



Save the Children Promoting Literacy in Latin America

2015



Save the Children

PROMOTING LITERACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Six Approaches from Save the Children in the Region

Save the Children
2015

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2013, Save the Children's Education Global Initiative convened a meeting on the organisation's priorities in Education in the Latin America and Caribbean region. One of the agreements that was established by the participants was on the creation of *learning networks* as mediums for exchanging knowledge, approaches, materials and methodologies developed by the organisation in its work on education. In this way, the *Latin American Basic Education Network* (Red Latinoamericana de Educación Básica) was born within Save the Children. Since then, the Network has been prioritising study and exchange themes, and has consolidated itself as a working group making advances in studying the practices it has developed in the region.

In 2014, the theme of focus was program analysis *to promote and improve literacy learning* in the most disadvantaged schools and communities of six countries in the region. This publication is a synthesis of the discussions on the six approaches studied, as well as their main challenges and potentials.

With this publication the *Network* seeks: to identify the achievements and challenges of each approach; strengthen the exchange of



experiences in order to improve the quality of interventions; and positively impact the pedagogical practices of teachers and the learning of the poorest children, families and communities where Save the Children works.

SUMMARY

The six approaches presented in this publication are the result of the work carried out by Save the Children's educational teams in six countries of Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru). Each approach sets out specific conceptual, pedagogical and

methodological perspectives utilised in order to strengthen literacy skills in children and adolescents and to have an impact on the improvement of their learning.

The six approaches are directed towards a population between the approximate ages of five and 16. They address common problems related to children's and adolescents' insufficient capabilities to understand and make use of what they are reading in their immediate context. In addition, in most cases the family and social context of students does not favour the development of best practices in reading and writing. This is reflected in their low academic achievement, poor results in national and international tests, and in some cases, school dropout.

The approaches are developed from different conceptual and pedagogical emphases. However, **the most prevalent methodology was the constructivist methodology**, in which one "learns by doing" through cooperative work and supporting one another. They also include the **rights approach**, which addresses issues related to equity, inclusion and multiculturalism.

An important aspect of all the approaches is the **integration of the family and the community in the literacy training and learning of children**.

This generates greater opportunities for the children to incorporate literacy into the daily lives.

Moreover, the **capacity-building and support provided to teachers**, conceptually as well as in pedagogical practice, is significant.

The approaches include **didactic material** to utilise with children, teachers and parents. In some cases, the material is standardised, while, in others it is adapted to the characteristics of the specific population and context.

Meanwhile, **the approaches still have various challenges to overcome**. Among these, we can observe the need for:

- i) greater precision in evaluation tools, as well as time to apply, process analyse and inform on the results of the evaluation;
- ii) incorporating these into school work plans in conjunction with other disciplines in order to guarantee their sustainability;
- iii) adequately integrating bilingualism into literacy teaching in countries with a large indigenous population, and producing more material in indigenous languages to stimulate greater equity in opportunities for indigenous children;
- (iv) the approaches relying on volunteer work have the additional challenge of reducing high turnover in programs.

Some of the lessons learned from studying these approaches can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ The development of reading and writing abilities also strengthens social and emotional capacities; contributes to developing critical thinking; nurtures language abilities to better communicate with others; and provides the tools necessary for personal and community expression.
- ✓ The extensive communication with departmental and municipal educational authorities and the guarantees provided by local authorities for the acceptance of the approaches in the communities and schools facilitates their permanence and sustainability.
- ✓ Teacher capacity-building must be experiential and practical in order to demonstrate the functionality of the methodologies. Support provided to teachers in the classroom is indispensable for improving practices and creating a sense of ownership of the training process. Furthermore, it is important to generate spaces which allow teachers to discover for themselves the joy of reading so that they may in turn transfer this joy to children.
- ✓ The use of libraries in the schools and municipalities as a resource for promoting literacy is fundamental in widening and diversifying the reading options of children and youth according to their preferences, needs and interests.
- ✓ Involving different members of the community as volunteers in the projects and programs in an active and participative manner - whether they are students, teachers-in-training, or others - brings about better ownership of the approaches inside the community.
- ✓ Developing practical activities with parents allows them to understand the objectives and scope of the approaches and to achieve, in this way, better commitment and participation. The role of parents in the literacy training processes of their children is fundamental in accomplishing the incorporation of literacy in the daily lives of children.



Teacher training session

I. Why Literacy in the LAC Region?

Despite the progress in the area of education made by countries around the world in the last 10 years, there are still a large number of children that are deprived of this fundamental right. The situation is even more dramatic in developing countries, as is the case in almost all of Latin America, including the so-called medium income countries¹, where social inequality and unequal access to education continue to affect these populations. The UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on compliance with the goals of the Education for All (EFA) campaign in 2014² provides evidence for this situation. According to this study, 57 million children around the world are deprived of their right to education because they do not attend school. Of this figure, 2,726,000 children are in Latin America and the Caribbean³. Just over 50% of the Latin American and Caribbean countries have achieved universal primary school coverage, but there are still 3.7 million children not attending schools. In 2012, 16% of out-of-school children from the entire region were

located in one country that has been the victim of a prolonged armed conflict - Colombia. More than 20% of primary school students in the region abandon their studies before completing primary school.



Just over 50% of the Latin American and Caribbean countries have achieved universal primary school coverage, but there are still 3.7 million children not attending schools.

¹ Seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, México, Peru, and Uruguay) have been classified as middle income countries due to their strong macro-economic management. However, it is generally accepted that it is possible to "cheat" this classification, since according to socio-economic studies, macro-economic management is not a guarantee of success unless it takes into account the development of other variables such as competitiveness, productivity, management of the labour market, and equitable access to education, health and employment. These variables aren't always evident for these emerging economies.

² Teaching and Learning. Achieving Quality for All. EU: UNESCO, 2014

³ Teaching and Learning, page. 66

However, access is not the only crisis, but is compounded by a low quality of learning even for those with access to education. A third of children in primary school around the world are not learning basic skills. They do not know how to read, write, or conduct basic mathematical operations, which has negative effects on the future of children, but also on the economies of countries. Latin America is characterized by high levels of social inequality and inequity. Children that come from marginalized environments struggle compared to children from higher income households. In El Salvador for example, only 42% of children from the poorest homes complete their primary school education and can handle basic concepts, compared to 84% from the richest homes. In Guatemala, Panama and Peru, urban children had 15% higher scores in mathematics and reading compared to children from rural areas. Illiteracy rates have been reduced by 26% across the region, a figure that is far from the forecasted 50%. It is estimated that only three countries – Bolivia, Peru and Suriname – will achieve the established goal for literacy. Other countries – Colombia and Nicaragua – still have a long way to go in achieving this objective.

The relationship between education and better living conditions is also reflected in individual income: one year of school increases a person's

income level by 10%. In Guatemala adults have an average of 3.6 years of education. In 2005 this had increased by just 2.3 years compared to the average in 1965. In the rest of Latin America the average increased from 3.6 years in 1965 to 7.5 in 2005. If Guatemala had achieved more than double its average this would have resulted in an additional \$500 dollars of annual income per person.⁴

Education provides possibilities to improve other aspects of people's lives: it provides knowledge and tools for the development of human potential and is a catalyst for the achievement of other goals. As we have seen, better education is based on improvements in Literacy, which improves human development; provides a foundation for a democratic society, favours changes in attitudes that benefit environmental protection, and empowers women, who have historically been deprived of this right.

The transformation of the meaning of literacy

Nowadays, literacy is considered a social and cultural practice, elevated to the status of a citizenship right. However, the current conceptualization of literacy has not always been the same. For a long time, the responsibility of teaching literacy skills was delegated solely to the

⁴ Teaching and learning, P. 14

schools, with the aggravating factor that in schools reading and writing were reduced to mechanical skills far removed from social practices. This model was dominant in Latin America until the middle of the 20th Century; the worst of the matter is that it continues to exist in the pedagogical practices of many teachers to this day. What is problematic is that it generates a mechanical literacy with very poor reading comprehension, which means that it does not create readers for life, nor users of the written language.

Thanks to the contributions of various disciplines such as psychology, anthropology,

and linguistics among others, the reader has been recognised as an active being that builds meaning, converting reading and writing into forms of transformation and growth, and that these skills are not just ends in themselves. Each field has made its own contributions, promoting the idea of research on literacy as an inter-disciplinary issue. Authors such as Kenneth Goodman (USA), Frank Smith (England), Louise Rosenblatt (USA), Bruno Bethelheim (Austria), Roger Chartier (France) and Michel de Certau (France), among others, have conducted research in the framework of their own areas of knowledge, but all agree



Better education is based on improvements in Literacy, which provides a foundation for a democratic society and empowers women, who have historically been deprived of this right.

on recognising the importance of the reader and his/her vital and significant relationship with the written language. Based on these new approaches, reading is a complex process of constructing meaning, which involves the emotional, affective, psychological, cognitive and linguistic facets of human beings. It is the reader who builds meaning based on their own frameworks of thought and previous experiences. Reading and writing are actions that permeate everyday practices, never ceasing to contribute to individual growth. This is the biggest challenge for schools today. As Delia Lerner⁵ rightly said:

“what is necessary is that we make the school a community of readers that engage with the texts in order to seek responses to problems that they need to resolve, endeavouring to find information to better understand some aspect of the world that concerns them, seeking arguments to defend a position that they are committed to, or to refute a position that they consider dangerous or unjust, wishing to learn about other ways of life... What is necessary is to create an environment in schools in which reading and writing are living and essential practices.”⁶

⁵ Delia Lerner: Argentinian researcher who has directed a range of studies in the area of teaching literacy. Titular Professor of Primary Didactics in the Department of Sciences of Education of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires.

⁶ Lerner, Delia. *Leer y escribir en la escuela: lo real, lo posible y lo necesario*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001. Pág 26

What does it mean to have literacy during childhood?

Research has demonstrated that children that are born and grow in literate homes enjoy many benefits throughout their lives: they express themselves better, they find the formal learning of literacy skills easier and they have greater possibilities of transforming themselves into autonomous and critical readers.

The PIRLS 2011 reading comprehension measurement study⁷ demonstrated the importance of a literate home in improving the reading capacity of children and providing an early start for participating in a literacy culture in a playful and pleasant manner. The parents of the children with the best results in the study reported that:

- (a) they themselves are readers;
- (b) they usually involve their children in literacy activities;
- (c) they have more learning resources; and that
- (d) their children attended early education.

The PIRLS 2011 study highlighted the importance of enjoying reading, or in other words, the personal component which derives from a desire rather than an obligation to read.

⁷ PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, Boston College, 2012



Throughout a child's development, time dedicated to reading is essential for developing literacy competencies, or even better, the capacity to enjoy reading.

The study categorized students with parents that liked reading based on seven considerations centred on whether or not they read for pleasure. The international result was that students with parents that liked reading (32%) had a substantially higher reading capacity compared to those children that reported that their parents did not like to read (11%).

The Latin American countries that participated in PIRLS 2011 were Colombia and Honduras. In Colombia, 22% of students had parents that liked to read, achieving a score of 475 points, compared to the standard 500 used as a centre point for the PIRLS study. In Honduras, 21% of students had parents that liked to read achieving a score of 480 points, still below the standard.

In terms of literacy-based activities prior to the onset of primary education, in Colombia 34% of students reported frequent literacy activities while in Honduras the figure was 30%, with both countries below the international standard in this area.⁸

Throughout a child's development, time dedicated to reading is essential for developing literacy competencies, or even better, the capacity to enjoy reading.

PIRLS included reports from parents on the frequency of 9 activities with their children such as playing with letters of the alphabet, reading to them out loud and writing letters and words. Internationally, 37% of students whose parents regularly engage in these activities demonstrated better academic performance than those whose parents only did this occasionally (60%), and the small percentage (3%) of students whose parents never participated in these activities (3%) had the worst results.

8 PIRLS, p. 136

In Colombia and Honduras, 10% of students who took the test achieved results higher than the PIRLS international standard; that is, they scored 550 out of 500, while only 1% achieved the highest result⁹. However, the two countries were below the international standard, with a combined 81% of students scoring below the center point.¹⁰

What family and reading contribute at an early age are not just advantages for academic life. Reading during childhood nurtures the imagination, develops creativity and provides emotional encouragement thanks to the affection provided through symbolic words. Lullabies, songs, nursery rhymes and oral stories “sustain” the child, providing them with security and the resources to build notions of metaphorical time and space, in other words growing with the capacity to create possible worlds.

In one of his talks in Brazil, the Colombian psychoanalyst Evelio Cabrejo who is a member of ACCES¹¹ and lives in Paris said something very enlightening: “children need food, affection and books”. These three items were placed at the same level and given the same importance: food for the body, affection for the heart and books for access to knowledge.

⁹ PIRLS, p. 79

¹⁰ PIRLS, p. 83

¹¹ Cultural Action against Exclusion and Segregation (ACCES). Organization that has operated in France since 1982 through the joint work of various specialists in different disciplines along with storytellers that take books to families' homes in order to share them with children and their parents.

If children have not been encouraged to read in their homes, then they can and should receive encouragement to read at school.

The linguist and researcher Emilia Ferreiro¹² stated that “the experience of being read to out loud is not something which is experienced by all children before entering school and is essential for understanding that strange world of “spiders’ legs” (letters of the alphabet) on a page which generate words”.¹³ Ferreiro insists that the first thing a child needs to become a reader is enjoyment, and that this is cultivated as much at home as it is at school. She insists that it is vitally important to have teachers that are readers who can transmit the enjoyment of reading to children, teachers that are trained, and above all, passionate about their work. “People talk a lot about the enjoyment of reading, but how can this enjoyment be transmitted if the teacher has never felt this enjoyment because they have never read anything more than official instructions?”¹⁴

Writing: a necessary condition for the exercising of citizenship

Nowadays it is essential to conceive reading and writing as inseparable practices. The traditional

¹² Argentinian researcher living in Mexico, who works in the Centre for Research and Advanced Studies of the National Polytechnic Institute of Mexico.

¹³ Interview with Emilia Ferreiro published in Canal Cultura: <http://canalcultura.org/2015/01/21/si-los-docentes-no-leen-son-incapaces-de-transmitir-el-placer-de-la-lectura/>

¹⁴ Idem



school, in its mechanic conceptualization, had radically separated these practices up to the point of converting writing into the mere exercise of copying.

In the current information society and the development of technology, writing has not only recuperated its close relationship with reading, but has also become a tool for individual expression, social mobilization and the full exercise of citizens' rights.

As Jesús Martín Barbero precisely puts it:¹⁵

“Writing, however, is beginning to change shape, being located in a different environment: that of cultural rights tied to the recognition

¹⁵ Jesús Martín Barbero: Researcher born in Spain and living in Colombia. Doctor of Philosophy, with studies in anthropology and semiotics. Expert in culture and the media, he produced important theoretical work in Latin America.

of differences and the exercise of citizenship”¹⁶, above all with the increasing support of new technologies and virtual communication which has become the daily form of interaction and an entry point for relating to the younger generations. This new form of communication is exceptionally literacy-based.

For all of these reasons, and convinced of the benefits that literacy has for the lives of children and their families, Save the Children works with schools, communities, Ministries of Education, teachers and other groups related to literacy programs; this work has the goal of contributing to improving the evaluations of academic performance, but also seeks to create interest and enjoyment in reading and

¹⁶ Martín-Barbero, Jesús y Lluich, Gemma. *Lectura, escritura y desarrollo en la sociedad de la información*. Bogotá: CERLALC, 2011. P. 39

writing among children in particular, and in educational communities in general. It is for this reason that Save the Children also implements teacher-training programs and promotes projects in schools that go beyond the classroom and involve families and communities. Some examples will be explored in the following chapter.

II. Six approaches to be shared

The following six approaches are the result of work carried out by the Save the Children Education team in six Latin American countries (Peru, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia and Nicaragua). Each approach lays out the conceptual, educational and methodological practices followed in order to strengthen literacy skills in boys, girls, adolescents and youth. They act as a reference in the promotion of learning in the area of literacy.

The approaches identify different ways to successfully impact the development of literacy skills, the capacity to question, analyse and reflect on a situation, as well as to enjoy reading or listening to a story. These approaches are strengthened on a day-to-day basis by the reflection and practice of teachers, partner organisations and the professionals of Save the

Children in the schools and communities where the organisation works.

These types of approaches provide a basis for creating and nurturing trust among students, teachers and other social actors that intervene in the educational process. It is a bond which is not created by 'transmitting knowledge or a teaching style', but rather through first-hand experience, by fostering an atmosphere in which children learn from each other and not exclusively from those who teach them, and by ensuring that teachers and professionals inspire students to engage in this type of learning. This, moreover, is a way to contribute to children and youth's ability to transform their relationship with literacy, and to incorporate it into their everyday lives.

The following is a synopsis of the approaches and the social actors that implemented them.



Read Together, Learn Together - Peru and Guatemala

Description of the problem

Various studies have proven that learning literacy skills is more difficult when children are taught in a language that is different to their mother tongue. This situation jeopardizes children's

learning in diverse areas of knowledge. A longitudinal study conducted by the World Bank ten years ago showed that in the five countries in Latin America with the largest indigenous populations, indigenous students had significantly poorer educational results compared to non-indigenous students. Within these countries, Guatemala and Peru showed the greatest educational inequity with the widest gaps.

In order to reduce this gap, Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB - Spanish acronym) has been implemented in both countries. Nevertheless, it has been detected that indigenous children receive instructions in Spanish in their early years, which can affect their understanding and thus cause a delay in their learning. Another factor is classroom learning time, which is very limited for children, requiring greater attention to be paid to factors revolving around the family and the community influencing acquiring literacy in Spanish and in their mother tongue, in order to strengthen these with educational interventions and the promotion of literacy.

Read Together, Learn Together is a bi-national program implemented in Peru and Guatemala by Save the Children. The 'Literacy Boost'¹⁷ methodology is used, which has an important evaluation/research component. The methodology has had very good results in other countries where it has been implemented including: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe, among others.

Research

Read Together, Learn Together, apart from being a community and educational strategy, is a research project that seeks to prove that *Literacy Boost* strengthens reading skills in children. The participating schools sign a consent form in order to participate in the research and are randomly distributed into the following groups:

- Group A: Schools with interventions in the school and community
- Group B: Schools with interventions only in the school
- Group C: Control schools with intervention programs by the Ministry of Education of each country

What does the project propose?

Read Together, Learn Together seeks to improve reading skills in indigenous native languages and in Spanish among boys and girls in the early grade levels. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to have an impact on language teaching. It is for this reason that the project proposes to improve how reading is taught both in the native language and in Spanish, by focusing on the 5 basic skills:

- (i) Knowledge of letters/the alphabet;
- (ii) Phonemic Knowledge;
- (iii) Reading fluency;

¹⁷ Literacy Boost is a Save the Children program that aims to create a reading culture both within and outside classrooms through three strategies: (i) measurement of the reading skills of children; (ii) teacher training; and (iii) involvement of the community in the learning of reading skills.

(iv) Vocabulary;

(v) Reading comprehension.

Another important factor in developing readers is access to books. The project therefore proposes an improvement in the access and use of reading materials both within and outside of the schools and to increase the actions of parents to support the development of reading skills of children in their native language and boost the amount of reading practice.



The intervention zones and the population reached

In Peru the program is implemented in the provinces of Andahuaylas, Chincheros and Huancarama in the Apurímac region. It focuses on work with 145 schools and rural communities.

The project is aimed at children whose native language is Quechua and/or Spanish in rural zones, from first to third grades of primary school, and its activities directly involve parents, members of the community, teachers and carer givers.

In Guatemala, the project is implemented in five K'iche-speaking municipalities in the region of Quiché, working with 150 schools, with collaboration from the Ministry of Education.

As in Peru, the project strategy has its roots in the *Literacy Boost* methodology. It has similar aspects to the Peru approach, though its activities are catered to the specific national and local context.

The population with which the project works is composed of indigenous and non-indigenous children living in rural areas, between the ages of 6 and 14 years old and attending primary school, along with parents and teachers from the schools and local communities.

The activities implemented in the approaches in both countries are similar, allowing them to be explained jointly.

Description of the activities

The intervention is implemented through two components:

- (i) In-classroom activities, focused on the training and empowerment of teachers, allowing them to teach and support children in mastering basic reading skills, linking methodology with the school curriculum and generating a literacy-rich environment in the classroom; and
- (ii) Community Activities, focused on strengthening the participation of parents and

community members in developing reading skills in their native language and providing opportunities to practice these skills.

Both components include the creation and/or provision of context-appropriate reading materials in the native language, along with activities promoting a commitment to reading, above all with the community (as in rural areas there is little or no access to reading materials outside of the school).

Within the in classroom component, group workshops are conducted for classroom teachers, and delivered by a local team of specialists, in this case project staff.



These workshops involve the 9 modules as part of the training program:

1. Introduction to the development and teaching of reading for children in early grades
2. Educational evaluation
3. Tackling problems of language in a literacy-training environment
4. Knowledge of the letters/principles of the alphabet
5. Phonological awareness
6. Reading fluency
7. Vocabulary
8. Reading comprehension
9. Conclusion

During the workshops, the teachers observe, discuss and practice techniques in developing basic reading skills promoted by *Literacy Boost*. In addition, they receive capacity building in Spanish language teaching as well as in the Quechua language and culture in Peru, and the K'iche language and culture in Guatemala. The specialists **support** the teachers on an **individual basis**, working with them during their class reading sessions, as well as in groups through Learning Communities, involving shared feedback sessions in which everyone contributes or gives an opinion. The goal

is for the teaching and learning process of reading skills to be conducted in the children's original language, assuming that the teachers understand the language. If not, this is delivered in Spanish.

The Community Activities component aims to strengthen the participation of parents, along with community leaders and authorities in developing reading skills in the children's native language and providing opportunities to practice. This includes the creation and delivery of reading materials in the native language, some of which are created by the project team.

The following activities are implemented:

Selection, training and support of reading promoters. Members of the community who volunteer for the project are trained and supported until they are capable of implementing reading promotion activities on their own. Any member of the community who knows how to read and write, shows commitment and is capable of completing the activities can be selected.

The participation of volunteers is important because these are community members, known by the children and parents, and they also receive training in monitoring these processes.

Reading Banks. These consist of a range of reading materials that can be accessed by children and members of the community.

In Peru, a market research study was conducted to select appropriate reading materials for children from 1st to 3rd Grades. Some of these were donated, while others were bought, and new reading materials were created in the native language (Quechua Chanca) by the professionals in the project team. Reading Banks have been implemented in 52 communities, offering more than 200 publications and are located in the homes of the reading promotion volunteers.

In Guatemala, reading material is kept in a box with around 140 books and reading sheets including short stories and fables presented bilingually. These are delivered to each community so they may be borrowed by children, taken to their homes to read and shared with their family. In both countries the Reading Banks are managed by the volunteer reading promoters.

Workshops for parents. These are meetings with school children's parents where tools and information are shared to them support their children in the reading process. Moreover, in



Reading Banks. These consist of a range of reading materials that can be accessed by children and members of the community.

these sessions, concrete suggestions are made that can be practiced in the home.

The workshops cover the following themes:

1. Language development and literacy in children
2. Daily activities to initiate children in reading
3. How to read to children 1
4. How to read to children 2
5. Feedback on how to read *to* and *with* children
6. Development of reading materials to help children learn how to read
7. Reading corners

Reading activities and events for children.

The project includes a variety of community activities, designed to complement school activities, aimed at children and occurring on a weekly basis. These activities include: Reading Camps, Reading Buddies, Story Time, Reading Friends and annual events such as Reading Festivals, Fairs or Marathons.

Reading Camps. In this activity, students are given the opportunity to enjoy a place outside of school where reading becomes a fun activity. Children also create reading materials to use at home and with their friends. These camps are

implemented by the volunteer reading promoters.

Story Time. These activities can be done at any time, in any place, and with any person. The purpose is to tell or read stories and share wisdom and history with the children. This may take place at home, in an area within the community, or in any place deemed important for the activity. The stories may be taken from oral traditions, books, poems, historical accounts, or could be made up. Story Time establishes a pre-arranged time each week for volunteers and other community figures to read or tell stories to the children. The activity encourages all members of the community who are interested to join in, including those who cannot read, regardless of their age or educational level. The activity only requires the ability to tell or read stories to sweep the children away in a world of imagination and creativity.

These are moments in which children meet with volunteers in a community space to read and tell stories. Members of the community who do not know how to read and write are also involved, as they are able to tell stories and transmit community-based knowledge to the children.

Reading Friends. This is an activity that takes place outside of the classroom but is organised by teachers (in the case of Peru). Children work in pairs with other students from higher grades to form Reading Buddies, providing an



additional model of better reading. The younger students regularly select books from the library or the Reading Bank administrated by the teacher at the school and the older children help them read or read to them. The reading texts are produced by the teachers in many cases, and also by the project, sending them to the school for the Reading Friends. The older students also help the younger ones with their schoolwork, school attendance and other responsibilities.

Reading Festivals, Fairs or Marathons. These are sessions that stimulate reading through contests and competitions in which students, parents, local authorities, teachers and school principals participate. These take place once a year, creating a space to involve the school and community in reading/literacy activities.

The Magic of Reading in Guatemala

The Magic of Reading is an educational methodology promoted by the Save the Children Guatemala (SCG) Education Program, which aims to generate a significant degree of learning integrated in literacy. The reading projects that are implemented also help to develop other childhood skills in key areas – primarily in promoting child participation and leadership.

The implementation of the Magic of Reading program is undertaken in conjunction

with the Ministry of Education authorities, complementing and strengthening the ‘Let’s Read Together’ National Reading Program. In the first period of the SCG program, it reached a total of 20,417 children between the ages of 6 and 12 from 136 primary schools benefitting from Educational Resource Learning Centres (CREA – Centros de Recursos Educativos para el Aprendizaje) in the municipalities of Chiquimula, Quiché and Ciudad de Guatemala. Of these CREAs, 27 were organised in order to promote bilingual literacy (Maya/Spanish). The project also carried out teacher training, training of parents and coordination with local authorities in the targeted areas.

Description of the Problem

Implementation of The Magic of Reading program is a process designed to address the educational needs of children that are disadvantaged due to problems of educational quality and social marginalization. In terms of national educational achievements, in 2012, only 48% of students passed the standardized test in reading and 46% in mathematics.¹⁸

The illiteracy rate in youth and adults continues to be high. However, according to the National Literacy Committee (CONALFA), a significant reduction has been noted from 38.78% to

18 <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/portal/index.asp>

16% over almost two decades thanks to certain successful programs.

The departments with the highest illiteracy level are Alta Verapaz, Huehuetenango, Quiché and San Marcos, regions with large indigenous populations. These are affected by high levels of poverty reaching up to 75% in certain communities (Agence France-Press Guatemala)¹⁹.

Similarly, bilingualism continues to be an important challenge for this project, given that according to the results of the initial diagnostic there are low levels of literacy in the indigenous population and teachers have difficulty communicating with indigenous children in their native tongues.

What does the approach propose?

The Magic of Reading seeks to promote the development of monolingual and bilingual literacy skills in children through an active methodology, promoting the participation of the educational community and the active participation of children. The objectives of the program are:

i) to encourage among students the habit of reading, initially in their mother tongue, and subsequently in a second language, respecting their sociocultural contexts;

ii) to encourage autonomous learning through available materials for research;

(iii) to support teachers' work through a diversity of educational, instructive and audio-visual materials with a setting catered to the emotional needs of children and the pedagogical process;

(iv) to promote the participation of the educational community; and

(v) to promote an intercultural dialogue for peaceful coexistence.

Description of the activities

The initial component of the approach is a diagnostic test to evaluate the literacy skills of children. Next, the educational community is organized and teaching staff are trained to apply the materials in order to promote literacy in the CREAs, to organize Reading Corners and to apply strategies to promote monolingual and bilingual reading comprehension. This approach applies a focus and methodology based on the use of CREAs, and school, community and municipal libraries. Following this, kits consisting of educational materials and bibliographical and audio-visual resources are donated. The various reading projects are then implemented, such as Reading Fairs, the Travelling Book, the Reading Bag, the Travelling Basket, the Reading Truck, Children reading to Children, Reading Circles, My Municipality

¹⁹ AFP: International news agency that provides global economic and political information.

Reads, Intercultural Corners, the creation of anthologies based on community traditions, the compilation of Mayan oral traditions in different literary texts and dramatic and theatrical projects in the Mayan mother tongue.

The process of implementation and improvement of the CREAs is supported by monitoring and evaluation, technical and educational support and the documentation of successful approaches.

The project is built upon a bilingual and intercultural, equity and inclusivity rights-based approach. It is equally based on the principles of social constructivism in line with the National Foundation Curriculum of the Ministry of Education. It uses child friendly methodologies. Its learning approach is based on the analysis of problems, and projects promoting informative education, but with a problem-based and formative focus. The project seeks to develop children's capacities to solve problems, to successfully carry out daily life tasks and to transform reality according to their age and level of development. In this process, the role of teachers as guides, counsellors, condition creators, learning facilitators and organizers of academic work is vital.

The CREAs or CREA-BIs are learning spaces that provide favourable conditions for the development and promotion of literacy and the application and development of materials with the participation of children. These spaces strengthen children's comprehensive development, self-esteem and identity, mainly as a result of the work of the bilingual and intercultural CREAs, with involvement from the educational community.

Reading and Writing about Risks in Colombian schools

This project is developed in the framework of a wider program called Long Live Education (*Vive la Educación*).

Description of the Problem

Colombia faces important challenges in guaranteeing access, retention and quality education to its children and youth, especially those that live in areas of high vulnerability due to the armed conflict, emergencies caused by natural disasters, and school-based violence.

In terms of educational quality, this population achieves low scores in national standardized tests. Additionally, the country lags behind in international evaluations, particularly in the subjects of language and mathematics.

Some findings related to reading and writing, according to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) conducted in Colombia, shows that:

- A significant proportion of students do not reach the minimum levels of reading ability. Six out of every 10 primary students have difficulty understanding and interpreting complex texts.
- The difficulties experienced by children in reading and writing are largely related to pedagogical practices implemented in schools, the family and society in general.
- The resources available in schools are insufficient to guarantee significant learning among students.
- The economic conditions and scarcity of resources for learning, both at home and at school, restrict the academic and social performance of the students.



Research conducted in the country suggests that children who show difficulties in reading and writing often fail the year, thus creating a population at risk of dropping out of school, especially during the first years of primary school.

Description of the Project

Save the Children has embarked on the *Vive la Educación* (Long Live Education) program in the departments of Cauca and Nariño in Colombia. Within the framework of this program, a comprehensive strategy has been developed, understood as a working pathway to be implemented in the Schools and *Secretariats of Education*²⁰, focused on addressing and managing three types of risk in an articulated manner: (i) natural disasters (ii) armed conflict (iii) school violence.

The management of risks in the strategy is related to the capacity building of social actors (boys, girls, youth, teachers, families and officials of the Ministry of Education) to respond to life-threatening situations.

To ensure that risk management is a practical and formative exercise, literacy processes and the development of citizenship skills is used as an educational opportunity, since risks can be read, **understood and written in order to anticipate**

²⁰ The *Secretariats of Education* in Colombia are decentralized entities of the Ministry of Education that administer the management of education at a local level.



and act responsibly in an emergency or crisis. As such, skills consist in knowledge and actions that allow one to anticipate risks surrounding the educational community.

The comprehensive strategy is comprised of a careful selection of books that are delivered to Schools as part of the materials included in the Pedagogical Kit²¹. These books have been chosen because, aside from their strong aesthetic value, they serve as a pretext to discussing aspects of everyday life. Reading recreates life and death, the constant tension that comes with the risk of walking through a forest, running away from home or running an errand to the shop; all of these present dangers that must be

21 A kit containing pedagogical and learning materials designed to help manage risks that occur in schools.

addressed to avoid serious consequences. In this way, reading and writing strengthen the ability of children, adolescents, teachers and families to express perspectives, argue ideas, develop critical thinking and generate opinions related to the management of risks and the construction of agreements for living in peace.

On the other hand, authentic everyday texts that warn against risks are also used. For example, these warn children to check the expiry dates on food packaging, danger warnings on pesticides or fertilizer, recycling symbols on waste bins and signs for meeting points in case of an evacuation, among others. Similarly, these safety warning guides have a strong level of authenticity, showing that reading and writing do not occur

exclusively in the classroom but are also required in everyday life.

What does the project propose?

The project's aim is to generate school learning environments that strengthen the capacities of children and youth to manage the risks present in the school context, using literacy and the development of citizenship skills as crosscutting themes. To achieve this aim, the project proposes to use diverse textual resources with students, teachers and families; to create spaces (reading stations) to read, discuss and produce texts in schools related to risk management; to train and instil in youth mediators literacy strategies so that they can facilitate reading in their families as part of a service provided to the community; and to bring together parents and communities in activities on risk-management in the home.

Stories and children's books are used in this comprehensive strategy as a powerful teaching tool that allows for discussion of situations and content, as well as putting into practice emotional, cognitive and communicative skills.

The target population for the project are boys and girls in primary school in urban and rural areas, affected by violence and the conflict, along with parents, teachers and caregivers in the schools and communities.

The following are general guidelines for working with stories:

- (i) Pose questions that foster the development of emotional, cognitive and communicative skills;*
- (ii) Interrupt the story when tension is created between two characters and invite the students to predict what could happen. Brainstorm ideas, relating them, when possible, to the risks presented in the story;*
- (iii) Transcend the story so that the students may relate it to their own lives and experiences;*
- (iv) Promote the production of different texts where new stories are created, emotions and sentiments are expressed, personal identities are developed, and where plurality, democracy and participation in the community are promoted. In all cases examples of risk management should be highlighted.*

Description of the activities within the framework of the comprehensive strategy

Presentation of the strategy to the Secretariats of Education and schools. A presentation is made to the *Secretariats of Education*, detailing the strategy and specifying its importance and pedagogical and methodological relevance, along with its alignment to national and local policies related to risk management.

Characterization of the schools. Initially, there is recognition of the ‘current state’ of literacy processes, using information available from the schools.

Authentic and everyday texts such as the project handbook: show that literacy does not only belong in the classroom, but is also part of everyday practices within the home. The handbook contains activities for playing, writing and reading in the school and home, related to risk management, tips for positive parenting, reading and writing.

Textual profiles activity to promote reading and writing. In order to work with reading and writing, diverse texts are analysed from the point of view of an author, in order for students to write their own stories afterwards.

Reading and Writing Stations. These are spaces for shared reading which allow the exploration of different interpretations and emotions that the same text may produce. The activity is carried out by the mediators of the comprehensive strategy, and is supported by the youth mediators of the schools.

Youth Literacy mediators. Students completing their community service requirement are trained in pedagogical strategies based on: reading, writing, oral language and games, that bring

families closer to the educational processes of their children and youth, as well as the school.

Extracurricular Clubs in Mexico

Description of the problem

The Political Constitution of Mexico decrees that education must be free and compulsory in order to guarantee this fundamental right. However, the figures prove there are important challenges: in Mexico City, 9.8% of the child and adolescent population, which represents 3.9 million children and youth between the ages of 0 and 17, were behind their age-appropriate grade level in 2010. 20.6% of the school age population, corresponding to 23.2 million children and youth, had not completed the basic obligatory education level that corresponded to their age.²²

At a national level, 63.1% of primary school students had an insufficient or basic achievement level in Spanish; in Mathematics, the figure was 66.1%. Nationally, 86.2% of indigenous primary school students obtained results classified as insufficient or basic in Spanish and Mathematics.

22 UNICEF and CONEVAL, Pobreza y derechos sociales de niñas, niños y adolescentes en México, 2013, p. 44. Consulted on 10/01/2014 at http://www.coneval.gob.mx/Informes/Coordinacion/INFORMES_Y_PUBLICACIONES_PDF/Pobreza_en_ni%C3%B1os_y_adol_mex_2008_2010.pdf

These last two figures were identified in the ENLACE 2013 test, which was administered annually in all of Mexico's schools until 2014, and is now known as PLANEA²³.

Because of this, literacy and logical mathematical thinking, as basic skills for the development of other skills, require a specific focus within the Mexican educational system. This is required to promote the understanding of the relevance and contribution to daily life of literacy beyond the mere appropriation of symbols.

What does the project propose?

The *Extracurricular Clubs* project aims to strengthen the social skills and abilities in children, and to promote family and school environments that allow the sustainable reduction of child labour. To achieve this, the Extracurricular Clubs are designed and implemented to create educational environments focused on language and mathematical-logical thought that contribute to making the most of school and encourage children to not drop out. Additionally, the project aims to help children understand that language and mathematical-logical thought are part of everyday life. To achieve this goal, the aim in the Clubs is to use written expression as a means of communication, to promote reading as means

for understanding messages, and to resolve real-life problems autonomously.

The target population are child workers affected by violence, from the urban sector, of a primary school age.

Description of the activities

Firstly, the strategy is presented to teachers and principals in order to evaluate the interest and viability of implementing it in the school. Following this, various instruments are employed to measure the levels of reading, writing and mathematical-logical thought among children. Once a child-friendly space has been created within the school where the club may be located and can promote active learning, materials are provided and community agreements are signed.

The next step is to plan the activities to be implemented with the children, with work sessions organized according to specific skills and dimension of learning. The sessions vary according to the needs and conditions of the school. Possible sessions include: activities focused on children with poor school performance; whole school activities; activities that complement the work of teachers.

²³ National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning developed by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE for its initials in Spanish).



Save the Children promoters carry out the activities within the schools, inviting teachers to observe and participate. Once the activities have been implemented, the intervention is evaluated, applying instruments that allow for an improvement in reading, writing and mathematical thought. Finally, a transfer of activities is completed through teacher-training for the use and application of the activities within the context of the extracurricular club.

The proposal is based on modelling education alternatives and transferring tools to teachers for the implementation of extracurricular clubs or additional tutoring of students.

The Extracurricular Club or additional tutoring for students is an educational alternative for those who have low academic performance, that includes active learning using movement,

listening, investigation, manipulation and experimentation of learning through material objects. These spaces aim to be child-friendly, and contribute to school achievement. Using a constructivist approach, the spaces aim to contribute to literacy skills and mathematical-logical thinking, which are divided into the following areas:

- Literacy: Conventional alphabetical construction of words, use of punctuation, comprehension and reading expression.
- Mathematical-logical thought: Mathematical reasoning and logic without, formal mathematical processes and language.

School Clubs, based on the active learning model, offer abundant opportunities for children to approach situations they consider interesting based on their contexts and which, in turn, allow them to generate hypotheses that they may resolve through their personal and collective experiences. In order for this to be successful, the spaces must be appropriate, permitting exploration of the senses, providing access to different materials and allowing the expression of emotions and self-knowledge. Adults, through their questions, have the responsibility of helping children discover their relationship with objects, their ideas and the options that the objects offer.

Playing with Magic Words in Bolivia

Description of the Problem

In Bolivia, as in many countries of the region, the biggest difficulty for children is reading comprehension. Many students are promoted to higher grade levels without knowing how to read or write, or remain in school longer than they should. Education, as an unalienable right for all people, should encourage the development of concepts, qualities, attitudes and cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social skills, ensuring an improved quality of life. It is for this reason that, in Bolivia, access to quality education at a primary school level is fundamental for children to prepare themselves for the rest of their lives. However, a study (situational analysis of the Basic Education Program) showed that curricula are repetitive and theoretical due to limitations in teacher-training, dedication and above all teachers' willingness to innovate and/or strengthen their practices.

One way of contributing to solutions for this problem is to implement strategies in writing and reading comprehension, which is one of the biggest challenges in the processes developed in schools.

Description of the Project

The *Playing with Magic Words* strategy supports the construction of methodological proposals and the design of materials that respond to local contexts and allow teachers to interact with students in a significant way.

This project assumes that reading is an active process that includes fundamental aspects such as visual and auditory perception (physical dimension) and the mental comprehension of what is being read (intellectual dimension). The development and interaction between these activities determine the effectiveness of the reading, given that when the child simultaneously develops both skills they then construct the meaning of the text.



Fundamental Aspects of the Magic Words Strategy

Magic Words is based on the fundamentals of the method developed by Glenn Doman²⁴, which has been adapted to take into account the Bolivian reality. This strategy is based on three fundamental principles:

- (i) Scientific: comprehensive development of the person in all fields: intellectual, physical, emotional and social. The establishment of neurological connections determines intelligence and enables knowledge. The more connections that the brain is able to make, the more that intelligence will be developed. External stimuli strengthen the development of neurons and facilitate the formation of connections between them. The younger the child, the greater their potential for learning.
- (ii) Psychological: the human capacity and potential that exist in each child are infinite, which translates to their learning and the development of their intelligence. Children have a strong curiosity for learning new things, which leads them to discover and learn.
- (iii) Child stimulation: children should receive stimuli from their environment, with the effectiveness of these stimuli depending on their clarity, realization, intensity, frequency and duration.

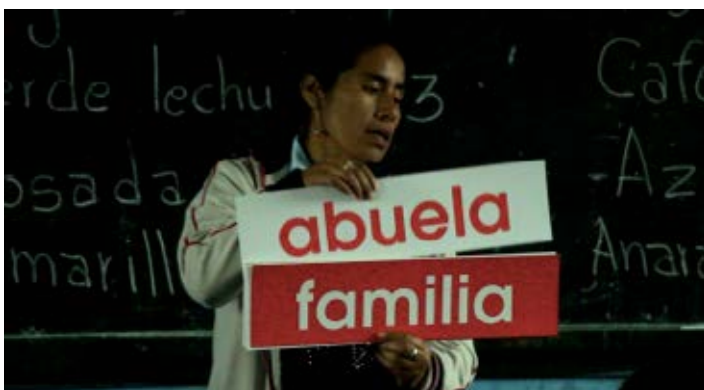
The Magic Words strategy has its origin in the global analytical method, which is initially based on concrete elements (teaching words that have meaning) and eventually leads to the abstract (the alphabet). The methodology used is experiential based, allowing children to be protagonists of their own learning experiences.

What does the project propose?

The purpose of the project is for children, in early education and primary levels, to improve their writing and reading comprehension, logical reasoning and communication skills to reach their full potential as protagonists of their community. To achieve this, it is necessary to guide and strengthen practices in the classroom through the application of reading posters; these posters present words serving as visual stimuli linked to a range of strategies, seeking to develop in children the capacity to use oral and written language linked to areas of knowledge, and to fully interact with the family, the school and the community.

The target population are urban working indigenous children aged between 3 and 12 years of age that are at a primary education level, as well as the parents, caregivers and teachers of the schools and communities.

24 Medical Doctor from the United States who began his research, with children suffering from brain injuries. Then, later, this knowledge was transferred to the general population of children. His intervention methodology is based on taking advantage as much of the possibilities of the individual, with early stimulation of children a fundamental part of this approach.



Description of the activities

In-school intervention

Teacher strengthening: teachers from early education and primary levels participate in this component. Four-hour workshops are held in which participants analyse and reflect on the difficulties faced by teachers. Based on this diagnostic the methodology is introduced through the use of posters (visual stimuli for children) that are organised into categories of words depending on the relationships that exist between them. This is linked to the texts and learning materials from the Educational Resource Centre.

Classroom support: A process of exchanging experiences in which teachers share their best practices in a horizontal relationship through an open classroom. This process is carried out for all of the strategies implemented in the teacher training.

The process is developed in three stages:

- (i) Diagnostic: evaluates the methodology that teachers are applying and a class is planned with support from the facilitator of the program;
- (ii) Shared support: the planned class is implemented;
- (iii) Autonomous session: with contributions from the shared session, the teacher plans and teaches a class by themselves.

Out-of-school intervention

Reading as a Family: A space is generated by the school to undertake reading and writing processes with parents and their children. This involves a range of activities: storytelling, drawing contests, production of texts and shared reading between children and their parents, uncles and aunts, grandparents and other family members.

Travelling Books: Children borrow books from the Educational Resource Centres in their schools to take home and read with their families, later sharing their experience with their classmates.

My First Book with the Family: Parents work with their children in early education to create a book with images, which is then read together.

My Dictionary: Strengthening and broadening of vocabulary through the construction of a dictionary for children.





Writing and reading comprehension implies much more than the capacity of verbalizing a written text and to read a specific number of words per minute; it involves finding meaning in what is being read and to use this learning in daily life, whether it is to solve problems (logical reasoning) or to relate in an assertive way to a perpetually transforming environment (community learning).

Reading for pleasure and promotion of reading comprehension in schools and communities in Nicaragua

Description of the problem

Children in their early years learn how to speak their mother tongue without the mediation of a formal instruction process, solely based on the experiences of daily life. However, the teaching of reading and writing, which are the other expressions of language, presents a range of difficulties in educational systems.

Writing and reading comprehension implies much more than the capacity of verbalizing a written text and to read a specific number of words per minute; it involves finding meaning in what is being read and to use this learning in daily life, whether it is to solve problems (logical reasoning) or to relate in an assertive way to a perpetually transforming environment (community learning). This implies that children can continue learning throughout their life, access universal culture and exercise active citizenship.

Nicaragua, like the majority of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, has achieved important progress in broadening educational coverage, managing to enrol almost all children in primary education (92% of coverage in 2013 according to official figures from MINED),

which is free and compulsory. However, the retention of children in the educational system continues to represent a challenge. A study found that the probabilities of a child from a home above the poverty line graduating from primary school is 62.3%, while for children from homes below the poverty line the figure is at 35.6% and for children living in extreme poverty there is a 21% probability that they will complete primary school (IEEP, 2012, p. 11)²⁵

Progress in the educational quality indicators has been minimal, especially those related to the development of basic competencies and skills (PREAL, 2006, p. 5)²⁶. The deficit in quality mainly affects the poorest children, in particular those that live in rural zones and the regions along the Caribbean Coast.

In Nicaragua, the application of the *Early Grade Reading Assessment* (EGRA) in 2008 revealed that 41.5% of students in the second grade, 26.6% in third grade and 17.3% in fourth grade were not achieving the required standard of reading fluency, identified as 35, 60 and 72 correct words per minute, for the second, third and fourth grade respectively. The baseline in schools supported by SC in 2012 indicates that 86% of first grade children did not reach reading

²⁵ Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policies – IEEPP – (2012). *Children and adolescents that drop out of Primary Education*. Managua: IEEPP

²⁶ PREAL/EDUQUEMOS/IBIS. (2014). *Informe de Progreso Educativo Nicaragua. Informe del Foro Educativo Nicaragüense EDUQUEMOS*. Managua: EDUQUEMOS

fluency and comprehension benchmarks. The most relevant factors in explaining this situation are: the high level of student drop-out associated with literacy difficulties; that reading is seen as an academic obligation and not linked to the social and affective spheres of the lives of children; that teachers do not use a structured method of teaching; the limitations of teachers in their own reading comprehension; poor or inexistent practices of evaluating literacy learning; limited access to books; a poor culture of reading among adults and children; the scarce coverage of early childhood education; and a family context affected by poverty that does not favour learning.

Description of the approach

For this systematization, two approaches were chosen: *Reading for Pleasure*, developed by the non-profit organization *Books for Children* (Libros para niños - LPN), in partnership with other local actors, and *Children with a Right to the Future: Project to Promote Reading Comprehension in Schools and Communities*, implemented by the *Centre to Support Programs and Projects* (Centro de Apoyo a Programas y Proyectos - CAPRI) together with the departmental delegation of the Ministry of Education (MINED) in Managua.

The first approach, *Reading for Pleasure*, is mainly developed in the community environment –



although it also takes place in early education centres and primary schools – at a national level and consists in the promotion of diverse dynamics of reading for pleasure – Story Corners, Story Places and Reading Pathways, among others. The second approach, *Promotion of Reading Comprehension in Schools and Communities*, is executed in partnership with the MINED in primary schools in Districts VI and VII of the Municipality of Managua and places an emphasis on the strengthening of the pedagogical capacities of teachers to teach literacy skills to first grade students through a training process.

The Books for Children (LPN) approach

In 2011, and with the support of Save the Children, LPN began the implementation of a project in partnership with the municipal delegation of the MINED in the Municipality of Prinzapolka, which consists in the development of a *Reading for Pleasure* plan during school hours in some public primary schools.

In this approach, LPN maintains the philosophy of their founders of “making real the dream of giving Nicaraguan children the opportunity of coming into contact with stories and falling in

love with reading... and becoming readers for life". The organization's methodology consists of three basic aspects:

- (i) bringing books within the reach children;
- (ii) reading to them out loud; and
- (iii) allowing children to read alone, with help, or in any way that they prefer.

The beginning of this approach coincided with the prioritization of a community approach through the diversification of reading strategies (*Reading Pathways* and *Reading Spots*) and the implementation of a book loan system to allow children to take them home.

CAPRI's Children with a Right to the Future approach

This approach began in 2010 with the goal of contributing to the improvement of educational quality to advance literacy learning for first grade students in Districts VI and VII of Managua.

In 2012, this approach brought together actors that have an impact on learning processes for children. With the MINED delegation, CAPRI supported the application of literacy tests in selected schools in Districts VI and VII of Managua; it facilitated training processes on literacy strategies for Ministry of Education's pedagogical advisors, directors of Education Centers, first grade teachers and library staff; it

led training processes in school leadership for directors, sub-directors and technical staff from schools; and it provided assistance to schools by providing children's storybooks and furniture for the operation of mini-libraries.

At a community level, this approach trains and supports members of the community to provide additional tutoring to children and supports the creation of *Friends of Reading* networks and *Resource Centres*, which act as spaces run by members of the community in order to support the educational development of children.

Actions directly implemented by SC

In addition to the approaches implemented by CAPRI and LPN, since 2011 Save the Children has coordinated with the Centre for Research and Social Educational Action (Centro de Investigación y Acción Educativa Social - CIASES) the implementation of a three year course aimed at strengthening pedagogical capacities for the teaching of literacy with participation of members of the MINED pedagogical advisory team.

SC, CAPRI and LPN participate in the National Reading Campaign

In 2010, SC, CAPRI and LPN began their participation as founding members of the *National Reading Campaign*, led by 18 civil

society organizations that are committed to children's rights, with the objective of promoting reading comprehension and transforming pedagogical practices during the school year. One of the most important contributions to the educational system by this campaign is the adaptation of the EGRA test, which consisted in the application of only two of its sections to evaluate the essential skills of reading fluency and comprehension.

Best Practices

In the development of this approach, SC, CAPRI and LPN have developed a set of actions that constitute best practices, including:

1. Addressing the problem of literacy through a comprehensive approach, developing diverse strategies that respond to different causes of the problem – strategies to improve educational quality in early education; to increase access during the early grades of primary school; to improve children's life skills (socio-affective); to promote reading for pleasure; to improve the active role of children in their learning; to create a protective environment from violence towards children; to improve school leadership and management; and to improve learning environments. All of these strategies are articulated with

strategies that improve the literacy skills of children. Improving literacy implies improving different aspects of educational quality. These cannot be separated and treated as individual components;

2. Providing libraries consisting of recreational literature as a way of supporting the teaching of literacy;
3. Assigning more motivated and better trained teachers to the first grade, as approaches have demonstrated that having good teachers in the first grade is an essential step towards improving literacy, due to the fact that this is the grade level in which children access the formal learning of literacy skills;
4. Providing students with additional tutoring with support from members of the community;
5. Disseminating teaching practices that are recognised as award-winning in pedagogical competitions;
6. Implementing the Reading for Pleasure methodology in schools;
7. Diversifying reading activities to maintain children's motivation.

III. Population Reached

Country and approach	Years of implementation	Schools	Children	Parents	Teachers
Peru: Read Together, Learn Together	2	145	2,500	2,865	444
Guatemala: Read Together, Learn Together	3	150	4,291	901	368
Guatemala: The Magic of Reading	3	136	20,417	*	*
México: After School Clubs	3	35	21,000	2,000	900
Bolivia: Playing with Magic Words	4	44	11,859	980	380
Nicaragua: Reading for Pleasure and Promotion of Reading Comprehension	*	*	6,445	*	*
Colombia: Reading and Writing: Risks at School	1	15	1,200	375	265
Total		525	67,712	7,121	2,357

*No information available

This table shows that the approaches have been developed over a period of 8 years, with the exception of Nicaragua that has undergone a longer process over different stages that began in 1990 and continued up until 2014.

During these implementation years, Save the Children has worked with a total of 525 schools, benefitting 67,712 children and youth. These approaches have also involved around 7,121 parents and community members while 2,357 teachers received training related to teaching literacy skills.

These figures are approximate due to the different methods of reporting information. For example, some approaches reported participation of parents while others referred to families; some disaggregate children by gender, while others do not; some report only the number of child beneficiaries, leaving out the rest of the targeted population. However, the figures as they are indicate the number of children, youth, teachers and the general population reached. When cross-referenced with the qualitative reports, this makes it possible to comprehend the impact of the work of Save the Children in the area of education in the region.

IV. Analysis of the approaches

This section has the objective of identifying some common ground in the pedagogical and methodological approaches used in the six countries that are presented in this report, as well as the particularities, challenges and lessons learned in the development of each one.

The six approaches were directed at a population approximately aged 5 to 16 years old. They deal with a common problem based on the insufficient capacities of children and adolescents to understand and make use of what they read in the immediate context. In addition, the family and social context of students in some cases does not favour the development of best practices for reading and writing. This is reflected in low academic performance, low results in national and international standardized tests and is in some cases related to school drop-out.

Each approach was developed with a different conceptual and pedagogical focus. However, **the most notable approach followed was constructivism**, as this best corresponds to a way of working in which *students learn by doing, and is achieved through a cooperative learning process that involves supporting each other*. This is an approach that strengthens cognitive, social and emotional development and promotes

concrete scenarios for meaningful learning by students and the community in general. This approach generates permanent reflection on the meaning of what is being learnt, which allows for the formation of critical readers.

In this framework, the approaches perceive reading and writing as a construction of meaning made by readers in their contextualized and permanent relationship with the texts. In addition, playful and pleasant situations involving literacy are created in order to promote a life-long enjoyment of reading and writing among children, and bring them into contact with children's and youth's book and learning materials that are specifically designed for their ages and development levels.

In addition, **the approaches include a rights-based approach**, which covers topics of equality, inclusion and multiculturalism. This approach undoubtedly represents strong progress towards the achievement of a more coherent education that is relevant to local, national and global contexts, contributing to the broadening of possibilities for children and youth to improve their academic performance and so that they can feel emotionally more secure and happy in school.

An important aspect of all of the approaches is the integration of the family and community into the learning and literacy education of children. This component is fundamental as it supports them to overcome the conception that reading and writing are a purely technical and mechanical issue, and links pedagogical elements from school with the cultural and social reading practices of communities. This generates increased opportunities for children and youth to incorporate literacy into their daily lives.

In terms of methodological aspects, each approach has coherent strategies and methodologies within its focus. A common aspect is the training and support of teachers, both in conceptual elements as well as in pedagogical practices. This is fundamental in order to achieve real change in the way that teachers update their theoretical and pedagogical approaches and transform their way of teaching literacy.

The approaches developed didactic materials to work with students, teachers and parents. In some cases, the materials are “standardized” and, in others, are adapted to the characteristics of the population and the specific context.

In general the approaches have some common components in their implementation, such as:

- (i) Diagnostic / characterization, in which populations are profiled along with the level of literacy of children and youth;
- (ii) Training / implementation: a component that provides information and pedagogical tools to teachers and community members for implementing the approaches;
- (iii) Pedagogical support: through which teachers are aided so that they take ownership of the methodologies and so that their concerns are addressed;
- (iv) Tracking / monitoring: through which the implementation of the activities is observed;
- (v) Evaluation: instruments are designed and applied to evaluate the literacy skills of children and youth; and
- (vi) Systematization: in which the processes and results of the approaches are collected.

However, **the approaches still have various challenges to overcome** that are currently being addressed by the different teams. Some examples:

- (i) increasing the accuracy of the evaluation instruments, as well as reducing the time required for applying, processing, analyzing and informing the results of the evaluation;
- (ii) incorporate the approach in the work plans of schools in such a way that it is linked with other subject areas;
- (iii) continue with teacher training and working with parents in order to guarantee

the sustainability of the processes;

(iv) sustainability of the approaches, which is why it is necessary to ensure that schools include these within their work plans;

(iv) in the approaches of the countries with a large indigenous population, one of the major challenges is incorporating bilingualism in an appropriate manner in the teaching of literacy and producing more material in indigenous languages to achieve an better equity of opportunities for indigenous children;

(iv) the approaches that are supported by the work of volunteers face the challenge of achieving better retention of volunteers in the programs.

Even though the approaches have designed instruments to evaluate the processes, it is not clear how they are measuring the results of the specific interventions. Regardless, some approaches show achievements such as:

(i) improvements in communication skills, self-expression and inter-cultural peaceful coexistence among children;

(ii) improvement of literacy skills among children and increased motivation to engage in these practices;

(iii) the presence of literacy materials have been observed in classrooms, which is an indicator of a school that is focused on improving literacy;

(iv) increased participation of parents and the general community in the activities implemented as part of the approaches and in the support provided to children in developing their literacy skills;

(v) strengthening of the pedagogical capacities of teachers in the teaching of literacy skills;

(vi) diversity of reading materials including books, didactic games and technological equipment.

V. Lessons Learned

This process of reflection on the approaches has identified important learning experiences to be taken into account, both in the continuity of the approaches as well as in the implementation of new projects in the region. These include:

- The approaches recognise that the development of literacy skills strengthens social and emotional competencies, because these are not limited to learning a technique, but are related to using literacy in daily life. They contribute to the development of critical thought; they nurture language in order to improve communication with others; they highlight relationships between what happens in the readings and events in daily life; and they provide the tools necessary for personal and community expression.

- Evaluations need to be implemented with increased rigor and understood as an opportunity to analyse the approaches. This information allows for identification of the changes and necessary adjustments made during implementation.
- Maintaining close communication with educational authorities at state and municipal levels, as well as obtaining the approval of the local authorities for the introduction of the project in the community and in the school guarantees the continuity and sustainability of the approaches.
- It is fundamental to adapt the methodologies to the characteristics of the population without losing their essence.
- It can be reaffirmed that the teacher training processes should be based on real life experiences and practices with the goal of demonstrating how these methodologies should be implemented.
- Supporting teachers in the classroom in implementing the methodologies is necessary in order to improve the practices and encourage ownership of training processes.
- It is important to generate spaces and relationships that allow teachers to discover the pleasure of reading so that they can transmit this pleasure to their students.
- It is essential to use libraries in the schools and in the municipalities as resources in the promotion of literacy.
- It is equally necessary to broaden and diversify reading options for children and youth according their tastes, needs and interests.
- It is important to involve different community members in an active and participatory manner in the projects and programs as volunteers, whether they are young students, student teachers or members of the community. This generates increased ownership of the approaches within the communities.
- It is recommendable to develop practical activities with parents that allow them to comprehend the objectives and scope of the program and in this way ensure increased commitment and participation.
- The role of parents in the literacy training processes of their children is fundamental to achieve the incorporation of literacy in the daily lives of children and their families.

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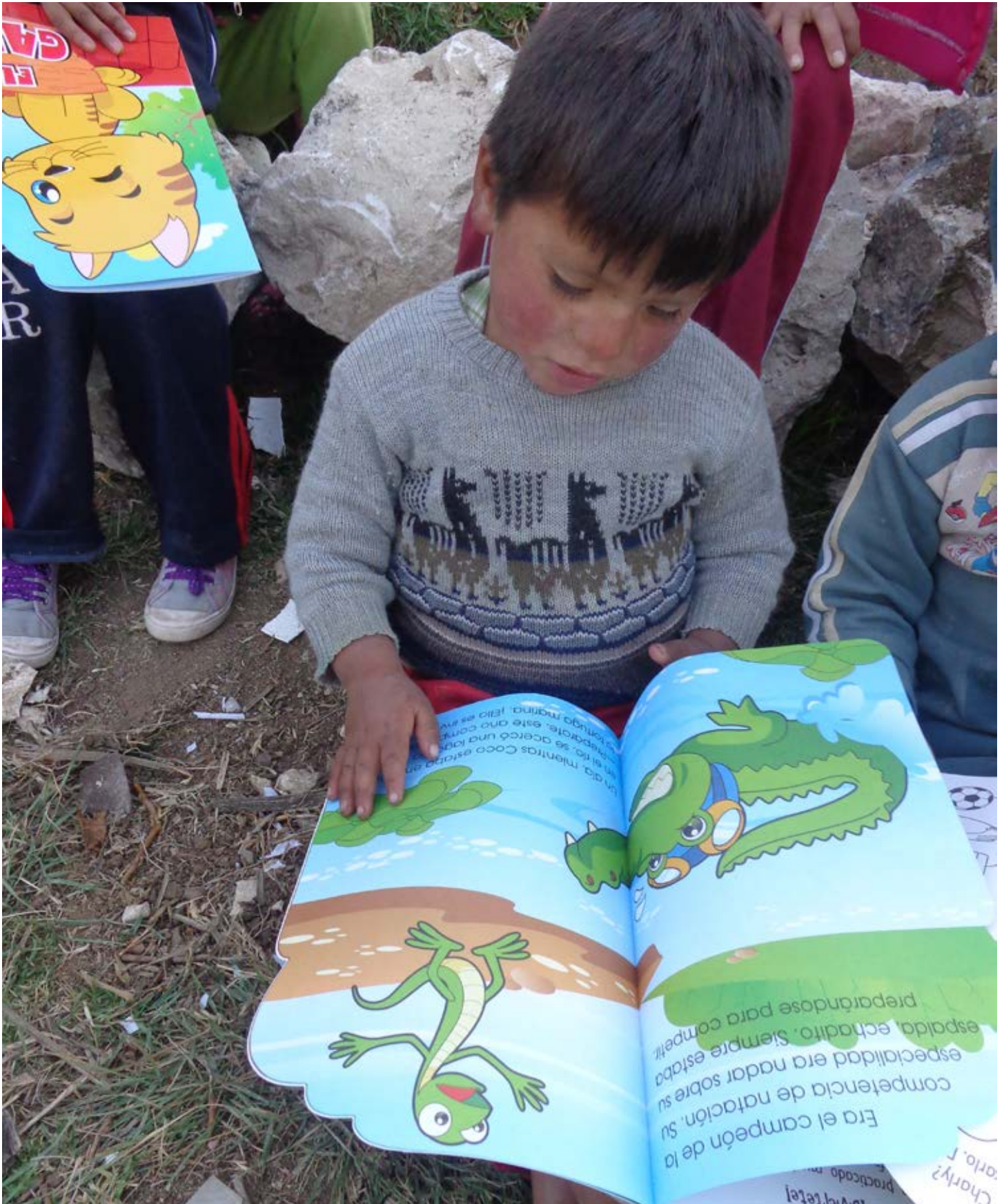
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