

## Changing a non-reading culture

Cotacachi, Ecuador

Report by Vicky Allen (Freelance Educator)

Is it possible to change a non-reading culture into one that enjoys reading and gains knowledge of the world through books? A culture where children and adults can be seen sitting around with a book in their hands? I believe it is very possible and thanks to the Extensive Reading Foundation, Fundación Uno a Uno is making an impact on reading in Cotacachi, Ecuador!

Through the financial help of the Extensive Reading Foundation, we were able to purchase almost 200 books and 16 tablets for the students at Fundación Uno a Uno, an after-school non-profit educational program for children, as well as adults. What started as a dream for a young Canadian couple, Pierre Etienne Banville and Candace Cho Banville, became a reality with the opening of Fundación Uno a Uno in 2015. They desire to empower the children and adults here in Cotacachi, Ecuador through the power to education. The program relies on donations, a number of volunteers, along with a small paid staff yet the students pay only a \$5 registration fee. There is no weekly fee for their classes and no fee for their curriculum books.

Since receiving the generous grant from the Extensive Reading Foundation, we've had to overcome a number of hurdles over the past several months in order to get the extensive reading program, including mReader, up and running. The first hurdle was that Ecuador is NOT a reading culture so many were not convinced that this was a wise decision. The next hurdle was that a number of the students do not have computers or tablets or even smart phones so it was necessary to include the purchase of tablets in order to use mReader with our program. After that, it was asking friends to 'mule' books into Ecuador for us from the United States and the UK. The last hurdle was getting reliable Internet at the school location. For 5 months, we struggled with unstable Internet service, therefore, it was not worth introducing it to other teachers just for them to become frustrated with the Internet and, ultimately, the Extensive Reading program. But, because our directors were determined to implement extensive reading into the school, they were willing to invest their money into getting reliable Internet for our reading program and it now finally works!



Back in February, there were only two classes using it, even with the poor Internet, and then two more classes joined before the end of the quimester when the new Internet was up and running. In one of the original classes, seven young Indigenous adult women read a total of **147 books**. All of these students moved from Level 1 books to Level 3 or 4! In the other class, which was comprised of adults, the attendance fluctuated greatly so the individual results were a bit different.

The adults still read a total of **84 books** and they became very excited when they passed the mReader quizzes! The motivation of these online quizzes is obvious with all ages!

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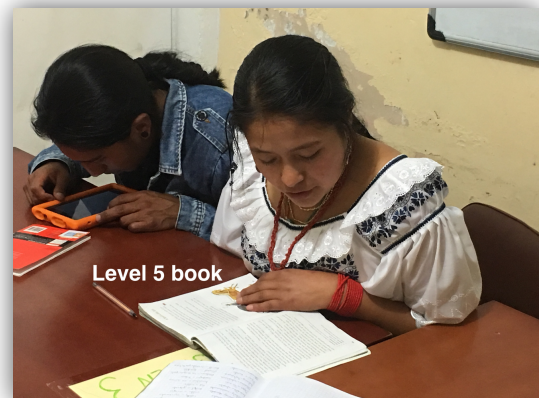
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One of my adult working students was so excited about reading in English that, during the weekend, he would search on the Internet to find more graded readers. After only 5 weeks of class (2 times per week), he had read and passed mReader quizzes for 17 books, moving from Level 1 to Level 4! His face was lit up because of his accomplishment and he told me that he loved reading in English, yet he had never liked reading in Spanish! If this was the only success story, it would make this project worthwhile!



In May, two more classes joined the Extensive Reading program. The students were hesitant at first and struggled with actually having to read the books BEFORE they took the quiz online. But, even with their hesitancy, the students read a total of **32 books** in about 6 weeks.

With summer here, the original class wanted to continue reading and have done so. In just 6 weeks, these 8 students have read and passed quizzes on a total of 54 books at Levels 3 – 5. One of my students, the one who struggled the most, is now reading Level 3 books and passing the quizzes! Back in February, she could not pass a simple quiz for Level 1 books! The confidence that she has gained is unbelievable!



Even though, there will still be struggles: the need for more books as the students continue to devour those books we already have and the need for all teachers to support this program in their classes, we, at Fundación Uno a Uno, are looking forward to the new quimester in the Fall and the potential reading successes with all of the teachers and students participating!

A huge thank you to the Extensive Reading Foundation and those individuals who help to financially provide these grants for places that could otherwise not afford to offer extensive reading to their students.