



Amigos del Aprendizaje (ADA) Program Description

Today only 3 of every 10 Costa Rican children that enter first grade, will graduate from high school. The children of low-income families are at a disproportionately higher risk for reading difficulties, repeating a grade and dropping out.

Educational research shows a strong relationship between reading readiness in kindergarten, reading well in the primary grades and later academic performance in elementary and high school¹. Programs focused on teacher capacity building in language and reading in the early grades, have been highly effective in promoting early school success and preventing grade retention, a predictor of future drop out among “at risk” children.

What is ADA ?

Amigos del Aprendizaje (ADA) is a Costa Rican non profit organization dedicated to teacher professional development to enhance the educational opportunities of low-income children. ADA works with teachers, families and community volunteers to promote reading readiness, reading and critical thinking among “at-risk” children in the Costa Rican elementary schools to improve the quality of public education. Through its involvement of volunteers, corporate and other sponsors, ADA also promotes a culture of social responsibility and fosters private – public sector partnerships.

The ADA Program

Incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1999, ADA enjoys a rich set of partnerships and collaborative relationships, with academic partners, non governmental organizations, the Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education, schools, private philanthropies and corporations. ADA’s pilot program focuses on **teacher capacity building, while also involving the family** through parent-child workshops; and **volunteers** through annual school based workshops and weekly tutoring with children.

¹ Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1998) Preventing reading difficulties in young children, (Washington, DC: National Academy Press).

The ADA Program is based on the most up to date research and the careful contextualization to Costa Rica of successful educational interventions with low-income children in the U.S and Latin America². Together with its collaborators at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, ADA tracks annual language and reading performance indicators among children participating in professional development classrooms.

Program Objectives

ADA strives to meet the following overall objectives with its major stakeholders:

- **Educators:** promote best practices in the classroom to benefit students through active learning.
- **Children:** improve the language and reading abilities of public school children in kindergarten through third grade, through providing them with a solid foundation for learning.
- **Parents:** involve parents as active allies in the education of their children.
- **Volunteers:** promote a culture of social responsibility in volunteers through their hands on participation in educational activities that promote learning among children.

Participating Schools, Volunteers and Communities

From 2007 through 2009, ADA has worked with over 200 teachers and 6000 children, involving over 500 volunteers in three representative communities around the country (Santa Ana, Turrialba, Guanacaste).

² The ADA teacher professional development program builds on and contextualizes the experience of the Collaborative Language and Literacy Instruction Project (CLLIP), a “best practice” multi-grade educational reform model (k-6) for “at risk” children in the United States, www.gse.harvard.edu/~pild/clip/, while also taking into account the successful experiences of interventions in Latin America.

Program Sponsors

ADA benefits from the involvement and sponsorship of corporations, individuals, foundations and other partners, among them:

- **EcoDesarrollo Papagayo**
- **Hacienda Juan Vinas**
- **Automercado**
- **Empaques Santa Ana**
- **Procter & Gamble**
- **Genesis**
- **Strachan Foundation**
- **Tides Foundation**
- **INTEL**
- **Citibank**
- **KPMG**

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Rosemary Boehmer - Educational Psychologist

Renata Villers – Executive Director, ADA

Attachment I - ADA Advisors, Staff and Volunteers

ADA Advisors

Professor Catherine Snow, Ph.D.

Catherine Snow is the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~snow/> . An internationally recognized expert on language and literacy development in children, Professor Snow's work focuses on how oral language skills are acquired and how they relate to literacy outcomes. Snow has recently chaired two national panels, the National Academy of Sciences committee that prepared the report, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children" <http://books.nap.edu/html/prdyc/execsumm.html> (recently adapted for Mexico in collaboration with the Mexican Ministry of Public Education) and the Rand Reading Study Group, that prepared "Reading for Understanding: Toward an R&D Program in Reading Comprehension." Her current research activities include a longitudinal study of language and literacy skills among low-income children who have been followed from age three through secondary school; following the language development of young children participating in the Early Head Start intervention; studying the vocabulary development of first- and second-language learners; and considering aspects of transfer from first to second language in the domains of language and literacy. She is also involved in attempts to develop consensus among teacher educators on what pre- and in-service elementary teachers need to know about language and literacy. Professor Snow has also written about bilingualism in the United States and in developing nations, and about testing policy. Since 2002 she acts as an advisor to the ADA Program.

Professor Fernando Reimers, Ed.D.

Fernando Reimers is the Ford Foundation Professor of Education and Director of the International Education Policy Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education <http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~reimers/> . His research and teaching focuses on identifying education policies that support teachers in helping low-income children succeed academically. He is particularly interested in studying how teachers help students who attain significantly higher levels of schooling than their parents and in understanding how to support quality teaching in systems where access to schooling has expanded rapidly. His current research focuses on the relationship between teacher quality, educational expansion and social inequality in Mexico, with a forthcoming book expected in the summer of 2004. He has also published on the utilization of educational research in policy reform. In addition to his research and teaching, he advises governments, developmental agencies and private groups involved in education reform in developing nations. He has worked in a large number of countries within and outside of Latin America including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Egypt, Guatemala, Honduras, Jordan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. Prior to joining the Harvard Faculty, he served as senior education specialist at the World Bank, at the Harvard Institute for International Development and on the faculty at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. Professor Reimers has published several books, a number of which have been translated into other languages, as well as chapters and articles on education and development. He is a member of the College of Fellows of the UNESCO International Office on Education, and acts as an advisor to the ADA Program.

Professor Eleonora Badilla M.Ed.

Eleonora Badilla is a Professor on the Faculty of Education and Director of the Center for Academic Evaluation, at the University of Costa Rica. An ongoing consultant to the MIT Media Lab Program, Professor Badilla has spent the past 20 years advising NGOs, Governments and Universities on digital innovations in education and educational policy issues in and outside of Costa Rica. She has been the Educational and Community Director of the Little Intelligent Communities (LINCOS) Program (established by former Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres), and presently serves on its Board of Advisors. Formerly, she served as special advisor to the Costa Rican Minister of Education (1994-1998), and as Director of the National Center for Didactics. Over the years she has been the director of a number of programs at the Omar Dengo Foundation, including the national Computers in Education Program and the Center for Educational Innovation. Since 2001, Professor Badilla acts as an advisor to the ADA Program.

Andrea Rolla de San Francisco, P.hd.

Andrea Rolla de San Francisco holds a doctorate in Language and Literacy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Of Argentine extraction and married to a Chilean Ms. Rolla is fully bilingual and bicultural. She completed her undergraduate studies in literature in addition to being certified as an elementary school teacher at Princeton University where she graduated *summa cum laude* in 1997. That same year she worked at the U.S. Department of Education in the evaluation of a national program of voluntary tutoring in literacy. She completed her masters' degree in educational research in 1998 as a Fullbright scholar at the University of Oxford, England. Ms. Rolla worked as a visiting professor at the Pontifical Catholic University, Santiago, Chile, from 1998 to 2000, where she collaborated on literacy research on low-income children, in addition to supporting the creation of a masters' degree in early education. Formerly she worked with Professor Snow on a project to evaluate the reading skills of low-income Latino children living in the United States. Since 2002 she collaborates with the ADA Program on the design and impact analysis of early reading interventions involving families, teachers and volunteers to promote early school success among children in at risk communities.

ADA Staff

Renata Villers, MBA, Executive Director

Renata Villers is Founder and Executive Director of ADA where she is responsible for strategy, stakeholder relations, collaborations and fundraising. Prior to coming to Costa Rica, Ms. Villers was a consultant in the firm of Harvard Business School professor James E. Austin, involved in developing materials and capacity building for non-governmental organizations in developing countries as well as institutional clients such as Woman's World Banking, the Asian Development Bank and the International Finance Corporation. Since moving to Costa Rica, Ms. Villers has been an independent consultant to a number of non-governmental organizations including the National Institute for Biodiversity (INBio) where with the support of a Rockefeller Foundation grant she supported the creation of the business development role. At INBio Ms. Villers was responsible for marketing research, strategic planning and the identification and management of collaborations with pharmaceutical firms (such as Merck and Eli Lilly), agroindustrial companies and academic partners. Ms. Villers graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College in 1985 and received her MBA from Columbia Business School in New York in 1992. She lives and works in Costa Rica with her husband and two Costa Rican daughters since 1992.

Melissa Arias, MSc. Program Coordinator

Melissa Arias is a preschool teacher, with ample classroom experience in k-6. She holds a masters degree in education and has conducted research on early learning among “at risk” children, as well as on teacher practice in preschool. Since 2000 she has also been a member of the faculty at the ULACIT University, where she has taught courses on emergent reading, children’s literature and others. In 2003 she joined ADA as its Program Coordinator working closely with Harvard doctoral student Andrea Rolla and Professor Catherine Snow in the development and adaptation of methodology in three new early reading interventions involving: families, tutors and classroom teachers. She has been responsible for piloting the implementation of these interventions involving over 400 participant children, volunteer tutors, parents and teachers. As part of her work she also trains student teachers and volunteer tutors in evaluation techniques and coordinates the evaluation of over 200 children in 14 classrooms.

Ana María Vega, MSc. Program Coordinator

Ana Maria is a preschool teacher with experience teaching in the primary grades. In 2001 she received a competitive scholarship to pursue her masters degree in education at the Universidad Catolica of Chile, where she focused her studies on Learning Difficulties graduating with honors in 2003. Her thesis focused on a comparison between Chilean and Costa Rican methodologies in early reading instruction in the public schools. In 2004 she joins ADA as a Program Coordinator responsible for implementation of ADA interventions including tutoring, family and classroom.

Maria Jose Escalante, MSc. Program Coordinator

Maria Jose Escalante is a bilingual teacher with considerable experience at the preschool level in several well known private schools. Ms Escalante received her master’s degree in teaching from the Universidad de La Salle, graduating with honors in 2000. For several years she was taught courses and supervised new teachers in training for the Universidad Latina. In 2001 she set up the Country Day School preschool program in Guanacaste in which she taught till giving birth to her son in 2003. Since 2005 she is a Coordinator in the ADA Teacher Professional Development Program, where she imparts workshops and engages in coaching classroom teachers from kindergarten to third grade in the ADA Program.

Mayte Morales, MSc. Program Coordinator

Mayte Morales is an educator with considerable experience teaching preschool and first grade. For many years she was the Preschool Director at a well known Costa Rican private school where she was responsible for more many classroom teachers, their children and parents. She holds a Masters degree in Educational Administration from the Universidad Latina de Costa Rica. Since 2005 she is a Coordinator in the ADA Teacher Professional Development Program, where she imparts workshops and engages in coaching classroom teachers from kindergarten to third grade in the ADA Program.