

Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta

TZALAMTÚN

Cahabon, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala



Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth
FLAAR Mesoamérica, March 2018



Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta Tzalamtún

Photography: Senaida Ba, Cristian Garcia,
Elena Bout, and Erick Flores
Design and Layout: Erick Flores

Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta Tzalamtún

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

The goals of FLAAR Mesoamerica are to learn which kinds of teaching and learning material is most helpful for the teachers and for the students.

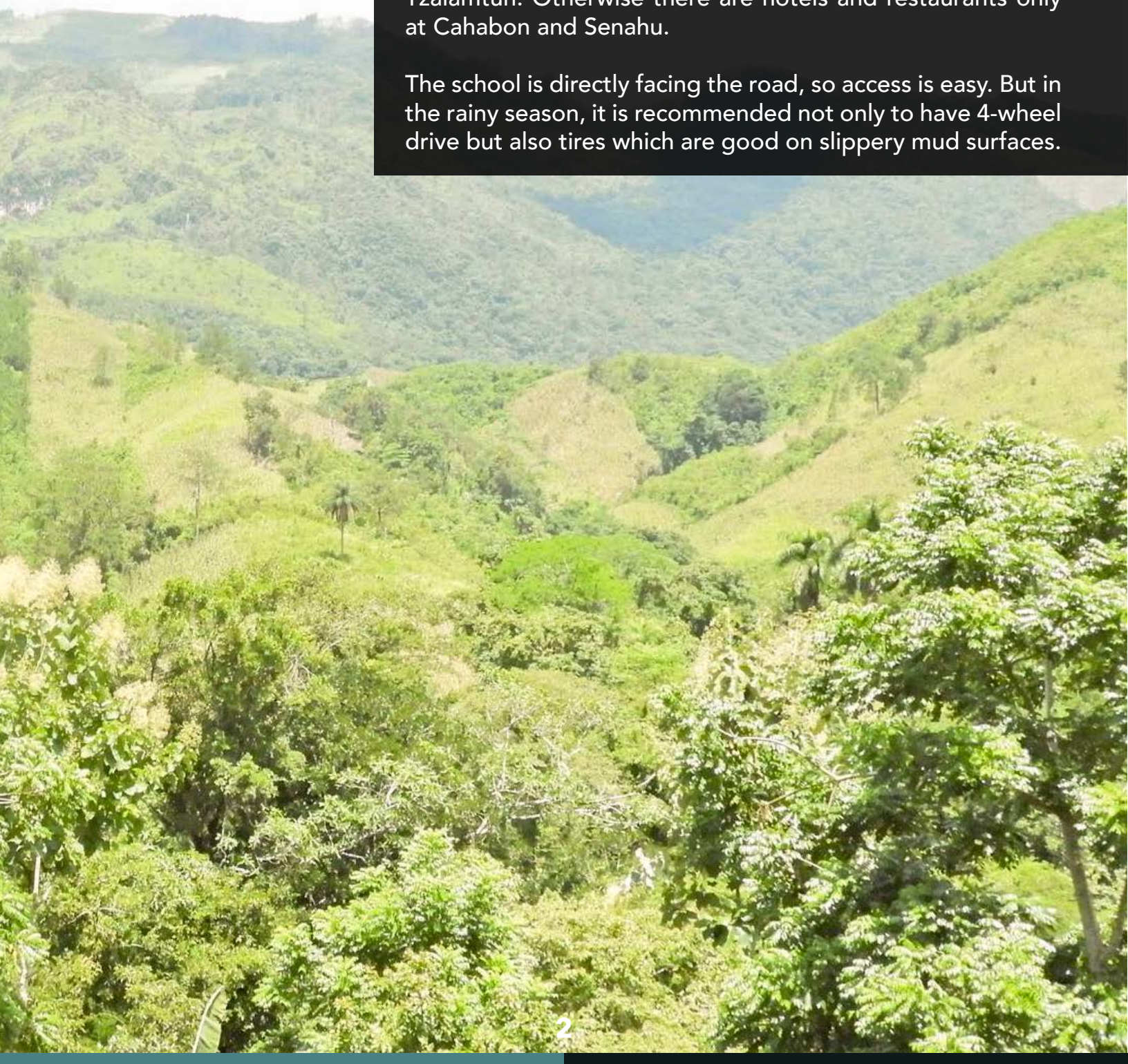
We start with ages 3 through 5. We would enjoy also preparing material for all other ages, but this would require outside funding.



Access to Tzalamtún

Tzalamtún is about 20 to 30 minutes drive from Cahabón, on the rural dirt and occasionally gravel road to Senahú. It is all hills and mountains. The views from the road are gorgeous. This part of Guatemala is so beautiful it is sad that there are no tour programs that bring tourists to experience these views. Tourists would allow hotels and restaurants to open in Tzalamtún. Otherwise there are hotels and restaurants only at Cahabon and Senahu.

The school is directly facing the road, so access is easy. But in the rainy season, it is recommended not only to have 4-wheel drive but also tires which are good on slippery mud surfaces.



What impressed me about this school

First, the school was larger than any most other schools that I have visited. There were dozens of teachers and lots of classrooms.

The school building appeared to be in good condition.

We did not have time to visit each classroom; I like to visit classrooms to see what materials they put on the walls. In the school rooms of Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta San Marcos Chivite the walls are filled with helpful and informative posters.

This is also the first school where I have seen so many children of 4 to 5 years old. This is what inspires me to keep developing educational books for young students: to teach them about plants and animals in addition to ABC's.



What could be considered for the future (if local people wish such projects).

It would be an idea to consider opening a Q'eqchi' Mayan language learning school. The main difficulty is that tourists and visitors prefer to be in a city or town to attend a school. I studied Spanish, at age 16, in Saltillo, Mexico. I studied German in a city of comparable size to learn Deutsch in the 1980's.

But even if a language school was unrealistic, there could be organized a team to produce a Q'eqchi' Mayan dictionary to preserve local Mayan culture.

Yes, there are already lots of Q'eqchi' Mayan dictionaries, but none are complete for plants or for Mayan house architecture. Would be great to have a Q'eqchi' Mayan dictionary by theme:

- Dictionary of all house and architectural terms
- Dictionary of all animal, insect, and reptile terms
- Dictionary of all eco-system terms
- Etc.

Plus it would help to have the dictionaries:

- Q'eqchi'-English
- English-Q'eqchi'
- Spanish-Q'eqchi'
- Q'eqchi'-Spanish

This would also help local school children learn all three languages.

And, the dictionary should be in video in addition to e-book format (and published hard-copy book if funds were available).

We appreciate the food provided after the presentation

Kala wrapped in tortilla was a great food treat. I have eaten raw kala direct from the junco plant between Senahu and Tucuru: local kids picked the junco and encouraged me to learn to eat it raw. It was very tasty.

Kala is the Q'eqchi' for junco, which is *Carludovica palmate*. This is the material used to weave "Panama hats."

When I first saw junco plants along the Rio Ixbolay, Alta Verapaz, I assumed they were palm trees. Only when I began doing library research did I find that junco are not related to palm trees whatsoever. Yet junco are used to thatch Q'eqchi' Mayan houses in many areas. We were in one aldea where several houses had corozo palm roofs and other houses had junco thatch. Information on junco thatch is missing from most books and articles on Mayan house architecture (because a roof of aged junco thatch looks either like an old ak grass roof or an old guanco palm roof). Only when a roof thatch is brand new can you detect easily what material it is made of.

Would be interesting to know if junco is used to thatch houses in the area of Tzalamtún.

We look forward to bringing more educational material to Tzalamtún

For the past two years we have been working specifically on books for primary school age, and focused on ABCs (using local plants and animals as teaching aids).

So to prepare material for pre-primary, and ages above 6 years, we will need to start new projects at our office. But in the meantime, the next time we are near Cahabon, we will bring the following material to donate to the Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta Tzalamtún.

We will prepare material for pre-primary

For pre-primary we will be preparing coloring books in three-languages. Yes, we realize that pre-primary students do not yet read, but their parents and the school teachers can read the names of what we will present to color.

We will start with shapes: squares, triangles, circles, etc since these make easy solid areas to color.

Then we will do leaves, fruits, vegetables, flowers of local native Q'eqchi' Mayan area healthy edible plants. Coloring a flower is fun; and many vegetables are bright colors inside or outside.

We are inspired to develop educational material for students ages 6 through 11, and 12 through 16

The saga of the Popol Vuh is inspirational for topics relating to caves, mountains, and rivers.

Lots of plants and animals are featured in the Popol Vuh. So these we can use for ages 6 through 11.

For ages 12 through 16 we will be more inspirational, to awake in each student the goal to learn, to learn from the awesome natural environment around them. To learn that there are WASPS that make honey (yes, we all know bees make honey, but there are also (wild) wasps that make honey, specifically in the Cahabon area).





Hanz Veliz Gracia
Teacher

For Primary School Students we wish to add crossword puzzles, and other learning games to our books

We had two meetings with Julio Piedra Santa about two years ago. He showed us books with crossword puzzles, games, and other innovative educational material.

With outside funding our team of graphic designers at FLAAR Mesoamerica would enjoy doing innovative material.

Plus we really like to do “books” in origami format. This way the primary school children can have fun with the books. But origami books work best with a kind of cardboard and glue which holds the origami in all shapes without it tearing.

And most important, in all three languages

In each school that we have visited, they say that there is no previous material, providing information about Guatemalan plants and animals, or ABC learning material, that is in three languages all in one book.

There are Spanish-Q’eqchi’ Mayan books. There are English-Spanish books: but the teachers said they appreciated that FLAAR made the effort and initiative to have Q’eqchi’-Spanish-English all together.

Our books on macaws, tomatos, avocados, etc, we will also put into three languages.





Oscar Cholom Tux
Teacher

Hanz Veliz Gracia
Teacher











This is the material that will be donated in our next visit



