

**Fundación Leer Initial Report-July 2010
Program "Open Book Project"
In School N° 4233-Las Llanas, Salta**

In this report we present a synthesis of the first developed actions of the program "Open Book Project" implemented in an educational institution located in a rural part of Las Llanas, province of Salta. We include in it a brief description of the program and a general explanation of the institution and its beneficiaries. Finally, we present the activities completed to date.

Presentation of the Program

"Open Book Project" is a Fundación Leer program that seeks to make reading a more relevant part of daily life for families and to support institutions that lack books with the possibility of counting on them in a context that favors the relationship between children and books. Establishing Reading Corners and developing activities that promote reading for pleasure are two of the pillars upon which this program rests.

Through the implementation of this program, Fundación Leer seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To create spaces in which children and youth can access books and learn to feel comfortable being in contact with them.
- Stir up the desire to read amongst children and youth.
- Train teachers so that they can encourage children and youth to read for pleasure and involve families in the process of youth literacy
- Provide a space in which parents can share books with their children.
- Make the community aware of the importance of developing reading habits for the future of its children and their families.

"Open Book Project" addresses many of the problems that affect children who attend this school and become causes for concern for educators and families. For example, these problems include:

- Limited or unavailable access to reading materials.
- The absence of family role models that value reading.
- Lack of motivation to read.
- Difficulties and lack of children's ability to read.
- Lack of institutional spaces to read for pleasure.

Description of the beneficiaries



The School



An example of a family house

The institution involved in this program is located in rural Las Llanas, whose closest city, Embarcación, is 90 kilometers away. The population of children that the institution receives belongs to the aboriginal community called **Wichis**. The Wichis are the most important ethnic indigenous group of the Chaco salteño region. While there is no reliable data, one estimates that there are some 80,000 aboriginal Wichis in Argentina, of which 15,000 live in the province of Salta.

Around the municipal locality of Embarcación in which one finds the school are 10 established families of the community. Five kilometers further one finds six other families. The Wichis are represented in the municipality by a local political leader elected by the community's adults, who are also the parents and relatives of the children attending the institution. The socioeconomic level of the community is one of extreme poverty and vulnerability with a lack of basic necessities. The houses are simple structures in the style of a hut. In some cases, they are constructed out of mud. The houses lack of sanitary services and drinking water. Electricity is only found in the school, the windmill, and a water pump that is located in the district of the institution and from which water is extracted for everyone in the community.



One of the principal problems affecting the community is the lack of education of families. The parents and relatives are in many cases illiterate and only some speak Spanish. The children speak both the Wichi language as well as Spanish since the school is bilingual and has an



instructor specialized in their native language. Likewise, the children also learn English.

Parents are unemployed; while in some cases they perform odd jobs, none can count on a stable occupation. They receive a small subsidy from the provincial government as well as a universal allowance per child. They also receive bags of food and donations from some social organizations. They count on sanitary officials that come by the school for any health assistance.

Many of these people have never left their community and are not familiar with the city. Another important characteristic of this community is that as a result of inter-marriage, everyone is related to one other.

The total enrollment of this institution is 46 students, who enter the school starting from kindergarten and elementary school. The pupils are divided into 3 cycles composed of students of different grades.

The school has two classrooms and another attached classroom that was constructed recently to house the kindergartener, as well as a bathroom and a kitchen. Outside they have an oven made out of mud and space for a garden in which they grow some vegetables under the supervision of an instructor who is also an agronomist. In the school, the students receive breakfast, lunch, and a snack.

There are eight teachers in total, including the principal who is also the teacher for the third cycle of students. They all work to dedicate themselves to the task of educating these children. Besides realizing the tasks of their profession, the teachers contribute to the maintenance of the institution not only with their time but with economic support to settle the costs of maintaining the school.

The school has few teaching materials, and it has no children's books. Owing to the life conditions of the children and their families, it is difficult for the instructors to establish ties with the community. However, despite its situation the said population only has the institution as a point of reference.

The beneficiaries of the program

The direct beneficiaries of this program are the children and youth who will have the opportunity to visit the Reading Corner that will have 300 books for children and adolescents.

Some of the indirect beneficiaries we can mention are the teachers and principals who receive pedagogical advice and technical assistance during the period of the program implementation and the general community that will be able to have access to books through the use of the Reading Corner that the school will create as the first step of this project.

Next, we announce the actions developed by Fundación Leer to guide the school during the first step of this project:

- Teacher training.
- Pedagogical advice and technical assistance.
- Deliver materials to support the school.
- Communicate the guidelines of the program.
- The selection of books.
- Create and maintain the Reading Corner.

Completed Actions

The Initial Training



On June 30, 2010, we completed the training for the program "Open Book Project". Six people attended the training, including teachers and the principal. During the training, the participants demonstrated that they were very well predisposed to working in a group, which created a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. On this day, Fundación Leer announced the fundamental guidelines of the program and guided a group reflection about the importance of reading to the development of children and youth as well the participation of families in the education of their children.

On this day, the foundation also assigned the coordinators for the project and defined their tasks.

These coordinators, taking into account the professional advice of Fundación Leer, organized the first steps of project implementation in their institution.

As the meeting drew to a close, Fundación Leer gave the attendees a brief anonymous and voluntary survey as a way to gauge the opinions regarding this first instance of formulating the project. We present some of the results of the evaluation:

- 100% of the attendees thought that they had completed the objectives of the initial training for the implementation of the "Open Book Project."
- 100% thought that the training was very useful.
- 100% expressed that their expectations of the training were satisfied.
- 100% thought that the project was useful and highly practical.
- 100% expressed that the information and the content presented in the meeting demonstrated a high level of innovation and was suited to the local context.

Next, we share some of the testimonies gathered during the training:

"This training allowed me to learn new ways to work productively as I develop as a teacher. I also greatly appreciate that the foundation and its coordinator chose us."

Teacher of the school, Las Llanas

"I enjoyed very much the work of the training. I believe that the foundation has formed a pleasant meeting with the staff of the institution and all around the topic of the pleasure of reading. I am proud of that. Many thanks for coming to our school."



Director of the school, Las Llanas

"I liked that the trainer supported us with the best treatment and communicated to us the information about the project. I hope for the best results from the program and that the community gets involved and participates in it."

Teacher of the school, Las Llanas

This first meeting marked the beginning of an ongoing process of training in the wake of implementing the program. This process builds up a channel of communication between Fundación Leer and the institution's coordinators, which will allow Fundación Leer to support and advise them to resolve any emerging situations.

Fundación Leer offers the school pedagogical advice and technical assistance from a distance through various means: telephone calls, electronic and postal mail. At the same time, it monitors the project and evaluates its implementation.

Program Materials

During the training, Fundación Leer distributed the materials of the program:

- Coordinators' manual, which contains information about the program, advice, and suggestions to work out each step of the project.
- Catalog of publishing houses
- Manual of activities and theory for teachers to make their own reflections.

Book Selection

During the training, teachers and directors of the institution accompanied by the pedagogical advice and the attendance of a specialist from Fundación Leer chose the books destined for the Reading Corner. In this instance, the attendees participated in an activity to explore the material of the project.

In order to guarantee a relevant selection, we abide by the following criteria:

Diversity: The texts should be diverse and the themes should be different. The idea is to show diversity in order to give children the opportunity to discover their own likes and interests as readers.

Identification: One interesting criteria is the relationship between the book and the child. The child identifies himself or herself with the characters as well as the context and the situation the book presents. As a result, the only valuable texts are not those that have a child as the main character but rather those whose protagonist is represented in a situation recognizable to the child.

Novelty: This refers to those texts that contain a novelty, transgression, or break from established formulas.

Format: It is important to consider the presentation and the format. To expose children to different forms and types of books will amplify their knowledge about the literary world. Books with images and illustrations, hard covers, paperbacks, those that are colorful or have different textures, books that have letters printed in capital or lower case letters, those that are small or big, etc.

Content: One of the most important criteria and necessary to the task of choosing some model text is the quality of the literature. This criterion expresses itself in the richness of the vocabulary, in the form in which the story is told, and the effects these literary devices generate in the reader.

The communication and organization of the committee

One of the first developed actions after the Initial Training Meeting was the communication of the project to families and the other personnel of the school through formal and informal meetings and the use of the school's bulletin board.

Setting Up the Reading Corner

Because of the lack of space, the school has planned to equip each class with small reading corners in the room. As part of the preparation, the school will decorate the walls with posters that allude to the importance of reading, construct bookshelves out of wood to store books that will be at an accessible height for children according to their age and will be displayed with their covers facing the front in a manner recommended for the Reading Corner. Also, they propose to obtain the materials necessary to make hanging pocket organizers, pillows, rugs, and curtains.

The teachers and the principal dedicated a great part of their free time to this program. They hope that the parents and the members of the community will be able to add to their actions.

Summary and next steps

An analysis of the information gathered in this first step allows us to declare that in the school of the present program:

- They have been able to carry out the proposed objectives of this first step within the stipulated period:
 - Fulfillment of the initial training program,
 - Selection of books by the institution,
 - Confirmation of the committee,
 - Start of the evaluation process that will follow the implementation of the entire program.
- The principal and the teachers have begun to work around the promotion of reading and about the importance of having a literary space after their training.
- The school has begun the first steps to create the Reading Corner.

The next steps are:

- The arrival of the 300 books selected during the training that will be added to the Reading Corner.
- The creation of the Reading Corner and the inauguration of the space.
- The implementation of activities that promote reading through orientations and ideas supported by Fundación Leer and by the proposal of the own institution.
- Preparation and participation in the National Reading Marathon.



We find the school and the educative community motivated and committed to the present proposal. They are grateful for having been selected and for the trust invested in their community to implement Fundación Leer's reading promotion project in it.

Cordially,

Marcela Inés Sisto
Pedagogical Coordinator of the Department of Programs
Fundación Leer