CHAPTER 18

How to Make a Living Legend: Bibliobandido as Literacy Movement Building

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We'd been waiting by the side of the road for some time, scanning the horizon. I was anxious how people would react. Would they throw things, thinking he was really out for pillage and plunder? Or worse, would they simply ignore him? Finally, from far off I could see two burros kicking up a sun-lit storm of dust, illuminating the profile of a masked rider that we'd named Bibliobandido ("story thief") who was fabled to eat stories (see Fig. 18.1).

For the past few days, I'd been plotting with The Library Club of El Pital on details to convince little kids that Bibliobandido was really a menace. We initiated a handful of kids ages 9 to 11 on the secret, knowing they were likely too old to believe in Bibliobandido and could be the first to denounce he wasn't real. Now our extended group of about a dozen kids and adults clandestinely worked day and night to sew costumes, choreograph who would say what, prepare bookmaking materials, and tea-stain paper to resemble a parchment scroll outlining the demands Bibliobandido

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Fig. 18.1 Bibliobandido riding in El Pital, 2010. (Photo by Marisa Morán Jahn)

would put forth. Designed to resemble the signs from cops and robbers movies or Spaghetti Westerns, we created our own colorful "Wanted" posters and pasted them throughout the one-road town to alert the 1000 residents of this Honduran community: "Cuidado! Hombre Peligroso! Bibliobandido—Come Cuentos" ("Warning! Dangerous Man! Bibliobandido—Story Eater!"). We liberally spread rumors that nearby villages reported hearing Bibliobandido's ferocious growl from within the forest. When asked about the gastrointestinal mechanics of what it means to eat stories, we kept the answer vague, saying something like, "Well, we all love a good story but I hear this BB guy just takes it a bit farther. Apparently, he inhales them on the spot but doesn't really take them away. I guess we'd better quench his appetite by feeding him stories!"

Now, as Bibliobandido galloped past the first house marking the edge of the village, a woman cried out in fear, shutting her windows and running inside. We learned later that she was the one who called the cops—a minor but important detail that later contributed to the sense that

Bibliobandido was "real." Bibliobandido now fast approached the center of the village which consisted of small one-story homes, two bodegas, a school, and the largest library in Northern Honduras, a 600 square foot room with a single shelf of books. The high school and library had been built in the past few years, thanks to Un Mundo, the same organization that invited me here to do an art and literacy workshop. Prior to my invitation, Un Mundo involved middle school kids and adults in surveying their community about their needs. The survey revealed that alongside a health clinic and eco-friendly toilets, the community saw literacy as a way to "lift them out of their poverty cycle" (Goetz, Elly, personal communication, 2010). Self-identifying the importance of literacy meant that community members committed to non-traditional strategies to overcome the limitations of Honduras' enfeebled education infrastructure.

In the late 1990s, Honduras was pummeled by a succession of storms including Hurricane Mitch which, in 1998, caused approximately 11,000 fatalities in the region (Castillo, 2011). The hurricanes ravaged much of the region's infrastructure, including the single road connecting El Pital to other communities more remotely situated up the mountain. This had widespread effects. For example, after the storms, the school teacher who worked in La Muralla commuted via bus from the nearby city of Ceiba for an hour each way. To reach the community's one room schoolhouse, she had to ford two rivers. La Muralla's increased inaccessibility meant that only a handful of books remained in their schoolroom.

In addition to the storms, Honduras' imperialist entanglements with the United States explain its status for many years as the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, just behind Haiti. Established in the late nineteenth century as the original "banana republic" where raw goods and fruit were sold to American entrepreneurs, Honduras has played a key role as a regional ally to the United States. After the Cold War, Honduras functioned as an American regional foothold, supporting Salvadorian regime changes and the Contras opposing Nicaraguan Sandinistas.

Then and now, Honduras has functioned as staging grounds for narcotraffickers and hosts one of the largest deployments of US Special Operations forces outside the Middle East (Shorrock, 2016). Around 2010, Eastern Honduras was fast becoming a new route for drug cartels running cocaine northbound from South America. Within five years, 90% of all cocaine originating from Venezuela and Columbia bound for the United States passed through Central America. A third of the narcotics passed through Honduras (Shanker, 2012), mostly in the Easternmost

region of Miskito, whose dense jungles provided cover. Soldiers and government officials either turn a blind eye or act in direct complicity.

Homicides in urban areas earned Honduras the reputation as the murder capital of the world (Sherwell, 2013), a moniker which disincentivizes foreign investment and tourism. The rate of homicides is especially high for journalists, environmental activists, and indigenous rights leaders such as Berta Cáceres, who was murdered immediately after receiving the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015. While violence is concentrated in Honduras' urban areas, the radical chilling of free speech extends throughout the country. Elected officials are not held accountable, and journalists covering government corruption find themselves censored, threatened, or much worse. As a result, issues impacting El Rio Cangrejal, the region in which El Pital sits, go under-reported. For journalists and artists in Honduras, professional video cameras are a liability; alternative and imaginative forms of expression become imperative.

For those in a place like El Pital, located in Northern Honduras, the specters of geopolitical violence hardly surface. While you shouldn't go walking by yourself in the forest or at night, mellow El Pital feels quite safe. But underlying tensions and rampant government corruption register in the form of entrenched poverty and the conspicuous absence of resources. Throughout El Rio Cangrejal, it was common to see schools that either had no resources or had simply ceased to exist.

Against this backdrop, ways to provide educational resources—as well as nuanced perspectives articulating the subtleties of life in Honduras—acquire urgency. Imaginative approaches dignify lived experiences, transform the everyday, and invite seeing things otherwise. To be starving for stories, like Bibliobandido, refers to the desire to be nourished by others' stories and reciprocally feed others. To hunger for stories refers to the right to gluttonously insist on the right to intellectual stimulation and creative agency despite a fractured education system.

By now, Biblibobandido's galloping burros slowed to a cant as he approached El Pital's school. Still mounted, BB roared as he rubbed his belly and peered into the eyes of the kids around him. He handed a parchment scroll to the crowd of kids, who jostled to read the message aloud to the others. "Soy Bibliobandido! Tengo ganas de comer cuentos! Los que no me alimentan, ten cuidado!" ("I am Bibilobandido! I am ravenous to eat stories! Those that don't nourish me, beware!"). A handful of moms and teens, key members of the Library Club, pretended to tremble with fear while little kids looked about, wondering what to do.

After a few minutes of uncertainty, a member from the Library Club stepped up and announced, "Bibliobandido, you come back in one hour. We will have fresh stories prepared for you." As BB rode off, Library Club members formed a huddle with little kids. Our plants in the crowd shared gossip that they'd heard from a neighboring village that the stories already bound in the library were too stale and only stories written by little kids could requite his insatiable appetite.

To prepare the freshest offering of stories, we broke the crowd of forty kids into smaller groups whose teen leaders I had already trained to lead simple bookmaking activities with accompanying writing prompts. One group imagined two characters from different stories inside the villain's stomach. Would those characters duke it out? Have tea? Enjoy a few laps in BB's stomach as the liquids sloshed around? Others create an illustrated menu imagining BB's ideal five course meal (see Fig. 18.2). Gory delicacies like "Blood of Snow White Soup" were followed by Pinocchio's nose,

Fig. 18.2 Bibliobandido's menu, Library Club of El Pital, 2010. (Photo by Marisa Morán Jahn)

grilled and served up in a hot dog bun. Pop-up books unfolded to impart step-by-step instructions sharing the kids' expertise in cooking beans, spear fishing, or gathering the best firewood. Origin stories speculated on BB's home, family, and network of villains. Agile and resourceful leaf cutter ants, which proliferated here in the semi-tropics, appeared as a constant motif. Gritty and uncensored, these literary activities became foundational staples for the youth-led Bibliobandido storycrafting rituals that centered around El Pital for a decade onward, spreading into nearby communities clustered around the Cangrejal river. Later, leaders of the Library Club would bring the legend to other communities in Central and North America that also needed a Bibliobandido.

By now, an hour had passed. Anticipating BB's return to El Pital, we'd put the finishing touches on our stories. When he arrived, belly rumbling, a few junior members of the Library Club circled the younger ones around the bandit. As the kids shared their stories, BB's audible lip smacking and sounds of contentment were muffled slightly by the bandana which concealed the identity of Coki, the only adult male member of the Library Club. Coki himself did not quite know how to read; he'd had to leave school early in order to sow and harvest beans to support his family. For him, literacy was therefore precious, and as an adult, Coki would take time off from working in the fields to participate in the Library Club. For years after, playing the role of Bibliobandido was an honor that he protected; the loveable outlaw was a coveted role that kids and adults clamored to play.

What happens next in the sacrificial ritual—the exit strategy—varies according to context. At Hola NYC, a Spanish-immersion preschool in New York City who "stewarded" Bibliobandido for a few years, we adapted the legend so that while being fed, Bibliobandida (our bandit was feminized since Hola NYC was women-led) eventually starts to nod off into a deep food coma. Toddlers would have to poke Bibliobandida awake and send her on her way in order to continue their regular school day. In other places, the dramaturgy ends when Bibliobandido needs to catch the next subway train, or his invisible neighing getaway vehicle suddenly demands attention.

But back in 2010, the denouement of this very first episode in El Pital came about as two policemen armed with semi-automatics showed up. Someone explained to me that the cops never come for anything, so the fact that they came for Bibliobandido signified to the kids that the story-eating bandit was in fact a real menace. As the cops handcuffed

Bibliobandido in the library, we shooed out the kids. Behind closed doors, Elly Goetz, community organizer and director of Un Mundo, explained to the cops: "Officers, this is all part of an art and literacy movement. This is Marisa. She's an artist from the U.S. We're making art right now." She invited them to stay to watch—we could even give them a role to play—but that they needed to let Coki ride away as Bibliobandido. We asked them if they could grumble something about how, if we all continued to feed BB, we could avert general calamity. They did as they were told, and BB galloped off. The cops left shortly thereafter, leaving kids and adults milling in the road outside the schoolhouse. Despite the fact that there wasn't a television in El Pital, someone from the crowd piped up that someone they knew had seen BB on the news. Like the cops, the news rarely paid any mind to El Pital, so BB's television cameo meant big time. In the Bibliobandido episodes to come, breaking news headlines, the sudden appearance of cops, head librarians, the president of the United States, and other signifiers of authority continued to play key roles in legitimating BB as a real threat while subversively poking fun at power itself.

To cap things off and send everyone home, members of the Library Club announced that BB would likely appear the next month for his monthly harvest of stories. We discussed that it was in fact an honor, because BB only comes to communities with the juiciest of stories—and so we'd better not disappoint. The thrill of Bibliobandido's return animated the kids in a new way.

Previously, for those kids who didn't like to write, performing literacy could be frustrating and/or humiliating. But writing for a greater cause—the salvation of your community—removes hesitation and perfectionism to make way for the practice of writing. Young authors become galvanized to defeat a common enemy; the monthly repetition becomes a rite that preserves an order—"not curative, but preventative" (Girard, 1977, p. 102). The atavistic logic of sacrifice with storysharing at its core becomes a way to maintain peace.

The next day I had to return to the United States. Before leaving, I met with the Library Club to finish sharing bookmaking and storycrafting skills. I explained what I'd gleaned from Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence which points out that the two intelligences most emphasized in schools emphasizing rote education—linguistic and logical/mathematical—left out six additional kinds of aptitudes, including kinesthetic, interpersonal, existential, naturalist, visual, and musical intelligence. Gardner's theory suggested to me that if I could hook kids by

exercising a wider range of intelligences via live dramaturgy, dialogue, sewing costumes, and oral storytelling, I could leverage those interests toward what was often most daunting for active kids—writing. I'd already seen this work back in the United States, where I'd been teaching bookmaking to several hundred k-12 kids from historically underserved communities. And I'd seen this work when I piloted a bookmaking workshop in El Pital two years prior. What I'd learned then was that we needed something so sticky and captivating that the kids would continue authoring their own stories after I left. This time around, what we sought to instill was an inquiry-led *literacy movement*. A literacy connected to "auto-estema," a term which suggests a self-regard created from a sense of autonomy conjoined with self-reliance. The English version of the word, which imperfectly translates to "self-esteem," carries feel-good connotations instead of the inflections of dignity carried by its Spanish cognate.

Indeed, Bibliobandido caught on throughout the Rio Cangrejal region. For the next ten years, the Library Club of El Pital would invent new "episodes" of Biblibandido on the third Wednesday of each month and enact them on the following Sunday with one of the surrounding 19 participating rural communities whose parents and school teachers had signed up to host the villain. Members of The Library Club eventually brought Bibliobandido to communities in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Meanwhile, I was invited to bring Bibliobandido to thousands of kids via workshops and teacher trainings at the Seattle Public Library, Pérez Art Museum Miami, Studio Museum of Harlem, Sugar Hill Museum of Art and Storytelling, Queens Museum, elementary schools, and dozens of other libraries and grassroots community groups in Central and North America (see Fig. 18.3).

In each place, new characters, obstacles, getaway vehicles, and corroborators were spawned. Many communities invented patron saints bearing local customs, traits, and features. In a workshop sponsored by the Queens Museum located in a New York City neighborhood principally accessed through a long ride on the purple or violet-colored 7 subway line, we invented a patron saint named "La Dama Violeta" (The Lady in Violet). Outfitted in a purple-hued cape and hat, La Dama Violeta publicly states that she protects subway riders whose newspapers and books render them vulnerable to Bibliobandido's snatching. However, according to the legend, commuters often discover scrambled sentences or paragraphs from their literature; it's speculated that La Dama Violeta herself is a secret word-snacker.

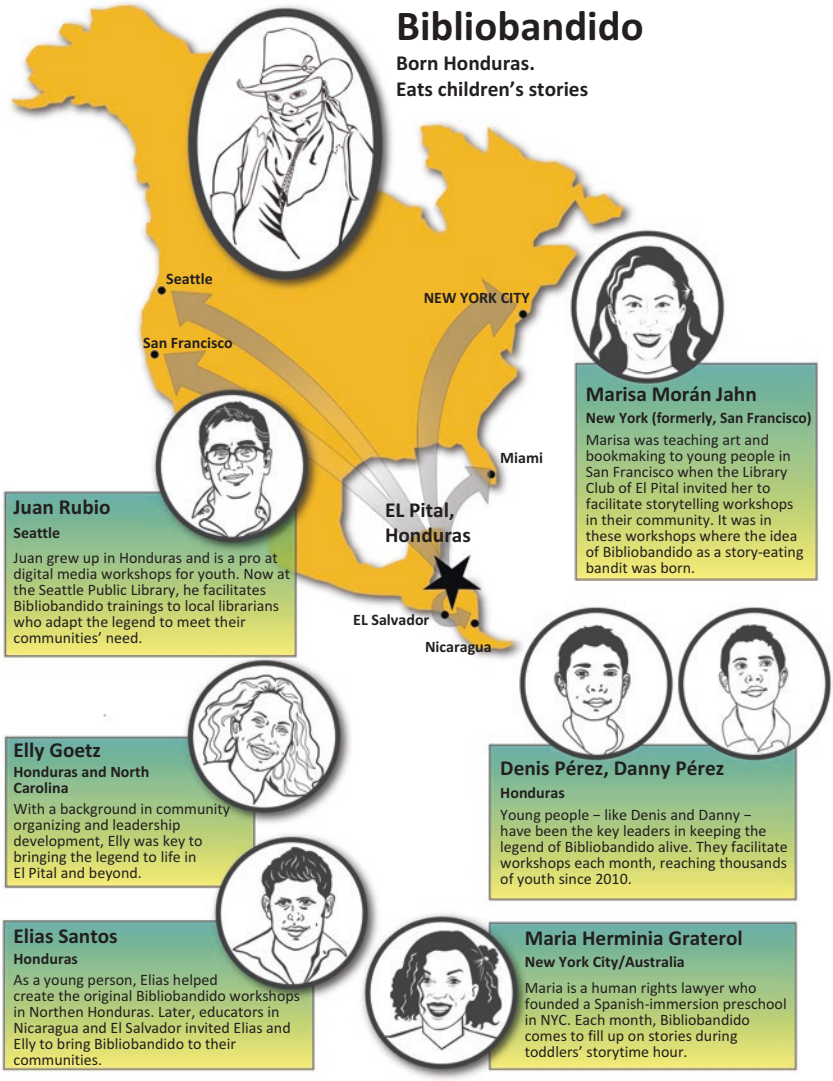

Fig. 18.3 Bibliobandido Diaspora, 2018. (Graphics by Marisa Morán Jahn)

Believing "As If"

The exhilaration of Bibliobandido comes when we recognize the fun and function of believing in something. It's fun to (at least pretend to) believe in something because it conjoins you with those around you, bringing you into a fellowship with those inside and apart from your community (i.e., being baptized, which presumes that you are a believer, brings you into communion with a fellowship of other believers). In a conversation I overhead at the bus stop on the outskirts of El Pital, one small girl said to another, "We celebrate Bibliobandido. What about you all?"

Even if you don't believe or fully believe in an ideology or supernatural character, participating in the structures of belief *in the minimum* might still do the work of cultural transformation (i.e., coming-of-age ceremonies celebrated in a religious contexts by secular non-believers still mark an important social transformation from childhood to adulthood). And perhaps, despite all your resistances, going through the rituals of belief might still bring about a transformation or psychic/spiritual liberation.

Besides conviviality and possibly catharsis, believing "as if" brings certain rewards (i.e., if you believe in the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus, or Easter Bunny, your parent rewards you with gifts, holiday treats, and their affection). In the case of Bibliobandido, pretending to believe he is an actual menace means you get to have a role in a community-wide pageantry, make artwork with your friends, and get things you wouldn't normally get like ribbons or colored pencils to decorate your pop-up book. If you're one of the kids who brought Bibliobandido to other participating communities, you got the rare opportunity to leave your own village, see where and how other people lived, ride the bus or hike with your friends, and receive a sack lunch or novel snacks made by other people.

Elly Goetz described the experience of being part of the Bibliobando cosmology as akin to being in the Boy Scouts in the United States, only more fantastical, intense, urgent, and the most vivid fabric cohering the complex lives of the young people involved. Believing "as if" provided youth with the opportunity to act as civic participants and in doing so, critically reflect on that self-same social order. As Slavoj Žižek writes,

> What we call "social reality" is in the last resort an ethical construction; it is supported by a certain "as if" (we act as if we believe in the almightiness of bureaucracy, as if the President incarnates the Will of the People, as if the Party expresses the objective interest of the working class…). As soon as the

> belief (which, let us remind ourselves again, is definitely not to be conceived at a "psychological level": it is embodied, materialized, in the effective functioning of the social field) is lost, the very texture of the social field disintegrates. (Žižek, 1994, p. 318)

In other words, for youth in El Pital and other regions, believing in Bibliobandido is simultaneously world-building (envisioning new worlds) and critical while maintaining cognitive and psychic coherence.

Subversive Play, the Logic of Rituals, the Carnivalesque

Since many of the Latinx communities that Bibliobandido reaches are Catholic, and since I was always fascinated by ecclesiastical structures growing up, my own interpretation of the Bibliobandido cosmology syncretizes a Catholic imaginary with broader anthropological systems of worship to give logic to various roles (e.g., patron saints), gestures (Bibliobandido's return or ascendance), and histrionic sacrifices (e.g., the juiciest of stories). But as inventors of the fantasy itself, we willfully break and invent the hierarchy as we go, the triumph of play over power.

In the world of Bibliobandido, even spectators became folded into the world of Bibliobandido pageantry as witnesses, corroborators, believers, alibis, or deniers. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) describes the blurring of spectator/actor roles in experiencing the carnivalesque:

> In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators … Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. (pp. 7–8)

Explaining the experience of time that Bakhtin puts forth in his writing on the carnivalesque, Michael Holquist writes,

> Carnival must not be confused with mere holiday or, least of all, with self-serving festivals fostered by governments, secular or theocratic. The sanction for carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by church

> or state, but from a force that preexists priests and kings and to whose superior power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival. (Holquist in Bakhtin, 1984, p. xvii)

Those who have harnessed the power of Bibliobandido have done so by allowing participants and the community to undergo a series of experiences markedly different from normative time. Through repeated rituals including suiting up characters, writing and bookbinding stories, songs, and more, youth prepare for and then experience a transformational experience.

Assets-Based, Invitational Entertainment-Education

Entertainment-education is a genre of scholarship emerging from the field of communication that focuses on social change impact. Entertainment-education typically employs media (e.g., soap operas, video games, social media) produced for consumption. The "medium" of Bibliobandido's legend in Honduras has been two modes of high touch, low-tech media: real-time, in-person performative improvisation alongside a "rumor economy" (Wright, Stephen, personal conversation, 2017). Adopting the theoretical frameworks of entertainment-education, however, to include these kinds of media used in low-tech infrastructures like El Pital enables us to understand the conditions contributing to Bibliobandido's quick uptake, or stickiness. For example, one assets-based approach of entertainment-education referred to as "positive deviance" shifts focus away from what's going wrong in a community toward enabling communities to identify and amplify their existing strengths to solve problems in ways that may deviate from the social norm (Singhal, Wang, & Rogers, 2016). In Bibliobandido, community members sought to redress their community's education gap through storycrafting, costume-making, and improvisations that engendered their creative agency and buy-in to the project.

A second strategy of "Invitational" entertainment-education upends traditional persuasive approaches, adopting instead a pull strategy that activates individuals' willing engagement and active participation (Singhal et al., 2016). The secretive nature of Bibliobandido, its irresolvable poetic crux, and its porous invitation to participate in world-building ensure that youth and adults' investment remained high.

A Note on the Artist's Relationship with the Community

As an artist, I draw upon my experience as the daughter of a Chinese father and Ecuadorian mother to inform my work producing creative media and public art with low-wage workers, immigrants, youth, and women. Pushing back against notions of putative objectivity, I work self-reflexively from within a system, foregrounding myself as an embodied subject influencing and influenced by my surrounds. When working with cultures outside of my own, I work only at the invitation of others, and communities that recognize their key role as hosts. I also only work with communities that have self-identified the need for creativity and who embrace cultural contact between local and outside communities.

In the case of the Bibliobandido public art and literacy movement, I was invited by the Library Club of El Pital, Honduras, after a key leader, Rachel McIntire, learned of my work both as an artist and as an educator teaching literacy through bookmaking to school-age youth. A US-born artist and educator from the United States, Rachel had been leading art workshops in El Pital for over a decade and was critically involved in the library of El Pital. The community's high regard for the arts was modeled by a number of community leaders including its founders, key leaders, and members who are predominantly from El Pital and the surrounding region.

Funding for my involvement in El Pital initially came through two bake sales led by Rachel and a group of high school students which raised $700—enough to pay for my plane ticket and a year's supply of bookmaking supplies in Honduras. Later, Bibliobandido workshops in North America took place at the invitation of organizations who invited me to be a part of their community. A few times, the host organizations in North America offered me small stipends for my participation which I distribute among Bibliobandido teacher-facilitators in the United States and in Honduras. Many times, I would teach for free in exchange for someone looking after my toddler who has thus grown up as a Bibliobandido believer and secret agent. My involvement with the community in El Pital significantly formed my understanding of the preconditions for creative, transformational change which are explored throughout this essay.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

In places where Bibliobandido catches on the strongest, a few determinants have been important.

Involving Local Leaders

It only takes a few charismatic members within the community to get kids excited about something they may be uncertain about. In El Pital, besides Elly Goetz, two other key individuals played important roles to introduce me to the community and signal the importance of Bibliobandido. The invitation of Rachel McIntire, a long-time Un Mundo board member and artist-educator beloved by the community, ensured kids that they'd have a good time and signaled to parents that responsible adults were involved. Dolores, a self-confident mother with whom I stayed and member of the Library Club, introduced me to other moms and helped me find local resources.

Stakeholders' Ongoing Involvement

Buy-in from local teachers and parents also become important to shape Bibliobandido activities to help meet youths' identifiable needs in the long term. In El Pital, school teachers told us that they needed fun ways to encourage kids to edit their own writing. Accordingly, we invented "La Inspectora," a picky story eater who only eats perfectly tidy and grammatically correct texts (see Fig. 18.4). When readers meet the standards of this gourmand, they are rewarded with Inspectora's lip-smacking delight.

Authentic Youth Voice and Leadership

Second, youth-led leadership groups like the Library Club of El Pital root the Biblibandido legend in what other kids like and give it an authenticity. At the Seattle Public Library, which in 2015 adapted Bibliobandido as a mascot for their digital media programs, a youth group provides feedback on curricula that we introduce and encourage local branches to adapt the legend.

Avoid Coddling, Embrace Grit

It's worth pointing out that in the United States, some educators are wary of suggesting that Bibliobandido terrorizes; they marvel how we could have

Fig. 18.4 La Inspectora played by Yaquira, 2012. (Photo by Marisa Morán Jahn)

been so bold in El Pital. I have often recounted that when we were first inventing Bibliobandido, some members of the Library Club thought that we should create a "good" character because the last thing Honduras needed was yet another villain. Others thought that kids didn't need to be coddled (think of Roald Dahls' delightfully terrifying stories). This group also recognized that kids love to pretend that they're scared (e.g., ghost stories) and that mock fear can bring us together. In the end, the very reason for Bibliobandido's success was because he's a villain we all love to hate.

In Hola NYC in New York, there was one kid who was not terrified of Bibliobandido specifically, but terrified of masks in general. So we created a ritual wherein the teacher would sit down in the center of the carpet and ask the kids to help put on her costume—vest, bandana, gloves, hat, and lastly, the bandana. At the point where the kids handed the teacher the bandana and she started roaring, the kids would pretend that they were scared.

In a Bibliobandido-inspired adaptation intended for homeless infants and toddlers throughout Greater Boston, some social workers felt that the kids might be traumatized by a masked bandit Bibliobandido. The other half of the group felt that it was actually critical that these youth be allowed to experience these emotions in a safe environment because it allows them to gain confidence in navigating their own real-life situations. In the end, we created a developmentally appropriate variant named Mister Miss Match Cha-Cha-Cha (see Fig. 18.5). Because kids at this age are not yet processing along narrative lines, this character was said to crave patterns,

Fig. 18.5 Mister Miss Match Cha-Cha-Cha, 2018. A character who craves rhythm and rhyme but can't keep a beat

rhythm, and rhyme—but can't keep a beat. The activities we created involved kids in recognizing, creating, and singing patterns to "feed" to Mister Miss Match.

Porous Authorial Structure and Mutable Roles

Creating a porous structure whose variegated roles provide community members with different ways and levels of engagement fosters community buy-in and agency within the legend. Allowing the roles to augment and accommodate new desires and needs enables the cosmology to dynamically expand. For example, recognizing that many young boys wanted to also run around with a handkerchief and cowboy hat, the Library Club of El Pital created a sub group called Los Bandiditos who were ostensibly the sons or nephews of Bibliobandido. They would often run ahead of Bibliobandido to announce his arrival or bring back news. At the Sugar Hill Museum of Art and Storytelling in Harlem, New York City, we introduced a new character named Jalapeanut (see Fig. 18.6). Half jalapeno, half peanut, this character reflects the ethnic hybridity of kids in the region and New York City as a whole.

Building Others' Creative Leadership Capacity + Coda

Many often think it's me that dresses up each time as Bibliobandido. I've always insisted that Bibliobandido should be played by others in the community. Figuring out how Bibliobandido would move, growl, and demand a sacrifice of stories—playing a naughty role, especially for women in culturally conservative communities—is transformative and renders the community dramaturgically self-reliant.

As for my role, I sometimes negotiate with the terrorist, receiving his written demands, interpreting his gesture, translating when he will return. I see my function within the Bibliobandido cosmology akin to John the Baptist, a figure who pointed to and announced Christ's appearance. If John the Baptist is a witness serving as a transitional figure to Christ and Christianity, my role is as the bystander on the sidelines, mouth agape, pointing others to see Bibliobandido, believe, and play as if.

Fig. 18.6 The Jalapeanut, 2016. Half jalapeno, half peanut, this character was used to talk with young kids in New York City about the way that we are all "mix-ies" coming from different cultures. (Photo by Marisa Morán Jahn)

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