Soledad Mena is a well-known authority in Latin American pedagogy. She has single- handedly changed the methods used for teaching children how to write and read (in that order) in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. Her expanding projects on reading in schools have shown merits in statistically decreasing the levels of illiteracy in the region.

After a career of several decades, Soledad, who confesses that her true calling in life was to be a rural teacher in a small provincial school, has now realized her dream. We visited her office in the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Quito and told her about our project in Don Juan and our hopes to better the lives of our neighbors through educational programs. We asked her for advice, since we, as college professors, had no experience with first learners and reading programs. She was immediately hooked. With wholehearted interest, she gave us materials and support, and offered to come for a visit.

On July 2016 Soledad came to Don Juan and we accompanied her to the tiny school in town. The children immediately greeted her with vivid curiosity and enthusiasm, while their teachers eyed us with suspicion and concern. This situation is sadly repeated over and over in our country’s schools, Soledad said. Rural school teachers are usually left to their own devices; with no training or resources at hand they face crowded classrooms full of kids that jump off the walls with energy. The only response from the teachers is discipline memorization.

Over the next months, Soledad became committed to Don Juan and our project. She comes every three weeks and spends long days offering teacher training to the five rural teachers in our town. She bought a plot of land nearby and together with her husband has started constructing a cozy bamboo and wood cottage to spend her retired years helping *A mano manaba* widen the horizons of the very youngest of our neighbors.

This is one more example of what we like to call an “intercultural exchange.” While we have settled in this isolated little fishing village, apparently giving up all the comforts of an urban lifestyle, Don Juan gives us purpose and a sense of coherence between our daily chores and our dreams. This is why we call our project “a mano manaba”, an interchange of grace from hand to hand.