



Second-grade teacher Vilma Aracely Cuc thanks Cooperative for Education's Culture of Reading Program for giving her the tools to make learning meaningful for her students. *San Buenaventura, Sololá, Guatemala. February 2011.*

## Vilma Aracely Cuc: An Exemplary Educator

With obvious passion and enthusiasm for education, Vilma Aracely Cuc kneels down to her students' level to engage them in the story she is reading about farm animals. Lost in her expressive tone of voice, 18 second-graders can barely contain their excitement for reading—an excitement fostered by their teacher.

The scene is atypical for most Guatemalan primary schools, but Cooperative for Education's Culture of Reading Program (CORP) is changing the way Vilma and other teachers operate their classrooms. Through CORP, Vilma has learned innovative teaching methods and easily applicable techniques that allow her to make literacy fun for her students.

Recounting when she entered the program, Vilma recalls, "The first books they brought last year...I sat at home and started to read, to think about how I would plan my class and work with my kids. [The books] were so interesting to me, I said to myself, 'I can; I'll do it!' because in the training they gave us guidance, like a spark to get us started. So I thought, 'I have to apply these skills,' and I've managed to." She adds with humble pride, "I achieved the goals that I'd set—I achieved them with my kids!"

Smiling with infectious joy, Vilma continues, "Last year, I worked with first grade, and even though at the beginning of the year they were not even familiar with letters, by the end of the year they knew how

to write, and also—more than anything—they practiced reading, reading, reading."

Cooperative for Education (CoEd) Educational Trainer Milton Ramos has been quite impressed with the progress he has seen in Vilma, now in her second year of CORP training. "She's been able to take the techniques she's learned [through CORP] and apply them to other subjects, like science and math," says Milton.

Using one of her favorite techniques, Vilma writes sentences containing vocabulary words and gives each student a "word soup" where the words are cut out and mixed around. Like a proud parent, Vilma looks on as each student diligently sounds out the words and reconstructs the complete sentence.

Vilma's integration of new teaching methods doesn't stop at the door of her own classroom. By sharing her knowledge with the other teachers at San Buenaventura, she's making a difference for the entire school!

Vilma feels a certain responsibility for the education of her students. She expresses her desire to see these children mature into well-rounded professionals and achieve great things. The spark that CORP has ignited in Vilma has been fanned into a flame that fuels her students' dreams and gives them the tools to make those dreams reality.