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Amigos Program Assessment in Peru:

Perspective of a US Educator

By Rene Rawhouser

Like so many visitors to Peru and its rainforest, I began planning and hoping for my next visit before my first visit was complete. In March of 2009, I had the opportunity to travel to Peru with an ACEER sponsored travel workshop. Little did I know that the following spring another opportunity to visit Peru would present itself.

I was invited to join Marguerite Gould and Carmen Chavez on a trip to evaluate the school programs that ACEER sponsors in Peru. As a retired public school teacher, I jumped at this opportunity.

Our visits took us to schools in both Iquitos and Pucallpa. The schools ranged from urban schools to rural schools to river village schools.

From our first stop at Escuela Simon Bolivar in Iquitos I knew that I was going to gain a completely new perspective on education.

Simon Bolivar

Sponsorship of medicinal gardens in schools is a cornerstone element of the ACEER support in the Iquitos region schools. So, our first stop was the medicinal garden in Simon Bolivar.

The students and staff were very welcoming to us. In our tour of the garden the students demonstrated how well informed they were about the plants in the garden. Their pride in the garden was apparent.

listing of 2011 workshops to
Peru -
www.wcupa.edu/aceer/workshops.asp

Staff in the U.S.

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Students of Simon Bolivar School explain the uses of various plants in their medicinal garden.

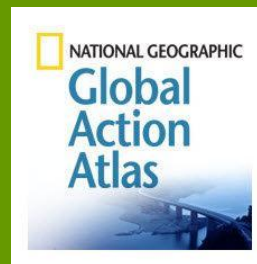
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ACEER on the Global Action Atlas

The National Geographic Society's [Global Action Atlas](#) is a web-based map that allows people to research different organizations across the globe that are trying to make a difference. Their mission is "to engage people to discover and support a planet-spanning array of local efforts to solve the major challenges facing society and nature."

ACEER has three locations on the Global Action Atlas; one for Pulcallpa, one for Puerto Maldonado and one for Iquitos.

Please visit our page for [Iquitos](#)! You will find a project summary, issues in the area, our goals, progress to date and ways to take action! You will also be able to find contact information, project partners and links for more information.



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Amigos Program Assessment - Continued

Grmo. Don José de San Martín

Another school visit in Iquitos revealed a completely different set of needs in terms of the support that ACEER gives for environmental education. Escuela Grmo. Don Jose de San Martin also kept a tidy medicinal garden, but our visit there revealed that the staff is working to combat the community ethos of disregard for the pollution of the neighborhood environment with refuse, noise and odor. Conversations with the school staff led the ACEER evaluation team to consider how ACEER can play a role and support environmental education in this context. This is a theme that would reappear in a subsequent school visit.



ACEER Director of Operations, Marguerite Gould, speaks with the school children in the schoolyard of Jose de San Martin.

The next school visit involved a 1-hour transfer by auto from center city Iquitos, and then a 20-minute boat ride to the site of the school and its garden in the village of Cahuide. (The 20-minute boat ride was a warm-up for the 1 hour and 3-hour boat rides that we would be taking to visit schools in Pucallpa. More about that to come.)

This school's garden is unique in that it is set within the rainforest and managed by the Shaman Don Antonio Montero. Understanding the plants in the garden, and pride in the garden itself was apparent in the presentations that the school children gave to the ACEER staff.



Students in the village of Cahuide explain the uses of their medicinal plants.

An additional bonus for this visit was the lunch prepared for us by Don Antonio. It included fish freshly caught from the river, then baked wrapped in banana leaves.



Don Antonio preparing lunch.

The last school visit we made in Iquitos was to the school Fernando Belaunde Terry. This school also had a tidy medicinal garden. We were informed that Don Antonio works with the children of this school in their garden teaching them how the plants can be used. In fact, the school uses medicinal remedies made from the plants of this garden to treat students that are ill or have small injuries.

At this point we moved onto Pucallpa to visit the schools in this region. The support that ACEER offers to schools in this region has a different focus, and we were soon to find out why.

Our first visit was to Porvenir. Remember that 3 hour boat ride mentioned earlier? This was the visit that required that trip. Porvenir is a river village that is on the Rio Ucayali 3 hours by speedboat from Pucallpa.

ACEER supplies basic school materials to this school and others in the Pucallpa region. The teaching staff and villagers are extremely thankful for these supplies. They told us that without them many of these students, and in some cases most of their students, would have no

supplies to use in their schooling.

We found this to also be the case, the great need for the materials supplied by ACCER, in our visits to Bena Jema (a school in the city of Pucallpa) and Puerto Firmeza, another river village.



Students in Porvenir showing the notebooks supplied to them by ACEER.

Puerto Firmeza also brought another interesting story. The village leaders have been making an effort to keep their village cleaner (more free of rubbish.) The leaders told the ACEER visitors that because of the support of ACEER with a focus Environmental Education in the school, they, the village leaders, were meeting with success in getting the village residents to change their habits of rubbish disposal. This was an unplanned, but welcomed and encouraging by-product of the ACEER program.

For the ACEER staff members, these visits allowed them to draw conclusions about the successes of the ACEER programs in the Peruvian schools, and will help them to redirect and redesign some parts of the support program so that it can have an even greater impact.

For the author, this was an enriching experience that has led me to greater understanding of education in Peru and the United States, and for a greater appreciation of the cultures of Peru and our United States.



The author with Profesor Abel Rojas in the village school at Porvenir.