

## Introduction

For those who are not familiar with our way of working, it might be good to take a peek into the work Iris and I did before: [here is a showcase of past projects](#).

This is part 2 of a travelogue and description of our work here. Part 1 can be found [here](#).



Canchabamba (3551m)

I sit on the top floor of a fancy AirBnB-apartment in sleepy San Bartolo, a coastal town on 1,5 hours drive south of Lima. Noises of construction-work all over, since summer is coming and all needs to be fixed, built or completed before the tourist return.

Hot showers, a toilet that works (all the time), 2 TV's and fast Wi-Fi: it is a far cry from the pretty daring conditions we had to deal with in Canchabamba. We do not complain easily, but the lack of water (pressure), cellphone reception and electricity, especially combinations of the above, make working complicated. You start to get 'creative': save water, cook when there's electricity (you can't drink from the tap), charge all phones continuously (when temperature drops they run dry without warning), in short: count on nothing.

Then on top of things, my MacBook broke down: away with my workhorse for sound and picture... Oh well.

But above all: we did not manage to find any translators and even the English teacher from the school could barely speak any; it would be fair to say that This Production Was Made Possible By Google Translate...

But enough with the moaning: we still had a wonderful time and reached an end result we can be proud of. It is just fair to say that we dearly missed having deeper conversations and that we needed to rely heavily on the staff to get things done.

But all in all: for us it is just 4 weeks, but the few hundred people of Canchabamba live in these harsh conditions: permanently.



Alejandro and Carlos installed a brand new shower for us, but due to lack of water pressure, it never worked...





### Findings

Remember I conducted a small survey with Classes 5 and 6 (16 to 18 years). Most of the results are not surprising: yes, half of them have a smartphone and know how to use it. Facebook, Snapchat and WhatsApp; all have found their ways into their minds. They live with their parents and grandparents under one roof, mostly big families. Almost without exception, their fathers are farmers and their mothers are housewives. At least 30% of them cannot write and/or read. Especially among the women, this percentage is higher. On the question what they want to be when they grow up, all except one answered 'to live in the city and have my own company/be a professional'. The sad reality in Peru is that chances to realize this future are small. To survive Huaraz (nearest big city) or let alone Lima (7.8 million inhabitants) you need to study after high school, and most universities are private and too expensive. If they decide to leave their rural surroundings, they'll probably end up cleaning houses, doing dishes or as street vendor.

And some more bare facts: for the documentary on the Kamishibai (see part 1), we visited a poor family, an hour walk from the school. When we asked the mother (a widow) to show the kitchen, she replied she had nothing to prepare... Add to that that some of these kids need to walk for *three* hours to reach school on an empty stomach and you get the picture. This is why it is plain necessary that the school provides breakfast and lunch and that the boards sees to it, that the menu is varied and not just potatoes and rice.

Also, we filmed at the local health post, only a day after we accompanied a 16-year-old girl, who found out she was pregnant. Teenage pregnancy is another serious problem here: abortion is illegal (35 years prison) and many young mother stop attending school, lowering their chances even further. The doctor we interviewed spoke of malnutrition, respiratory problems, stomach problems and diarrhea... So that's the face of poverty.





That said: progression is there. Not only the school with the fresh approach by their headmaster César, but [SUCO](#), an Canadian NGO has built latrines near every house in the field, making for better sanitation and more hygienic circumstances. The Don Bosco Foundation on the other hand (see part 1) have a double-faced identity: they provide food for the poor (if they attend mass) but take big slices of good farmland to use for themselves and let the farmers work it for low wages for high profit... Bloody shame that is.

### So what could we do?

The puru (Quechua word for gourd, calabash), which we found at the local market in San Luis, turns out to be a highly versatile object. It was used as a container for medicine since Inca times and is still used for coca-juice to keep up the hard labor 'from sun to sun' as someone described it. Furthermore, it was used 'to predict the future' (we are not sure if it means it was also used for hallucinogenic substances). In any case: it is a container for stuff to keep you going. That is what we feel these kids need. But who are we to tell them their dreams could be futile: we can't, if it was only because one needs to dream. What we can do is try to help them protect their dreams. Like Langston Hughes put it: 'Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly'.



Also at this stage, we need to keep things simple in order to involve them in the process (language). So we decided to buy 138 puru's, 1 for each student from second grade. This would become their 'message in the bottle' for their future selves. They are provided with two envelopes with tiny papers in it: one will be for their parents and one for themselves. Both papers can be used to write a note to the future selves. Meanwhile the students will first decorate their own puru.



Once finished, the personal papers will be put inside by us (we cannot read them), then sealed and hung in a grid of rope. Once the student finishes school, he or she will get the puru back and may open it.

Now, before I continue, imagine the scale of this operation: where to get 138 puru's (including caps to seal them)? Paint, brushes, thinner, rope... And then the schedule to work with the students to paint in just under a week...

That's why we need to keep things simple, in order not to lose control. And this is also why I could only find time after the fact to write this.

On top of that, we thought it would be too complicated to make the sealing of the puru's into a ceremony: too much chaos, it would take several hours to complete. So we decided to take the puru out of the installation, photograph the kids with their puru together with their parents and hang them back in. This meant finding two teachers with the best smartphones, instruct them how to shoot the picture and get 138 photo-frames all the way from Lima to Canchabamba, in order to fill the wall behind the installation with photos.

At this point, it's needless to say how much we asked from César and his staff and how much we all have achieved.

You can imagine that the teenager-students first were a bit devious: what are these 2 tall white strangers up to? But this vanished as soon as they started to decorate: there wasn't a single student that did not like the work. Even teachers wanted one for themselves. If the message was clear is hard to tell: for sure, some students forgot the notes, wrote both themselves (including the one meant for their parents) or put them in by themselves (meaning they already read their parents message). But all in all, things seemed to be working out mainly thanks to Iris who completed this whole process.



Meanwhile, I failed in some of the things I had aimed for: Quechua rappers: too far away, too expensive. Kids interviewing their parents: I got only one recording. Even a lullaby in Quechua was very hard to get recorded. And of course I was severely handicapped without my artisan's toolbox, my Mac. With what was possible with Iris' laptop, I decided I wanted to make a small video clip with timelapses and combine that with video-recordings of the small children with their drawing of themselves when they are 20 (see part 1). I recorded them saying what it was they were going to be, of course in Quechua, the language that is obviously closest to their heart and combined that with their silent pose. Also, I could record some local musicians in San Luis and use that as a (part of the) soundtrack.







A row of at least 200 students and parents are waiting in line to get their picture taken.

The day of the presentation was hectic at first, but when all parents and puru's were pictured and all was hung back in place, we could kick back a little and let things roll in place. The school had devised a complete program with dances of which at least 5 by students, ranging from local folklore to 'dansa electronico', meaning bubblegum pop and some acrobatic moves. Between acts there were long 'pauses' (to say it polite) and soon it became dark and flashlights were put in effect to keep the audience watching (or blinded, depending on where you were sitting). Highlights were the traditional Horse Dance, only known in Canchabamba and performed by the teachers and a Quechua poem by a gifted student. And of course we had to dance too...

It's funny when, even after 4 weeks, you feel like a poster-person coming alive: anything you do (a silly move, a funny gesture) is welcomed like you are Hollywood-come-to-life. The short film I made wouldn't play (laptop ran out of power) so luckily I had Iris' MacBook come to the rescue. I was a bit nervous how this would sit with the audience, since many thought it would be a documentary, but it was spot on and what could be seen as visual trickery played out as it should: a homage to Canchabamba and the future of its youth.

Even more special was the day after: we were told that as thanks for our work and efforts, the staff and us would share traditional Andes food called [Pachamanca](#). What we didn't know is that the whole school (and thus half the village) would partake in this and no less than 18 earthen ovens (known as a huatia), were hissing and puffing to prepare this divine cuisine of all kinds of potatoes, meat (including *Cuy*, guinea pig), followed by extended beer drinking. These are the moments we covet the most: when things are done and you feel what it means to the people that have trusted you as strangers to their community. And trust me: it's not the beer doing the talk when you are called 'family', brother or sister. People point to their heart and say you have a special place there. 'When will you come back?' And that whenever you return, there's always a home for you, here with us in Canchabamba.

