

Changing a non-reading culture, update

Cotacachi, Ecuador

Report by Vicky Allen (Freelance Educator)

I can't believe it has been almost three years since our Extensive Reading program started at Fundación Uno a Uno, thanks to the financial help of the Extensive Reading Foundation and their donors and the enthusiastic backing of the foundation's directors, Pierre Etienne Banville and Candace Cho Banville, along with the curriculum director, Suzanne Prenger!

So much has happened since that time. As stated in my preliminary report, we had huge successes once the program became functional. The students involved were still making progress by leaps and bounds and, if you asked them, reading in English was a joy for them, making it possible to travel to different places and times and meet new people without leaving their home town, all through the books they were reading. It was fun to see the different preferences in genres by the students. One of my very proper indigenous students loved not just scary stories but horror stories. Others loved the romance books while still others got lost in the mystery stories. Through Extensive Reading the students were not forced to read books chosen by the teacher or dictated by the curriculum book. They were selecting for themselves!

The struggle with the program was in getting other teachers to buy into the Extensive Reading philosophy and that was very difficult and soon became impossible. This frustrated me greatly until I realized that those teachers were still using the books and the tablets purchased through the grant. Their students weren't reading extensively but they were reading. Through this grant, books were in the hands of even the youngest students and all of this in basically a non-reading culture.



Is the program at Uno a Uno making a difference in the overall reading culture in Cotacachi? Maybe not a huge difference but it is making a difference in the lives of the students at Uno a Uno. Fundación Uno a Uno is a non-profit school with the students paying only a total of \$5 for about 12 weeks of afterschool or evening classes. It is supported by volunteer workers mostly due to the generous support of our directors and a few sponsors.



When COVID hit, the school closed down as per government orders. I had returned to the United States and, as requested by one of my students, was able to continue to teach online through Zoom. At first, it started with just two students yet those two continued to read online through Xreading, which was a wonderful option when the physical

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books were not available. Gradually, Uno a Uno opened up for a limited number of students and a couple more online classes, one for me and one for another teacher. Because of the foundation's generosity, these students were not asked to pay even the \$5 fee. All classes were offered for free. My Zoom adult students have changed over these months and are now from different cities/towns in Ecuador. Some have stayed with me the whole time. Others have joined part way through and still others have had to leave for work responsibilities or new entrepreneur adventures. Yet, all of them will say that reading extensively has helped them greatly in developing their English skills. One of my students, who started reading the low-level picture books only 2 years ago, is now reading the higher-level classics and doing very well.



All of us at Uno a Uno want to thank the Extensive Reading Foundation for their very generous help to establish our reading program in Cotacachi, Ecuador and beyond!