

Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta

San Marcos Chivite

San Marcos Chivite, Cahabon, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala



Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth
FLAAR Mesoamérica, March 2018



Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta San Marcos Chivite

Photography: Senaida Ba, Cristian Garcia,
and Elena Bout
Design and Layout: Melanny Quiñonez

Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta San Marcos Chivite

*Municipio Santa María Cahabón,
Departamento Alta Verapaz,
Guatemala, Central America*

We first visited this friendly village about three years ago to learn about what trees produce local kinds of incense. We were guided by a Q'eqchi' friend who knew the local people.

About two years ago we brought a dozen Guatemalan university students to learn about the eco-friendly Q'eqchi' manner of using grass, palm, and other plants for making roof thatch.

Last September (2017) we made a presentation to the school teachers in the village school, Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta San Marcos Chivite. This event was organized by Hans Veliz Garcia. During this visit in September 2017 our goal was to learn from the teachers and students what materials we of FLAAR Mesoamerica could provide to them. We were told that the most helpful would be to have everything in three languages: Q'eqchi' Mayan, Spanish, and English.





Melanny is doing her university thesis on how to improve teaching material in rural Q'eqchi' schools, So she brought her initial edition ABC learning book. At three different schools in September (including San Marcos Chivite) she showed her initial work. The teachers in each school suggested additional concepts to add to make a new edition.

Melanny returned to the office and did the changes. Dr Nicholas got sample books printed so that we could return to the schools in February 2018 to show them.



In order to reach this school, we walked across the remains of a hammock bridge across the Rio Cahabón. The drive from the picturesque Spanish colonial town of Cahabón is less than 45 minutes. You occasionally get nice views of the river which flows parallel to the road. There are impressive mountains on both sides.

Park your vehicle and walk across the impressive hammock bridge, high above the Rio Cahabón below. Then hike into the hills to reach the school. This is a beautiful area to visit.

As at the previous school, we were received by the school authorities and the village community leader. The reason of why the community leader was in our presentation with the local teachers of the school is that he knew that our interest as an organization is to prepare material for educational purposes. It is helpful if people in a village, especially the village leaders, know who you are in advance. This fact is due to the constant problems that exist a community due to the disruption and destruction caused by installation of megaprojects such as hydroelectric projects and mining. Obviously we are not engaged in any construction or mining work. FLAAR Mesoamerica is focused on research on flora and fauna of Guatemala and producing educational material to encourage preservation of endangered species.

This presentation was in a school which included around 90 children, always curious and surprised. They like us to take pictures of them together with their classmates. In the same way, it was a very peasant experience to feel an admiration for these little children and share what we know with them.



Some of the posters are printed on translucent material. This way you can mount them onto a window.



Two of the village school authorities are at the left. In the middle is Hans, who is a teacher at other schools in the same municipio of Cahabon. He organizes the school visits for us.

Here we are showing the numbers with their names in three languages.

Dr Nicholas gives a set of ABCs printed on hard thick material. This material will survive being handled by the school kids for many years.

We appreciate Mutoh Americas and other companies for printing this material with their UV-curing printer technology.



This is a rollout of wild animals of Guatemala. The teachers can post the 1.5 meter banner complete, or they can cut out each animal and mount them on the wall one by one.

We like to show local animals of the Mayan areas. The kid will learn about giraffes, zebras, lions and tigers soon enough. We like to focus on local animals to encourage protecting these animals and their fragile eco-systems.



Since ABCs are the basics, we like to prepare ABCs in many sizes and formats. Here is a row of Capital letters next to lower case letters. Then an entire row of the lower case letters.

It helps when we visit the schools to ask what material they prefer. For example, they told us that lower case letters are helpful to the students, so we made lower case series for the teachers.

Our next edition will have even more additional features.



We are getting close to finishing three books; ABCs for primary school, and books on the endangered scarlet macaw for students aged 7 through 9.

If funding were available we could produce a lot more subjects for the schools, and we could put the text into all three languages (currently they are in English or Spanish).



Colors and shapes are basic learning tools for primary school, but the teachers tell us that no commercial school books are in three languages. So we have the colors, and shapes, and numbers in Q'eqchi' Mayan, Spanish, and English available to the schools for the first time, on a poster format (since posters can be put on the walls for all students of all ages to view).

It would be great if a helpful corporation or individual or a Fundacion provided funds so we could do the colors, shapes, and numbers all into a book format which would also be a coloring book.



After doing a balancing act trying to cross the swinging hammock bridge, you hike up a hill to the school.

March is the dry season here.



There are several small streams to cross during the hike from the bridge to the school. Here you have a good view of the mountain behind the village.



Nice view of the hills.



It is good exercise. You walk along the edge of the Rio Cahabon, then climb some hills.



It is an adventure to cross the river on this hammock bridge. Frankly the bridge is very picturesque and reminds you of movies of past decades.

If the bridge were solid concrete it would not be picturesque.



Local people are repairing the steps leading up to the hammock bridge over the Rio Cahabon.

We were very pleased to see the small posters from FLAAR on the walls of the school. These were the first posters we had donated to the school on our first visit in September 2017.





The teachers are very knowledgeable

I enjoy learning about insects, especially bees and wasps. So when I saw two wasp nests at the school I took some snapshots.

I then mentioned to the teachers that if they know of where we could find the “Mexican Honey Wasp” that we would appreciate tips, because we wish to study honey-making wasps.

One of the teachers immediately told me that the larger of the two species of wasps that I had just photographed was a honey-making wasp.

WOW, and if this is a genus or species different than the Mexican Honey Wasp, *Brachygastra mellifica*, then we have discovered a species not in 95% of the articles and Internet pages on insects other than bees who do pollination.

Since we did not have a tripod or ladder with us, and no macro lens, I would need to return with good equipment to take a close-up of the “bee like” design of the base of an earlier nest.

We are now looking for a wasp specialist in Guatemala or nearby who can help us identify what “honey wasp” this is. The teacher at the school here in San Marcos Chivite told us that these wasps do not attack in swarms; naturally they will defend their nest, but they are not vicious.

Brachygastra mellifica may have the word “Mexican” in its name (Mexican Honey Wasp), but it can also be found in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and other countries of Mesoamerica.

We are very interested in doing books on pollinators of Guatemala in general, with a separate book on honey wasps. It would also be nice to make a school edition for kids so they can learn about pollinators and learn not to automatically destroy every bee or wasp nest that they find.

Future Educational Projects

For pre-primary children: coloring books with themes related to learning about protecting their eco-system.

For primary school children: ABC learning books but with more interactive aspects: crossword puzzles and much much more. It is also very very helpful to create games for children that do not include guns, explosions or blood. We have 15 Guatemalan university students in our main office. They are illustrators, artists, graphic designers, and animators. So we have a team ready, willing, and able to produce fresh new material... as soon as funding is available.



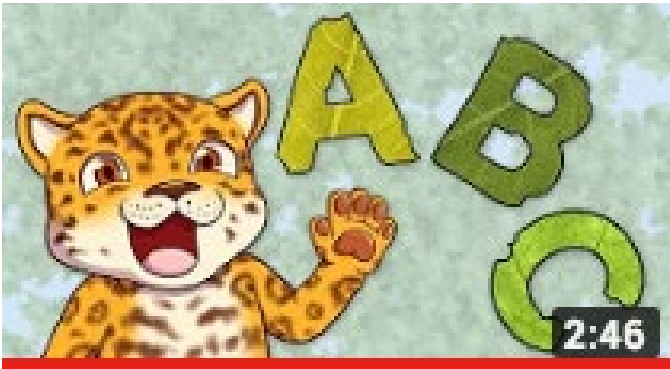
We also have experience making origami "books." These are origami where each segment has one of the letters of the alphabet. Our in-house staff has several people with experience in doing origami.

School kids really like innovative material. Origami lets the school children learn "hands on."

For school children 8 years onward, we have many topics about endangered species (of both plants and animals).

For ages 12/13 to 16 we have lots of concepts. As soon as outside funding is available, our team of over 12 graphic designers, artists, illustrators, and animators are ready to produce material to help in local schools.

We also have learning tools for parents and grandparents: many grownups did not have a chance to finish school when they were kids. We would like to help them finish learning how to read and write.



This is our first animated video. We have the storyboards for five more.

As soon as funding is available we can help children all over Guatemala learn how to read and pronounce ABC in whatever language they wish: Spanish, local Mayan, Xinca, or Garifuna language, and English if desired.



This is our animated video on friendly animal of Guatemala.

Our goal is to have each animal speak to the children to tell the children about the forests, fields, rivers, lakes, and swamps.

Most important is to preserve these areas: not destroy them with bulldozers.

And most important, it is definitely helpful to have animated video as learning tools: friendly plants and animals: not the fighting you see on too many 1950's cartoon series.

Most people have a smart phone (no matter how far they live from a city). And even if there is no internet, you can download educational videos into their phones so they can have these in their homes to assist everyone in the family.

And while speaking of the family, the concept of having ABCs and other learning adventures using cultural and ethical values has a lot of potential.

To learn more of what can be helpful for schools and the students, I asked 3-year old Shaila. She comes from Senahu, Alta Verapaz, high in the mountains (3 hour drive south of Cahabon).

Shaila said she would like to learn

- colors
- Shapes (sun, moon, stylized star, square, rectangle, triangle, etc.)
- Numbers

During the last two years I have helped her learn ABC, colors, and numbers. I estimate 80% of what she learned was from educational animated videos. And some videos of school children holding the colors, shapes, etc.

So we would love to do more animation and videos, since music, movement, and color in the animations is what holds the child's attention.

FLAAR Mesoamerica and FLAAR in USA have animators, but to do what is essential would take serious funding to produce noticeable results.

I then asked Shaila's mother, what she would like her daughter to learn. The mother said:

- Read and write, including alphabet and numbers
- Then learn vocals, syllables
- And also to learn valores (cultural and ethical values).

We at FLAAR Mesoamerica have capable university students, capable managers, capable Q'eqchi' speaking assistants (who are very adept at research as well).