Introduction
Since 1998 a small library has remained a steadfast bastion of education and enrichment for families in the Peruvian Amazon. Over the years it has changed hands, fluctuated in size and services, and endured the challenges of survival in the jungle. Functioning as everything from literacy center to tribal oral history headquarters, it has always focused on providing the people of the region with deeper education opportunities and experiences than there has ever been access to. I will share about the trials and realities of this unique center from first-hand experience and contributions of past and current directors and patrons.

Just what an accomplishment this center’s endurance is under the social, fiscal and environmental constraints of the region cannot be understated. As a patron and volunteer, learning about the trials and realities of an isolated, rural library in one of the poorest regions of its country has been an eye-opening and entrenching experience.

Bits and Pieces
- Started from scratch by Dr. Nancy Dunn in 1998 with only 200 books she purchased herself.
- Located c. 35 miles downriver from the nearest city of Iquitos, the Capital of Loreto and Maynas; largest city in the world with no direct roads leading to it.
- Poverty rate in the region is close to 70% (almost 50% higher than PE national ave.)
- One of the poorest but most expensive regions in the country of Peru.
- Closest to Yanamono and Palmeras II villages, with one secondary branch in Sapo Playa village—but is open to serve 52 other communities.
- CONAPAC was created to help preserve the rainforest and improve life for the people who live there, through education.
- CONAPAC also runs an Adopt-a-School program that is also funded by donations and brings school supplies to 3000+ students in 55 communities.
Interview with the Amazon Library staff

The library offers:

- Reading time
- Craft and playtime
- English lessons
- Computer classes
- Music classes
- Other community workshops

Some of the opportunities are more unique, such as chances to learn with teachers from around the world and learn from scientists that pass through the Explorama Lodge system that is the umbrella company to which CONAPAC is linked. It is essentially like an afterschool enrichment program. While it may not be immediately apparent to those of us who expect these kinds of activities in community organizations, the impact is great, and is helping transform points of view, intellectual skillsets and life goals.

The following are some of the questions I put out for the three most involved CONAPAC staff to answer about their perceived value of the library.

What is a typical day at the library like?

**Fernando:** A typical day at the library starts with an entire hour of just reading. Students can read alone or in groups. The smallest can listen to some adult reading aloud for them. At the end of the reading time we try to develop some activities to help them comprehend readings better, or we during the reading time itself we use some reading comprehension strategies, like encouraging dialogs about the subject of the reading, finding new words and their meanings, etc.

After the reading time, we can offer to our users an hour of some especial activity, like arts, crafts, etc. And finally, the third hour is devoted to play just for fun some board game, solving puzzles, etc. Once a week they can watch a movie. This year we are very fortuned, cause we found the way to offer besides three regular workshops: Computer skills, music (guitar and recorder) and basic English.
I personally think that our best achievement is that children keep coming every afternoon because they want to come. Nobody compels them to come, not their teachers nor their parents. The key factor ...our style of working have to be different [from] school.

**Megan:** I can’t think of anything to add here, except that before the day formally begins, students from Palmeras II walk with Fernando, or get picked up by Fernando on their way to the library. For me this was always a special time to bond with the kids, to chat with them and laugh with them.

**What makes the Amazon library stand out?**

**Megan:** Primarily the library stands out because there is nothing like it, not even in the city. The idea that these kids have books in their homes is unheard of here. Their parents never had the option to read for leisure.

Our special classes and workshops like music and computers are also very unique opportunities for students, they would not have access to something like this without the library.

**Cynthia:** I think just the fact that even exists at all and for so long. Living here has personally taught me how harsh the environment is and how complicated the cultural and bureaucratic systems are in Peru. These are the things that visitors and users don’t see. From my POV it’s a great, ongoing success to see that the doors are still open through dribbles of donations and oodles of commitment by a variety of people. Thus anything that we do at the library, large or small, is both a challenge and a success when it comes off well.

**What would you and the staff of the Library like others to understand about why this library is so important to its community?**

**Megan:** The library is so important to the people of the area primarily because of the benefits of reading, of course increasing knowledge, but also increasing analytical and creative thinking have lifelong benefits for individuals and their communities, no matter what a student does after high school.

**Cynthia:** For the kids it’s a real diversion to what is, at times, a boring life. They recently got bicycles from the government or Rotary so now many of them ride their bikes to the library and that makes it easier and faster during low water. Adults seem to be more than happy to send the kids and do encourage them to go and read, although they don’t use it much themselves. Certainly over the years the community has seen the many advantages they receive by its location so near that virtually all our other AAS communities do not.
**Fernando:** The library services provide a better education to the children who attend regularly through making available for them good quality educational resources and people who help students to benefit from those resources. Children who are regular users of the library since some years ago are remarkable better readers than the ones who are not regular users. In a general sense, while the Adopt-a-School program offers educational support to a great number of students delivering to them school supplies and training their teaches, the library can add a deeper educational impact to its users.

**How is the Library supported?**
Condensed from all three interviewees, the library is supported entirely by donations, from both individual and small organizations and from the Adopt-a-School project donations that come in from annual volunteers and donors to that cause. All three confirm a need of about $12,000 a year to keep the doors open, take care of basic maintenance and assistant staff salaries. While the director’s salary runs at about $10,000 per year. The total is still under $25,000 per year. Music classes, computers, field trips, scholarships, and so on only happen with extra or specific donations.

**What are the Library’s greatest challenges?**

**Megan & Fernando:** The library’s greatest need is funding of general operating costs. About $12,000 per year.

**And where does CONAPAC want to take things in the future?**
**Perhaps, what would it take to get it to that “blue sky”?**

**Megan:** We have talked about the idea of opening a branch on the Napo River. The main limiting factor besides funding, is personnel. It’s hard to find people locally who understand our concept of a library.

**Cynthia:** A director with more vision and the capability to find money to fund that vision. Fernando is great with hand’s on with the kids, special projects, maintenance for the libraries, and IT issues.

Certainly an internet connection would be great. Or a special project like moving our dolphin specialist, Marie Trone, to the library to set up her research lab.

**Fernando:** We would like to spread the services of the library to other villages. We are studying the better ways to accomplish such a goal. In my opinion, we could look for persons who live in the same villages to be trained for running activities to encourage reading. We can start just training people to make reading available. We could use the books and other resources recently delivered to the school of those communities by the government through the Ministry of Education.

**Are there any other notable changes in attitude, behavior, interests?**

**Megan:** I think library students feel like they have more opportunities after...
they graduate. They have seen students receive scholarships and know that they too could continue to study after high school. I’m not sure that students in other communities feel like this is something that is accessible to them, at least not as much as our students.

Tell us more about the Yagua Language Project...
In 2014 we undertook a serious and well designed project to rescue and save live samples of the yagua language, by recording in video some personal narrations, traditional stories, recipes, local technology, local medicine, rituals, songs, dances, etc. [The] recordings would be used to elaborate educational resources to help teachers to teach the local language and preserve the yagua culture, like book, educational software and materials, etc. We did our best to define a 4 phases project. We accomplished the first one: To select some yagua native speaker (the oldest in 2 communities), to start training for them to [understand the] purpose, to present the project to 2 yagua villages, to get the partnership of a scientific institute from Iquitos, etc. But at the end, we couldn’t get US $ 10,000 to afford the work of a professional linguist from Lima to make the transcriptions from spoken yagua into written yagua and to help to make the educational materials. Nowadays, we are trying something less ambitious, as just keep recording some samples of the yagua language and traditional stories.

Thank you for coming!!!

Any questions?

For More information:
CONAPAC’s website: [http://conapac.org/library.html](http://conapac.org/library.html)