

Supporting the Needs of Children through Arts and Culture: An Interview with Anabel Negrín (Librarian of El Parnaso, Uruguay Services for Children and Teenagers)

Patrick Lo¹, Bradley Allard²

¹Hong Kong (SAR), China

²Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Corresponding author: Patrick Lo, E-mail: wotan455@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

El Parnaso is an interesting cultural center in the small city of Young, which is located a bit north of Trinidad, Uruguay. This center is a non-profit organization dedicated to meeting the information needs of its population, and it contains a children's library and a music library. El Parnaso hosts a wide variety of activities for children and young people, including music, origami, and even Greek language.

Anabel Negrín is the librarian of El Parnaso, and she is responsible for managing the library's resources and offers information services to users who visit. A native Youngene, Negrín has returned to her birthplace after working in various academic libraries in Uruguay. In this interview, she introduces her library, gives an overview of various education issues in Uruguay, and provides interesting stories about her experience at El Parnaso.

Could we begin this interview by first introducing yourself? For example, what is your professional training and educational background? Do you come from a family of educators, librarians or avid readers?

I am Anabel Negrín. I was born in the city of Young, which is in the province of Río Negro, a city that has around 18,000 inhabitants, and its economic activity is centered on agricultural work.

From 4 to 17 years of age, I attended the three levels of basic and compulsory education in our country, institutionalized in Primary School (from 4 to 11 years old) and Secondary School or Lyceum, which is made up of the Basic Cycle (three years) and Diversified Baccalaureate (the final three years).

It is important to know that education in our country is secular, free, and compulsory. On the other hand, at the tertiary level, in order for Young's youth to be able to carry out their studies, they must travel or move to the cities of Paysandú, Salto, or Montevideo.

The first is 60 km from the city of Young and belongs to the province that bears the same name and borders north of Río Negro.

Continuing 180 km north is the city of Salto in the province of Salto. And toward the south, a little further from Young than the previous ones, is the capital of our country,

Montevideo. It is 315 km away, and all the universities and careers available in Uruguay are located there.

Most of the young people from Young move there during their career years, and some of them later return to their city or remain there permanently.

In my case, after finishing high school, I continued with a distance course for a Technician in Social Communication, offered by the ALDEY and IADE Schools, and at the same time, I started my bachelor's degree in Library Science in the city of Paysandú at the University of the Republic.

Due to a family situation (I married someone who lived in the city of Libertad in the province of San José, 60 km from Montevideo), I had to continue my university training in Montevideo at the University of the Republic.

There, I studied for my four-year degree. I did internships in various libraries, but I am currently doing the final degree project. Last year I returned to Young and to the El Parnaso Cultural Center.

I have parents who are avid readers. They have worked throughout their lives in communications (starting in radio, then in written press, audiovisual, and lastly, directing a TV channel in Young).

Have you always worked in libraries? Could you tell us more about your career path to becoming the Librarian of El Parnaso, Uruguay?

Yes, my work performance has focused on libraries. My first experience was here in El Parnaso (where my taste for books and my career in librarianship germinated), where I started working when I was 17 years old (when I was not yet studying). After three years of working here, I got married, which led me to move far from El Parnaso. But, after finishing my studies in Montevideo, I resumed my work in El Parnaso, traveling one day a month for five years, until 2019.

In Montevideo, while I was studying librarianship, I worked in the libraries of the following institutions: the ORT University, in the departmental board of that city, and in the Directorate of Education of the MEC (in the latter with a profile of Literacy Worker in the use of the Databases of Academic Electronic Journals, gathered on the "El TIMBÓ" platform, which was financed by the National Agency for Research and Innovation).

I returned to Young in March 2020, resuming my work as a librarian at the Centro Cultural El Parnaso–Uruguay.

What are the minimal professional qualification requirements for working as a school librarian in Uruguay?

As I mentioned in the first question, in Uruguay, education is secular, free, and compulsory. This conception of public education was proposed by the educational reformer José Pedro Varela in 1876. Then an idea came about that a library should be in each school (Law of Common Education, 1877). In the following years, an attempt has been made to provide each school with books to achieve this objective.

Several actions were carried out by the political and governmental entities that have tried to create these libraries:

- Implementation of the Learning Resource Center (CRA) that reached only 23% of the country's schools in 1992.
- Project MECAEP (Project for the Improvement of the Quality of Primary Education), which arose from 1994 with the contribution of books and didactic material—especially for schools in unfavorable socioeducational circumstances.
- And finally with the creation of the National Reading Plan, which emerged in 2005, in their line of action towards public schools, they tried to supply them with small collections of books to assist their school libraries, and more recently, in connection with the current Information Institute, has also generated training for teachers in the management of these libraries.

It is in this way that school libraries in Uruguay, for the most part, do not extend to more than one shelf with books located in each classroom, and are attended, managed, and directed by the teachers and directors of the same schools.

There are many cases in which there is no physical space and there are no dedicated staff—there are even cases in which they are attended by teachers who cannot teach directly, which is not always the best option.

Unfortunately, there is still no national policy that includes librarians and librarians as managers of these types of libraries, and there is no specialization in school libraries as a university degree.

Is librarianship (particularly school librarians and children's services librarians) a respectable profession in Uruguay—a profession that is comparable to schoolteachers or university professors?

As I mentioned in the previous question, librarianship in Uruguay does not have any specialization, and, therefore, there are no school librarians. However, elective subjects are presented toward the end of the career curricular content to delve into specialized services, and among them is the school library.

That said, the answer to your question is negative. Bibliothecology (especially the librarian of school libraries and children's services) does not compare to careers as teachers or university professors. They might even be lower than teachers or professors, as evidenced in the scarcity of the availability of state public budgets.

Uruguay's local school system—is it very much geared toward high achievement in examination, with heavy emphasis on rote learning and memorisation?

It consists of five levels: initial education (duration of three years, students from 3 to 5 years of age), primary education (with a duration of six years, students from 6 to 12 years of age), secondary education, which consists of basic cycle (duration of three years, students from 13 to 15 years of age) and baccalaureate (duration of three years, students from 16 to 18 years), non-university professional studies (at the Universidad del Trabajo del Uruguay—UTU), and university studies.

Regarding the institutions that make up the Uruguayan Educational System, and those who organize, implement, and supervise education in levels, orientations, and educational modalities, they are:

- The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), which develops the general principles of education, facilitates the articulation between national educational policies and human, cultural, social, technological, and economic development policies. It also collects, prepares, and disseminates the statistics of the sector.
- National Public Education Administration (ANEP) is the state agency responsible for planning, managing, and administering the public education system at its five levels (initial, primary, secondary, technical, and training in tertiary education) throughout Uruguay.
- The University of the Republic (UdelaR) is an autonomous entity in charge of higher public education, promoting and protecting scientific research.

Responding to the question, although from a theoretical aspect and from the General Law of Education of Uruguay, it is proposed to develop a critical spirit in students in practice; in reality, it is not.

There is not yet an education system explicitly based on experience and the acquisition of knowledge through observation and practice. And, unfortunately, the public school education system has a strong orientation toward rote learning and final school performance (especially at the secondary level) is based on passing final exams.

However, there are transversal efforts to the strictly academic or curricular educational system (defined by ANEP), which arise from the orbit of the Ministry of Education and Culture, such as the “Departmental Fair of Science Clubs.”

It is a space for informal education in which children, youth, and adults can develop their ideas and creativity through research, scientific and technological development, and, fundamentally, teamwork.

To what extent do the local schools or schoolteachers emphasise on active learning/enquiry-based learning via giving emphasis on developing students' reading comprehensive skills, as well as a voluntary reading habit for pleasure?

From my experience as a student of the public education system, and from my contacts with teachers, I can verify that few teachers and local schools emphasize active learning, based on inquiry, and emphasizing the development of comprehensive reading skills in students.

At the country level, there is a large deficit that the government has recently tried to help through specific government actions, such as the creation of the National Reading Plan and the National Culture Plan.

Both arise from the Ministry of Education and Culture, and in the case of the first, its development is carried out with a strong articulation with the Information Institute (where the courses of Bibliotecology and Archivology are dictated) of the University of the Republic.

The National Reading Plan proposes the promotion of Reading and Writing as basic tools for life and social inclusion.

It also proposes training in reading promotion strategies in all the actors involved with it (educational centers, libraries, museums, teacher training institutes, etc.). And from this task, reading as a tool to improve learning in children and young people is encouraged. However, there is still a long way to go.

Do the general public and politicians in Uruguay recognise the importance of libraries and librarians, particularly their contributions to children's learning, literacy skills and cultivating the attitude of lifelong learning? Are libraries and librarians in Uruguay always the first victims of budget cut?

Although people generally view libraries as the places where knowledge is cultivated and are necessary for the development of every illustrious citizen, there are few people, educational institutions, and even at the level of state policy who actively assist libraries for this purpose.

Consequently, and sadly, yes, libraries and librarians in Uruguay are the first victims of the budget cut.

Have you witnessed any major shifts in the trends of formal and informational learning both within and outside of school in Uruguay in the last 5 to 10 years?

To be honest, in the last five to 10 years, I have not witnessed substantial changes in formal and informal education in our country.

However, I could highlight the implementation of two plans:

- The Ceibal Plan, which especially in times of pandemic, has been the technological platform used by all educational levels in the last year.

The Ceibal Plan was created in 2007 as an inclusion and equal opportunities plan with the aim of supporting

Uruguayan educational policies with technology. Since its implementation, each boy, girl, and adolescent who enters the public educational system throughout the country has access to a personal computer with a free Internet connection from the educational center. In addition, Plan Ceibal provides a set of programs, educational resources, and teacher training that transforms the ways of teaching and learning.

In its practical application, most of the teachers promote the use of "Ceibalitas" (laptops for children and adolescents) and use virtual platforms to share instructions for homework or some classroom activities. But it was only in this last year that people used it more due to the pandemic.

- Another significant change at the level of professional technical education at the Uruguayan Labor University (UTU) has been the implementation of the FPB (Basic Professional Training) plan. It arose in 2007 as a proposal for Basic Secondary Education with a professional training component, which grants those who graduate the accreditation of the Basic Cycle of Secondary Education and the title of Practical Operator in the specific professional area they have chosen.

But sadly, in terms of content or quality of education, there have been no major changes. In the words of the current president of our country, Luis Lacalle Pou:

Uruguayan education is in trouble...Our primary education is having great difficulties in ensuring quality learning for all students...In secondary education things are worse. The PISA tests, among other measures, have shown time and again that half of Secondary and UTU students are not doing the necessary learning to have opportunities in life. And while other Latin American countries improve, we are stagnant...Added to them is the abandonment of thousands of students when they are still far from completing the legal period of compulsory education. In this regard, we are among the worst on the continent.

(<https://lacallepou.uy/programa/educacion/>)

Could you provide a brief introduction to El Parnaso, Uruguay? El Parnaso, Uruguay was founded by a Uruguayan native, Anabella Levin-Freris—a medical doctor and her husband Andrew Freris – an economist, both of them music lovers, who currently reside in Hong Kong. What motivated Anabella Levin-Freris and Andrew Freris to establish El Parnaso, Uruguay in the first place?

El Parnaso is a non-profit organization created in 1999 and located in the city of Young, department of Río Negro; it is dedicated to the development of educational and cultural activities in its wide spectrum. It is important to mention that since its inception, El Parnaso has been part of the UNESCO Libraries network.

It consists of a library of more than 7,000 titles of books, magazines, and other educational materials, as well as an important collection of musical works. All cultural and educational activities and materials offered by El Parnaso are free for the entire population.

Over the years, Dr. Levin-Freris has personally designed and implemented a large number of initiatives, programs, and activities, including Reading Club for Children, Adults

Reading Club, El Parnaso Investigates, classes in origami, guitar, harmony, and counterpoint, chess, and, most recently, a program on Greek lifestyle and the teaching of Greek language.

El Parnaso also has a music library, which brings together the entire collection of classical music from the NAXOS record label, most of the personal collection of classical music CDs and DVDs of the two founders, as well as an extensive collection of vinyl LPs and specialized bibliographic material on the subject, aimed at both youth and adults. In all, the music library contains more than 4,000 CDs and hundreds of DVDs and LPs.

It should also be noted that its owners and founders, Dr. Anabella Levín and economist Andrew Freris, have established and manage another non-profit foundation in Hong Kong: the Chopin Society of Hong Kong, which is dedicated to the development and presentation of concerts and music related activities in Hong Kong and other parts of the world, such as most of the Asian countries, London, Athens, and Uruguay, bringing the winners of its HK International Piano Competition to perform in our country (at the Solís Theater and Sodre in Montevideo, and also to the Centro Cultural El Parnaso).

With the convenience brought by Internet connectivity, one could find an overwhelming number of online materials to read for free—so why do the local citizens still want to use the services and collections provided by El Parnaso, Uruguay?

We are immersed in the Information Age, and the number of responses that are obtained in an Internet search is increasing. The lack of evaluative tools to define the veracity of the information, and perhaps even elements to accurately define the search for information, makes citizens use the services of El Parnaso, both print and digital materials.

In addition, El Parnaso's library collection has many unique materials in the country, which makes the search for users here more special and desired.

The services and programs offered by El Parnaso, Uruguay—how do they differ from those services, which are offered by public, city or community libraries?

On the one hand, as I mentioned in the previous question, the materials contained in the library are especially unique, for the most part, compared to the public libraries in our area.

On the other hand, in El Parnaso, users have large reading rooms, access to computers and online searches, as well as a printer available.

We also assist in their searches in a personalized way, and if it is within our reach, we also provide school support to subjects and curricular study topics that may cause difficulties for the student.

As the Librarian of El Parnaso, Uruguay -- could you tell me about your job scope and areas of responsibilities?

In my role as librarian of El Parnaso, Uruguay, the scope of my work and the areas of responsibility are the following:

First and foremost, I work under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Levin-Freris, founder of El Parnaso, in executing her overall plans of the short- and long-term development of the Parnaso through its educational and cultural programs.

- Organizing the library collection (considering that it is the first time that it has been organized, in a database, under a classification system and in an automated way).
- Coordinating the development and maintenance of the collection of books and other information resources: Selecting, classifying and cataloging library materials. Making recommendations to Dr. Levin-Freris regarding the acquisition of books, magazines, newsletters, audiovisual and interactive media, and other materials to be included in the library collection.
- Providing information and research services and being part of the information tool development process: identifying and efficiently and exhaustively using both information resources and search tools, such as catalogs and other open sources. Preparing bibliographies, indexes, reading lists, guides, and other resources that facilitate the search for information.
- In connection with the activities of El Parnaso, Uruguay, providing all relevant resources and sources of information for the development of each proposal, as well as the new research topics that arise from said instances.
- Specifically in the space of El Parnaso, assisting in the search for information and in the entire research process that children and young people must carry out.
- Making constant monitoring of the effectiveness of resources, collections, and other services and making the necessary improvements in order to guarantee both the quality of the information and the optimal provision of services.
- Coordinating the development and maintenance of the circulation system.
- In our line of action about the creation of the Local Collective Memory of the city of Young, managing the organization of the information obtained from the Youngense collective memory and preserve it well.

Could you describe your typical day at work? Is there ever a typical day at work?

As in the last time I resumed my full-time job in El Parnaso, Uruguay, at the beginning of 2020, just a month before COVID-19 entered our country, my work routine varied significantly, so all the proposals and activities that were developed in person went virtual. And honestly, no day is the same as another.

Although the schedules of the activities are maintained (except for the visits of the local schools), there is a lot of material to prepare to move our spaces to virtual mode, and I am doing this task between one class or another virtual meeting.

However, I will go on to describe a fairly typical working day that I had to do just before our country went into quarantine:

Tuesday: Caif Younguitos visited us early in the morning at 9:00 a.m. to make use of the didactic material found in

El Parnaso, adapted to their ages (books with sounds, textures, nesting games, suitcase musical, and other toys from the treasure chest).

At 10:00 am., a group of children between 8 and 12 years old attend the origami space. At 11:00 am, a 5th grade class from School No. 43 (located one block from El Parnaso) attends to watch a documentary on the giant screen about Life in Water.

Lunch is at 12pm. At 12:30, we have our Greek class with other students across the country via Zoom with the teacher who teaches her course for Uruguay from Athens.

At 2:00 pm, we meet with the group of adolescents and young people in the space of El Parnaso, where we address issues of particular interest to the members of the group, as well as research matters that El Parnaso, Uruguay carries out (for example: development of the Young's Collective Memory, the works of the architect Eladio Dieste, The Origin of Fables, etc.).

At 4:00 pm, we continue with a group of children (between 8 and 11 years old) in the Children's Reading Club.

And with this activity the routine of Tuesday ends. It is worth mentioning that throughout the day, boys have to find information to carry out their home tasks and work on the computers at El Parnaso.

Does El Parnaso, Uruguay carry out any kinds of collaborations with the local teachers and schools, with the hope of complementing the local education system to develop human capital of the local population? If yes, please provide detailed examples.

Yes, El Parnaso, Uruguay, develops all kinds of collaborations that can help local teachers and schools expand the teaching they can give in their classrooms, in multiple ways:

- At the infrastructure level: in El Parnaso, Uruguay, teachers make extensive use of its conference room, giant screen, and collection of audiovisual materials (documentaries, musical works, and films).
- Didactic resources: there are many didactic materials, such as books, games, or other resources that support the teaching of the instructors in El Parnaso, Uruguay. The content covers all scientific disciplines and educational levels of the local schools.

Since its creation, El Parnaso has a strong commitment to schools, from early childhood to secondary study centers. It is interesting to note that it is located geographically close to a full-time public school, a full-time kindergarten, a CAIF (public center from 0- to 3-year-olds), and two private kindergartens.

These institutions normally include El Parnaso as part of the development of their annual school agenda, and they attend our center to develop multiple activities each week, with prior planning (projections of films and documentaries on the giant screen, recreational spaces with the different didactic materials, reading corners, among others). And the rest of the educational institutions of the town also frequently attend El Parnaso.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are trying to hold events virtually, through our YouTube channel,¹ and also in periodic meetings via ZOOM, with activities related to reading, origami, and the development of a critical and investigative spirit on the part of young people.

Which parts of your job as the Librarian of El Parnaso, Uruguay do you find most rewarding, and which do you find most frustrating?

As a librarian, I find it extremely gratifying to see children and young people from all social strata, but especially from vulnerable sectors of the population, who come to our center with little or no reading habits and few ambitions participate in our activities, begin to experience a change in these habits, a significant development in their general knowledge, and even an improvement in their school performance.

And in the negative sense, I find it frustrating to deal with a population that, even for the most part, does not know, nor has an interest in the great opportunities and materials that are offered in El Parnaso. Unfortunately, in our town, there is still a great ignorance of the role of our center, or they may not be able to understand its scope.

What kinds of traditional and non-traditional-library activities has El Parnaso, Uruguay been providing for the local children and teenagers—with the hope of developing their habits for voluntary reading and lifelong learning?

El Parnaso, Uruguay has a strong commitment to the development of the reading habits of children and adults, as well as lifelong learning.

All of its activities aim to contribute to lifelong learning. In fact, the proposals for young people and adults have no age limits, and both beginners and people with knowledge of the subject who wish to deepen their studies participate in them. We refer to the courses of harmony and musical composition, guitar, and Greek.

Could you tell me the demographics of most parents who bring their children to attend these programs/activities launched at El Parnaso, Uruguay? What are their educational and occupational backgrounds? What kinds of work do they do for living?

It is important to bear in mind that the largest socioeconomic occupation of the city is agriculture and cattle raising.

Taking into account adult users (except for children and young people who dedicate themselves almost exclusively to their primary and secondary studies), the majority work in various types of trades (local shops, warehouses, bakeries, mechanics, carpenters, fieldworkers, etc.), and others are in jobs related to teaching and the school environment. The minority are professionals (agronomists, veterinarians, lawyers, doctors, architects, notaries, social workers, psychologists, engineers, etc.).

1. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVvCy7poJ20zz-PB4qoQv8cw>

In this wide range, there are also many children and young people who come to El Parnaso in search of supporting material for their educational curricular content or to carry out activities that help their cognitive development.

And young people and adults from other areas participate in the different programs and use the bibliographic material of our collection in search of ways to increase their cultural development and exploring the different branches of knowledge from a totally different point of view than the one from other centers in our country.

Most of them only speak Spanish. There is a percentage that speaks or understands English, but it is the minority. And there they still have a lot of issues trying to search for proper information, so we are trying to help out with this issue.

From this drastic description, we can conclude that the profiles of the users who attend El Parnaso have wide differences in information needs, reading habits and the ability to handle information and its retrieval tools.

In what ways does El Parnaso, Uruguay, encourage parents, schoolteachers, carers, and family of children and teenagers/young adults to take part in library activities with their children?

There are many ways in which we try to encourage and motivate the parents, teachers, and relatives of the children so that they can attend the activities taught here with their children.

In face-to-face instances, and in direct contact with parents, we share the benefits and advances in positive development that children experience with their participation. In addition, at the end of the year, there is a presentation of the achievements obtained throughout the year from the boys to their families—thus encouraging their parents to continue with their attendance at the activities next year.

However, teachers who make use of the conference room and the different didactic resources for their classes, motivate their students to attend our center to extend their studies and develop knowledge and skills that are not encouraged from the beginning of their school environment.

Finally, mass media (local radio stations, newspapers, social networks, etc.) encourages all families to be able to attend El Parnaso, Uruguay with their children, both children and young people, also showing the achievements obtained, or recordings of the classes via YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

What kinds of reaction do you usually see on children, teenagers, and parents' faces when they arrive at El Parnaso, Uruguay?

When children and adolescents, and even their parents, arrive in El Parnaso, Uruguay, for the first time, the expression on their faces is one of surprise and admiration for what is found inside the striking buildings that can be seen from the outside. It is astonishment at the many “extraordinary” materials and things they cannot find at any other library or information center they have known.

They generally stay longer than they had anticipated, claiming to feel very comfortable in spacious reading rooms and even in the information-seeking area of computers.

In general, the experience is always such a pleasure that most of the boys attend daily even if they do not attend the activities—whether it is to find information for their curricular classes or simply to read a book from the library. They really look very satisfied and happy every time they attend El Parnaso, Uruguay, and this makes our task even more satisfactory.

What are some of the difficulties and challenges faced by you and your colleagues when designing and implementing events for children and teenagers at El Parnaso, Uruguay?

Among the challenges and difficulties that we have had to face when designing and implementing events for children and adolescents, we can point out the following:

- Lack of knowledge and disinterest at a general level of the Younguense population about the activities and materials offered in El Parnaso. Unfortunately, in our municipality, there is still a great ignorance of the role of our center, or it is possible that they cannot understand its scope.
- Lack of teachers in the area for the development of activities.
- Current generation of adolescents and young people devoid of interest and motivation to know, learn and acquire new knowledge.
- At the general social level: lack of a culture of lifelong learning.

The sources of inspiration that allow you to keep coming up with new ideas for developing more exciting and innovative programs catered for children and young adults under an on-going basis—where do your inspiration and new ideas come from?

The extraordinary books and materials that are in the collection of the library of El Parnaso are particularly my greatest source of inspiration for new ideas for the realization of exciting and innovative programs aimed at children and adolescents.

Another source of inspiration is the foreign experiences that both the owners of the center bring from other countries. We can also read in articles in scientific journals on the subject or websites of organizations that work on this subject and with this age population.

Last but not least, I keep in daily touch with the founder Dr. Levin-Freris who has an extraordinary ability to be able to manage and guide the activities of the Parnaso even from the other side of the world, as she lives mostly in Hong Kong. These daily sessions are always a source of ideas and of stimulation.

What ways do you intend the teens and children's activities/programs designed and developed by your library team to make a positive change in the lives of the community that El Parnaso, Uruguay serves?

Based on testimonies and experiences that parents and teachers have shared with us about the positive changes

experienced by children and young people who attend the activities in El Parnaso, Uruguay. It is also on what the adult population that attends has shared with us, we believe that indeed, the proposals of this Center have had a very positive impact on the entire community that El Parnaso, Uruguay serves.

For example, we see it in children who come from vulnerable social contexts with few ambitions, and after passing through here, they begin to acquire new knowledge and skills in various disciplines and tools for solving both everyday and more complex problems. Then, they begin to have dreams, plan their professional future, and spread their desire to learn and develop in all areas of knowledge and culture.

Has the population and beneficiaries of El Parnaso, Uruguay changed over time? If yes, please describe in detail.

Yes, the population served by El Parnaso, Uruguay, has changed remarkably over time. In fact, El Parnaso, Uruguay is physically located in the border area of a vulnerable neighborhood. And in the beginning, the children and adolescents from there showed unwanted attitudes and behaviors in their participation in the different activities. Over time, they not only changed their negative attitudes, behaviors and habits into very positive ones, but, as we answered in the previous question, they also began to have ambitions and goals for personal and professional development, which not even their parents imagined that they could have. And finally, after seeing them become those professionals and who came to realize their goals has been the greatest satisfaction and evidence of change that the population served by El Parnaso, Uruguay, has had.

For example, we have a piano recital, which is held annually free of charge (in which the winners of international piano competitions of the Chopin Society of Hong Kong are presented), El Parnaso, Uruguay, has sown a high level of musical culture in the Younguense society.

This has translated into a greater interest in citizens to attend these events and learn more about the classical musical works that make up our Musicoteca collection, in addition to increasing participation in musical activities in El Parnaso, Uruguay such as harmony and musical composition, and guitar.

What are the key elements behind successful programming for teens and children for public libraries? Does your team of staff design programs for specific age groups within these categories? Do you also involve parents in your programming?

In our experience, for a program for children and adolescents to be successful, it is necessary that the way or way of carrying it out is attractive and fun. The content itself should be shared in a simple and accessible way to the degree of understanding of the students.

The workshops or educational programs should not exceed 90 minutes for children and adolescents between 9 and 15 years old. In addition, the activity should provide you

with tools that students can use to create new knowledge, tapping into their constant source of creativity, enhancing their known skills, and developing new ones.

The ingredient of generating expectations and surprise in each instance should not be lacking, and it is important to stimulate curiosity in the midst of these generations who have all the information they want within the reach of a click.

It is important that children and adolescents can feel part of not only an activity that will teach them something, but they can also discover something new that they will teach us, their families, and peers as well.

Do you have any strategic plans worked out for developing El Parnaso, Uruguay for the next three to five years?

The development plans of the Parnaso are undertaken by the founder on the basis of the feedback we receive from the current activities and programs and on the continuous development of her ideas and initiatives.

Although in this last stage of my work here in El Parnaso (which I resumed a year ago), all planning had to be modified and was adapted to the very particular needs of this year, in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Levin-Freris pushed quickly and resolutely the adoption of distance-learning via Zoom, Skype, and YouTube, and these all had a remarkable response among the majority of the users. Although the buildings of El Parnaso have remained closed, the size and level of participation, if anything, has increased over this period of the pandemic. Dr Levin-Freris is convinced that the use of the digital media will not be reversed or even slowed down once the pandemic has abated and, hence, all our future plans have been recalibrated and refocused along these lines.

Dr Levin-Freris has outlined the following areas of growth:

1. Reading and the book as instruments of knowledge, of the development of the individual wherever they are (particularly in these times of confinement at home), and the development of reading for pleasure
2. Classical and Academic Music, providing more spaces for the exchange and dissemination of this type of music, as well as strengthening the existing ones (harmony and guitar)
3. The Investigative Culture, both in children and adults. Providing research activities from the project 'El Parnaso Investigates' and spreading its knowledge through its own magazine
4. The development of skills, cognitive capacity and problem solving, through the activities of origami, chess, and sudoku, as well as new proposals from mathematics and other related sciences that we wish to develop in the next three to five years
5. Knowledge of the nature and development of scientific culture, as far as natural sciences are concerned
6. Learning foreign languages, especially English
7. The local culture of Young and its surroundings. We will continue with the development of the collective memory, generating an archive with the documents and testimonies that the young people themselves are

contributing to El Parnaso, Uruguay, in order to perpetuate in some way, their history and local culture for future generations

8. Support for the curricular contents of the local school and support for the teaching task, providing materials that may be useful for their task and being always attentive to their needs and proposals that we can make from El Parnaso, Uruguay

All these lines of action and programming proposals that we have drawn up since last year will continue to be carried out virtually since the beginning of COVID-19, and we await the stabilization of this pandemic in order to continue in person.

Are there any interesting or heart-warming stories involving the bookmobile service carried out by El Parnaso, Uruguay that you would like to share with the readers?

It is very beautiful to see how the boys enter El Parnaso for the first time and are impressed by all the equipment, rooms, and materials that are offered to them free of charge. It is very moving to hear them and see that they do not want to leave our center at the end of an activity or at the end of their task on the PCs.

They always mention that they have never seen so much interesting material in their homes nor in their school.

But if I could choose three exciting stories, I would take those of Luis, María José, and Diego:

The first two came to El Parnaso for the first time when they were 11 years old. Both Younguense attended several of the activities such as crafts, reading, piano, origami, guitar, astronomy, English, journalism, and website creation.

In the words of María José, “in El Parnaso, my love for reading, letters, and education was born for crafts and all kinds of creations.”

When asked what El Parnaso left her, she tells us: “I don’t know if it could be called tools, but if values, respect for my elders and my colleagues, teamwork, the great importance of friendship. I learned to appreciate what life gave me and to make the most of that possibility. To enjoy and see that the world is gigantic and offers us endless things. Not to be left alone with what we have next to us, because outside there is much more.”

Currently, María José works in the commercial and sales area of a large company in the capital of the department of Río Negro, and Luis is finishing his architecture studies in Montevideo.

On the other hand, Diego tells us that his passage through El Parnaso has had different encounters: “at various times, that allowed me to re-discover him as he went from childhood to adolescence. My first approach was when I was of school age, with about 8 or 10 years, being motivated by the school in the ‘Guided Reading Workshop,’ which was the driving force to lose the ‘stage fright’ that I had then.”

He assures that “remembering the conferences and workshops that I participated without a doubt is a journey back in time to which I keep a lot of affection.” In addition to the reading workshops, “the chess workshops with Dr. Levín left learning about strategic thinking in a didactic way.” Other activities that he participated were: “Huerta classes, Crafts, Origami, Guitar, Wind Power, English, Journalism, Computer Science, Film projection, among many more.”

Following his testimony, Diego tells us that “what attracted me to El Parnaso was what I could learn with people of my age, as well as being a technology center where many of us could access, finally its architecture was always interesting to me. Over time, I understood that El Parnaso nurtured my side of exploration, learning and gave me that possibility of approaching knowledge. Likewise, interacting with local and international people who introduced us to Anabella and Andrew made me understand that Young was closer to places that I thought were far away. On the other hand, the exchange and teamwork allowed me to develop communication, motivation, leadership, as well as other aptitudes, abilities and competencies that I continue to perfect to this day.”

Currently, Diego has a degree in Labor Relations and works in the private medical assistance mutual (Médica Uruguaya) in the city of Montevideo.

Anabel Negrín

Mailing Address: 25 de Agosto 3585, 65100 Young, Departamento de Río Negro, Uruguay

Corresponding author: Anabel Negrín
E-mail: centroculturalelparnaso@gmail.com