate all of our books to one place and organize them by genre and Lexile, but as I became more familiar with our collection, I realized it did not meet the needs of our varied readers. Our executive director, Caitlin Franco, told me to go ahead and dream big, so I put together a proposal, an ‘if I could have anything’ proposal, for a literary sanctuary to be housed in the school’s largest space, which was, at the time, our main office. Instead of telling me to come back with something more realistic, Ms. Franco said, ‘make it happen.’ ”

The main office moved, and the creation of the student-friendly library began. Fitzgerald enlisted the help of former and current colleagues, family, friends, local librarians, as well as Follett team members. “When we began using Follett Destiny® Library Manager, I found a fast ally in the Follett regional sales consultant. Their customer service went far above and beyond their normal job responsibilities to support my every nagging inquiry and connect me to a network of experts,” Fitzgerald said. “Through ‘emergency’ phone calls, on-site visits, and endless email chains, the Follett team answered questions, offered suggestions, and resolved challenges. When I realized that the cataloging process itself was more than I could tackle on my own, I turned to Follett for the next phase of the project. We carefully shopped around to explore all of our options, but Follett was the only company that offered all of the services – including help with genrefication.”

PEOPLE FROM FOLLETT – NOT JUST PRODUCTS – PROVIDED THE NECESSARY HELP TO GENREFY EQUALITY’S LIBRARY

Fitzgerald explained that the process slowly took shape over the course of the 2014-2015 school year, and the entire school community watched as the pieces of the library came together. New books, delivered weekly, sat in piles on specially-ordered shelves, but until they were cataloged, scholars couldn’t check them out. “We finally had the resources, but we couldn’t capitalize on them until they had been properly curated and organized,” she said. “When scholars left at the end of June, I promised them a completed library by September. Follett helped me keep that promise.”

“It was an absolute honor to work with Follett’s dedicated team as we experimented with this new process. As is the case with any new project, we came across some challenges, faced a few unanticipated glitches, but ultimately created a welcoming space for all of our middle school readers.”

CARA FITZGERALD

Librarian/Literacy Coach and Academic Coordinator



Fitzgerald worked with her in-house colleagues to assemble a diverse array of complete collections by genre, all of which supported standards and curriculum at the school. Together, school staff and the Follett team tackled brainstorming, tweaking, drafting, revising, and organizing and shelving, which helped move Equality toward success at a quick pace. “During the last week of July, the team met for the first time here in the Bronx. Follett folks worked with our team to manage logistics – they sorted thousands of titles according to our unique genre specifications; and they helped lead a team of approximately 15 people through the tedious cataloging process,” Fitzgerald said.

Overall, Fitzgerald admits the genrefication of the new library was time-consuming, yet rewarding. “Everyone involved labored tirelessly on behalf of 270 middle school scholars they had never met,” she said. “Throughout the entire process, we took turns reminding each other how important this work

was, how special its reveal would be. What a beautiful, selfless gift the Follett team helped us give our students!”

THE LIBRARY’S GRAND OPENING MARKS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LEVEL OF SCHOLAR ENTHUSIASM

When school resumed in the fall of 2015, Fitzgerald spent the first full week introducing scholars to the library, teaching them how to use the signage and pairing them with titles appropriate to their interests and reading levels. She also held the aforementioned grand opening of the library in which volunteers, parents, educators, and benefactors shared in the excitement. One scholar, Chizara Kwubiri, gave a speech that night, and Fitzgerald fondly recalls how the girl’s comments made all the effort worthwhile. “Reading can create new worlds for you. It can help save the one you live in!” said Chizara in her speech in front of a packed house. “That is why having this library in school is a gift I will cherish forever. Take last year, for example. I used to come

in early nearly every day, just to see if the library was open. And now that it is, I have the epitome of anticipation at my feet.”

Today, Fitzgerald sees her scholars looking forward to independent reading time, creating lists of books they want to read next, and recommending texts to each other. “Instead of hearing excuses like, ‘There aren’t any good books here,’ I am bombarded with requests to take out an additional book or visit the library more often.”

Perhaps scholar feedback of this type is the most satisfying outcome of Equality’s new genreified library. “The other day, I was in the library sorting through a new donation when one of our eighth grade scholars walked in,” shared Fitzgerald. “I asked her if she had a pass, and she said, ‘Well, sort of, but it’s to the bathroom. I just walk through here every chance I get. I just love this place!’ These are the small moments from which educators source their motivation.”