

Paropata school, iskay yachay, achkha ruraq makikuna: notes on intercultural education in Cusco

This article describes and reaches reflections on a successful educational experience of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) in the Peruvian Andes. The cool breeze of educational reform emerges from an Andean rural school whose virtues are to be genuinely friendly with the culture and worldview of Paropata community, and the successful development of fundamental learning in Quechua and Spanish from experiential projects for cultural affirmation.

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Paropata is a traditional community from the highlands: it is located at 4575 meters above sea level and comprises 61 families scattered who grow native potatoes and raise alpacas. More than a decade ago, the villagers decided to make their Ilaqta into a “progressive” community claiming its culture and ancestral knowledge, and who knows how to bridge the city.

They speak their Quechua with pride; learning another language helps them relate to the outsider or the authorities who are used to receiving all documents - memos, requests, orders, etc.- in the dominant language of Peru: Spanish. I wasn't told: I lived it during the five days of my stay there, because I was in the centre of the most important experience of intercultural education in Latin America: School number 56088. Unlike addiction to fashion, this experience begins with its own culture and the community's to meet the present times.

ON-GOING PROGRAM

The campaign against the learning and knowledge of Andean-Amazon cultures seems to be on-going, and hits community leaders themselves. It has incorporated the old stigma that if you learn in the indigenous language - Quechua, Aymara, Ashaninka, or any Amazon language - you act like an Indian.

Quite a while ago, groups of teachers whose commitment is to educate bet for taking out the experiences of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) which moves in a double logic: one, accepting that learning is more successful if children learn in their mother tongue; and two, contradictorily, they are under pressure and in many cases rejected by a supine belief that mother-tongue education implies backwardness, decline in learning and, what is more serious, inability to "catch up" with the ones in the cities.

So, in the case of Incahuasi (Ferreñafe, Lambayeque), villagers were convinced that if they educate their children in Quechua they can develop better academic re-

sults. In this effort, a group of teachers decided to meet the demand of children who speak only Quechua, and had to face campaigns against education in the mother tongue more than once; "progressive" voices were rising up against "backwardness" that implies teaching in Quechua. The pedagogical wisdom showed fathers and mothers how learning was consolidated, even under conditions of neglect that often occur in these experiences.

This successful experience in recent years has begun to be questioned by some IBE schools of the Amazon. There has been a kind of regression in which teacher and community leader coincide. They have opted for the shortcut the teacher offers, or there are contexts where the majority population are settlers who oppose IBE and impose Spanish teaching in native territories. It is official memberships who are gradually "abandoning" Amazonian culture, especially in Yanasha, Nomatsiguenga and Ashaninka areas in the central jungle, according to testimony of my students of the Decentralized Program for Primary Education at the University of San Marcos.



COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL

In 2000, people from Paropata were unhappy with the results: their children were not learning to read and write. This obviously was a disadvantage. On that occasion, earlier that year, the community assembly agreed to ask the teacher for better results. And they said that if their children were not learning to read and write until the end of the year, he would be put in jail. The teacher, who had just arrived, saw the tangle of problems that needed to be addressed. He had lived an experience where Quechua became his main ally, and had done work with parents. Paropata villagers now threatened him with imprisonment if their children were not learning to read and write. In the middle of that year, two children learned to read, and in August the same number learned to write short texts. At the end of the year, all children could read and write initial and brief texts.

That was how a claim of the community turned into an educational issue. How does the school become part of the community? How is the community committed to the education of their children? The teacher took up the challenge. Paropata community committed itself to its old school, which gradually transformed into an educative community. Not only classrooms and spaces improved; also, and principally, Quechua villagers of the highlands also became masters of ancestral knowledge that is taught in school.

THE EXPERIENCE

We have just arrived in the “mixed” car (half people, half load or animals). It’s Sunday. We participated in the weeding, planting and watering. In the small greenhouse there is lettuce, beans, potatoes, and broccoli. There are few tools. Then we go to the fair.

The teacher holds a reading activity with a Quechua text related to what we just did: “Lichuhas wiñasqamanta (Chiqaq Willakuy)”. I introduce myself. Children are inquisitive. I reply. I tell them I’m from Northern Peru, I see a huge map, and I put my finger there and look for the name of my small town. I am interviewed. The teacher writes down my data. They ask me in Spanish and they write it in Quechua on the board.

What mobilizes the learning sessions are projects of Andean cultural affirmation. All classes are in Quechua, ex-

cept those in which you should expressly speak Spanish. Paropata multigrade school has two teachers: Valentín Champi Ccasa and Elizabeth Quispe Huaman.

The classroom becomes a place of permanent meeting. The day begins with the Rimanakuy (initial “encounter” of children before starting the day). A boy and a girl direct their peers. They go every day. It’s almost a ritual. They register, start, say hello. They are counted, give news, throw riddles, do representations, they laugh, they sing in Quechua or Spanish. Not only is the word: it is the language of speech that matters. Then the materials come.

One dimension of the educational project Paropata is its link with the practices, knowledge and Andean worldview. Thus, both teachers have been worried about connecting the contents of the learning sessions with ancestral dance that also has a strong religious content. It is the wayri ch’unchu. It started with the distribution of a motivating reading in Quechua. All have participated in the reading - I myself had to read. Some inquiries and questions are prepared as they will serve for the conversation with the Yachaq that will accompany the class.

Throughout the entire day, children ask questions or follow the teacher attentively. The teacher checks their folders, whether it is as individual or as groups. The teacher is attentive to what students do. Reviews, corrects, rechecks the writings, numbers, drawings and graphics, and crafts. Everything. The teacher explains, asks questions; the students organize their answers orally and then write. The session can have everyone in the classroom, but according to the complexity and achievement levels, they are divided into two groups. This happened when they switched to the preparation of written texts. While children of fourth through sixth grades had a much more precise wording; the ones of first through third grades were short and direct. The teacher is not only attentive to the word but also the language of speech and strokes.

The cuts (breaks) have a precise destination: the school yard to play a “pichanguita” (football game) or a game of volleyball. Things are in the classroom, nothing is lost; there is a sort of respect for what each one has.

The Yachaq has arrived accompanied by two more villagers who make music. We went to the old school yard.



VALENTIN CCASA

He has put on the corresponding clothing, explains, and asks whether the villagers of Paropata are descendants of the Amazon. The dance is a representation made during the Qoyllur rit'i. The Yachaq has stopped indicating that it is not the time to continue as it is not Ocongate time. Then children ask very kindly about the things that the dancer does, the Yachaq responds. He does karpachikuy (initiation of dancing): one of the children received his baptism; the villager gives him three "sanmartinazos" and addresses the four sides of the world. He hugs him. Then we all get together to thank his participation.

Back in the classroom, we talk in Quechua about ch'unchu wayri, what we experienced. Papers are prepared: the group is divided. Then they all meet to collectivize the work.

A new day has started with the same scheme. This time the numbers and calculations come, which means accounting costs of things that are used in the dance.

I am invited to participate in a session only in Spanish. I am now a teacher of Paropata, my session is only in Spanish. I do it and I use a linguistic map to remember that we are distinct people and I talk using macaw feathers.

Meanwhile, we are close to the weekend. Teachers have been preparing the end of learning with the children. The word and language of the word will be everything the Yachaq taught. It's the last day and he is finishing up their crowns and their staffs. They'll dance and we say goodbye. It is very hard to say what the feeling is; it is a mixture of tenderness and encounter among boys and girls who we love deeply. There is only the promise to return, to visit them again soon.

IBE KEYS

Valentín Ccasa Champi synthesizes the key processes of IBE in XXI century Peru. The experience joins the ones in the schools of Puno, the "school-ayllu" (Gamaliel Churata), the lessons learned from the mistakes of bilingual education, the successes of IBE programs and learnings in the workshops and training spaces that TAREA has driven in Cusco. Valentín Ccasa summarises it as a modernity conceived in the Andes, whose potential should have to be appropriated by all the experiences in indigenous areas.


Ccasa Champi proposes two keys to the IBE. One is the iskay yachay and it explains it simply: learning from our Quechua culture then learn the others. Cognition and the Andean world are put forward as guarantee of learning another culture with Andean affirmation. From this perspective, the teacher Valentín Ccasa's reflection - and this is the second key - it is not just about knowledge in the abstract but the one of those that is useful for human activity. So the proposal is complemented to the achkha ruraq makikuna (hands doing various things): use your hands to know how, from things as simple as picking up grass, to those that have a high complexity (driving times), learning involving the ancestral wisdom: grow potatoes, raise alpacas, learn spinning and weaving, light the fire and prepare a lawa or use the Internet, or growing plants in the greenhouse.

The concept of education is strongly linked to the community: the school is part of it; it openly states a relationship with the community, which is vigilant and brings its ancestral and contemporary knowled-

ge. It represents an understanding of life from the Andean-Amazonian perception: *sumaq kawsay*, good living, implies an attitude towards life and ethics in daily life and in the context of rapid globalized modernization.

EPILOGUE

The school has been designed as a welcoming and friendly space for the meeting of girls and boys who stand on their culture and learn what every Peruvian child should learn. The lesson is simple and transparent: it is possible to educate in postmodern times with an IBE conception claiming ancestral culture but which does not deny the contingencies of contemporary modernities and knows intelligently how to negotiate with the other. It is possible to educate from the mother tongue, to be master and mistress at the time in which others become Wednesday teachers, ensuring support seriously and see results, as it is happening with children in Paropata.

I keep the tender smile. I keep the message: affirm our culture to talk with others in a bid for equity. 

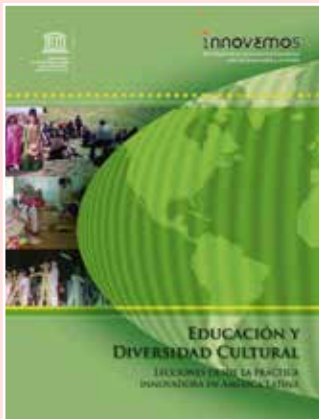
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Paropata School, a successful experience for intercultural bilingual education

The work by teacher Valentín Ccasa Champi has had positive outcomes for all children who have studied in 56088 School, Paropata community school.

A part of Valentín Ccasa's experience is recorded in the case study *Learning to read and write from the Andean knowledge*, done during 2005 - 2006 by Valentín Ccasa himself with Miguel Angel Torres, then TAREA's educator. The case study proposes a set of reflections on the possibilities of the teachers and the community to design and develop educational changes at school, making the latter become centres of culture creators and reenactors from both educational cultures, modern Western and Andean become present in the context of intercultural dialogue.

The study was sponsored by Innovemos Network, promoted by OREALC/UNESCO and was published in 2008 by that institution, as part of the book *Education and Cultural Diversity: Lessons from innovative practices in Latin America*, which is available in online at:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001626/162699s.pdf>.