



Irma Cuc understands the importance of inspiring a love of reading in her young students.

voices

THE VOICES
OF COED

Irma Natalia Con Cuc: In Her Own Words

A Culture of Reading Program teacher trainee talks with the Cooperative for Education about her life and her experiences with CORP.

Irma Natalia Con Cuc knows how it feels to enter a classroom and not understand a word anyone says. Irma, a second grade teacher from Sacatapéquez, Guatemala, grew up speaking the region's indigenous language, Kaqchikel. Like her students - and like so many of Guatemala's Maya - she learned Spanish almost as an after thought, once she entered primary school.

From that experience, Irma learned a lot about overcoming adversity. She looks back on those days, almost wistfully, given the enormous challenges she faces in her current job. As a new teacher, Irma remembers struggling, every day, to help her students read. After all, many of the children had never before held a book in their hands and most lacked basic Spanish language skills.

Irma noted that when she first attempted to teach her second graders to read, "The kids didn't pay much attention, so it was difficult to accomplish very much."

Then CoEd's Culture of Reading Program (CORP) came to her school and changed everything.

Through CORP training, Irma learned how to engage the children in the learning process. Through the program, Irma has access to high-quality, engaging children's books. She reads them to her class and encourages every child to participate in the story telling. She shows them the illustrations, asks them questions about what they think will happen next, and helps them write and illustrate their own books.

"This program is wonderful and so important to our students," Irma enthuses. "It helps them learn so much more than before and they are more excited about their studies."

When asked how the program has changed the way Irma views her own role in the classroom, she muses, "I'm so glad I had the opportunity to be part of this program. Every day, I am excited to use what I've learned."

Carolyn Johnson, coordinator of the Culture of Reading Program for the Cooperative for Education, also notes the difference she has witnessed in the lives of the teachers, children, and parents, in indigenous Mayan communities where she has conducted the CORP training.

"Parents are seeing that their children can read and are voluntarily sending in paper to the school so the kids can make more books. Kids get to school very early in the mornings just to go in their classrooms and read! It is exciting to hear in the teachers' voices how much they believe CORP is making a difference in their kids' learning."