

# **Donating Educational Material to Teachers and Children**

## **Aldea Chiax Balamte, Región Pinares, Cahabon Alta Verapaz, Guatemala**



## Introduction

During 2018, with the help of Cahabon area school consultant Hans Ermerson González Véliz, we visited and donated educational material to San Marcos Civite and another school into the mountains after you cross the Rio Cahabon on a swinging hammock bridge. We have also visited the village school of Aldea Tzalamtun, Santa Maria Cahabon, and donated educational material there. This school is on the road from Rio Cahabon towards Senahu, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala.

In early March 2020 we visited the school in the village of Balamte, an hour's drive from Cahabon into the mountains. Balamte is one of two words for *Theobroma bicolor*, a relative of the more common cacao tree *Theobroma cacao*. The other word for *Theobroma bicolor* is Pataxte. There is a Rio Pataxte and an aldea Pataxte on the southern shores of Lago Izabal, towards the western end of that lake in Izabal. We at FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica have been studying both kinds of cacao for many years. Our photographs of cacao from Tabasco, Mexico are in books on cacao decades ago by Yale University professor Dr Michael Coe and his wife Sofie Coe. Our photos of cacao are also in books by Dr Suzanne Cook on ethnobotany of the Lacandon Maya of Chiapas and books on cacao by Japanese linguist Dr Yoshiho Yasugi.

We have also studied cacao in the Izapa area of coastal Chiapas (many decades ago). Now we are focused on cacao of Alta Verapaz, Peten, Boca Costa, Costa Sur areas of Guatemala. Plus we study all the flavorings used by the Aztec, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Maya for thousands of years for their cacao beverages: such as *Quararibea funebris*, Rosita de cacao, a tree that grows in Peten, Alta Verapaz, and botanist Mario Velez has found another species in Izabal.

The photographs in this report show our visit to the primary school of Balamte



Alta Verapaz is a beautiful part of Guatemala to experience.





Nicholas heading for the school.



Alejandra, Senaida, and hospitable and helpful local villager. The mountains are in the background. As you can judge from all the mist, this area is quite moist much of the year, so both *Theobroma bicolor* (pataxte, balamte) and traditional cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) are cultivated in all these mountains.





Not many gringos have been to this aldea and even fewer (if any) have visited the school. In past years Dr Nicholas (Hellmuth) has learned that to show the local people his personality, he teaches them hand gymnastics (putting your fingers in backwards and then turning your hand around).



While waiting for our turn, outside Senaida Ba and Nicholas speak with the village elders.





Senaida is showing the village and school leaders the various plants we are interested in finding, photographing, publishing, and showing local people their nutritional value.



The school children are very curious. They are all eager to learn.

Senaida at the left; Maria Alejandra at the right.

The hour that we arrived the school was doing an educational event, so we sat in the background to wait our turn.





The children in every school we visit are inspired to learn new things. Here Dr Nicholas is showing photographs of local plants.



We have tested various ways to help school children in remote villages. They all love to see plants and animals on mobile phones. Even in these rural villages the kids have access to basic smart photos, so they can watch educational videos. We taught Shaila, a Q'eqchi' Mayan child of one of our assistants, to read the entire alphabet by age three. And by age four she knew the numbers, and the colors in English and Spanish. We experimented with different formats, so now we have experience.

The best way to teach children (and their families) what is a pollinator, why it is good to protect pollinators, is to use animated video.

Same with teaching ABC's, numbers, colors; books help, banners on the school wall are appreciated by every school we visit. But animated videos would be super helpful. So it would be great if an individual, family, foundation, or corporation, or a country's embassy or consulate programs, could work together with FLAAR Mesoamerica for us to prepare the videos.

We prefer to use Guatemalan themes, local themes, local plants and animals (to help teach the children how to preserve fragile ecosystems).

Animated video is essential. We have capable individuals available, both in Guatemala, and our team in USA are professional video animators (Camila Morales and Gustavo Gallegos).





The head school teacher (at the left) presents me to the students.



Now Nicholas and Senaida are giving their presentation. Senaida translates into the local Q'eqchi' Mayan language.





Banner showing colors and numbers, all in three languages; Q'eqchi' Mayan, Spanish, and English. The local school teachers have told us that they have only material in Q'eqchi', or Spanish, but not in all three languages together.

This material is all prepared in-house in the offices of FLAAR Mesoamerica, Guatemala City.

We would like to prepare educational material on essential food health: nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and what local plants provide each.



I have learned not to give a static presentation. It is best to interact with the audience, to move around and show the educational material to each group of students.





We then donate each banner to the school teachers.





Over the years we have prepared material for teaching ABCs in various formats. But in all cases we try to utilize Guatemalan plants, fruits, or flowers as the illustrations for each letter.





This is an example of desktop size educational material. It would help if each and every student had one for their desktop.





The teacher managing this meeting has the microphone explaining to the students about the educational banners that FLAAR Mesoamerica brought to the school today.



This banner is an entire book reprinted page by page. This way the entire book can be on the wall of the school.

It has every letter with a local edible fruit, nut, edible flower, edible leaf or other local plant. We would prefer to be able to donate books for the entire class. But until funding is available, at least we want to have the material prepared in advance.





The students come running to look at this.



A first-generation banner concept showing what is a bird, what is a mammal, what is a reptile, etc. We need to redesign these to make them fit on the desk of the students (as an infographic poster, size precisely of a desktop, so every student in the class can have one while the teacher explains what is a mammal, what is a frog, etc.





To show the students that every individual student in the entire room counts, our tradition is to walk the banner around the entire room, and show it to group after group.







School principal thanks Nicholas and Senaida.



School kids are curious about the curly hair of Maria Alejandra Gutierrez (FLAAR Mesoamerica).





I estimate that this photograph documents that the school children appreciate what FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala) would like to prepare for their own family phones (so they can learn more in the afternoon and evening, when they are no longer in the school).

Find photos of the prints of ABC written with letters
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We have another banner we are working on that has every letter of the entire alphabet physically written with actual fruits or flowers (all native, all local, all Guatemalan).
We would like to be able to print and donate these banners, but even more, we would like to animate each fruit-letter, each flower letter, and have each letter dance with music to explain which letter it is (and what plant it is).
This same animation can have the plants come together to ask the kids to save their fragile ecosystems, and to help preserve pollinators so all the plants can reproduce.
A for Avocado B for Bledo (leave of Amaranth) C for Camote, sweet potato, very healthy Z for zapote fruit from local trees.

We appreciate the cooperation of experienced school teacher Hans Ermerson González Véliz who now works for the Municipio de Cahabon. He arranged the visit to Balamte, speaking with the village elders and the school teachers and school administrators.