

# Dialogue with successful women teachers in Intercultural Bilingual Education

Teachers Manuela Chacon, Lucía Rojas and Eda Guevara's students obtained high scores in reading in Quechua and Spanish in the National Student Assessment by the Ministry of Education. TAREA spoke with them about proactive attitude all teachers should have, teaching strategies they used for developing reading comprehension in two languages, and their plea to education decision-makers to enhance the role of intercultural schools. Their commitment with cultural and linguistic rights of monolingual Quechua children is evident.

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**MANUELA CHOQUE / EDA GUEVARA / LUCÍA ROJAS**

*Interview by Huber Santisteban Matto, 30 November 2013*

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**TAREA: How do you approach to Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE)?**

**Teacher Manuela Choque (MCh):** In the year 2004 I worked in Manchapa, a locality of Pichari, in the border of Cusco and Junín. The Ministry of Education organized meetings and evaluations for the teachers and students in San Francisco, which belongs to Ayacucho which has been an area of the army conflict. I worked with children in the morning and with parents in the afternoon. We were just two teachers and had three classrooms each one. I started working with IBE but it wasn't easy because I didn't know Shipibo and the children helped

me with the translation. When I was in Quispicanchis, in the school of Tinki, they were working with a very demanding a project, and I implemented IBE as in Manchapa. In the jungle, it also gave me good results: first grade girls and boys that had no preschool or Non-Formal Early Education Programme (PRONOEI) learnt how to read.

**TAREA: And how do you assume IBE?**

**Teacher Eda Guevara (EG):** I was officially appointed in 2002, freshly graduate I worked in a one-teacher school. I felt desperate to get results but it was very complicated to deal with children of four different ages. I even thought to give up: "Here I'm not doing anything", I thought. I started to question things at school which did not work in reality. That year, in the months of



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June and July, I visited the Center of Promotion and Comprehensive Services (CEPROSI) which was training teachers for a similar job, and I started to obtain good results. I understood perfectly Quechua, but did not know to write it. I knew the letters, but I made mistakes: instead of writing with 'q' I used 'k'. Children helped me a lot. One of them said to me: "With this, it sounds like this".

**TAREA:** *And how come did he correct you?*

**EG:** Because his Dad was a writer who read in Quechua, and he had taught him. The ones who helped in speaking were the children. Then CEPROSI left the area but I continued with the work because I had realized that my children were learning in their mother tongue and they did it with joy. In some schools, there are trained teachers who have a complete set of pedagogic tools but don't apply them. That's not correct. In the conversations I have with my colleagues I tell them: "The failure of any education model relies on the teacher factor because change depends on us".

**TAREA:** *You have obtained visible achievements in the National Student Assessment (ECE). What aspects helped you get those results? What are the keys?*

**MCh:** Firstly, parents should trust in the teacher, and children should also acquire confidence. Furthermore, it is important that parents get involved; even though they don't know how to read, they should be observing and realizing what they lack. They tell me: "I will also teach my child in the language". They sing, dance, narrate little stories, they make the children act and weave small clothes so the children are stimulated. Almost always there is a parent that has studied up to third or fourth of Primary and proposes activities that are done in the community. "Today day we will prepare the minutes", the parent says. Yesterday, at the parents meeting, we made children write the minutes, no matter their spelling mistakes.

**TAREA:** *For you, what are the essential aspects?*

**Teacher Lucía Rojas (LR):** Well, first I want to say that I had been studying writing when I was invited to the course of TAREA. I studied grammar as a second specialty. As the previous colleague said, my teaching work comes from the experience with children, and my case was a little different from Manuela's because parents sometimes don't have time to attend classes.

I work with first and second grade and I try to link Mathematics or Language with their daily lives and the responsibilities they assume since they were very young: the grazing, the home, the farm, the care of their small brothers and sisters. I also help in the farm and I have children be attentive to growing or to cultivating potatoes because when children return to classroom they should comment the activities and, tasks are given depending on the groups. First graders should write titles, second graders have to write sentences, and third grade students must write small texts. All of that is published, after corrections.

**TAREA: And what materials did you use?**

We have always used school materials. The UGEL has not given me any material, I have created my own texts, and others come from the creativity of the children. I prepare a text for my class, and if a child comes with another proposal I change mine. Sometimes, I don't stick to what I prepared because children bring things that interest them so I use them in the session. Their context, their land, their language have helped me with my teaching because if I had imposed my Spanish, they would have run away. I would speak in Quechua with them and when we cooked a dish of meat and *olluco*, they all brought *olluco* and all shared.

**TAREA: As for parental involvement, what has been your experience?**

**EG:** I am a principal of a school and I don't work only with parents but with the whole community and I tell them about the achievements in the school. When you cultivate confidence with the community, they speak and teach us. Always I put the example of the table with four legs: if a leg breaks, the table falls completely. In the community there is a teacher whose name is Valentín Condori who is parent of the school. He is my teacher of Culture and he tells me how it was before, what is missing and what we can do. I also have the parents participate in the meetings, inform them about the things that we do and invite them to the activities. Recently, we held a cooking competition and teacher of first and second grade invited the parents to cook.

**TAREA: And how are the children responding?**

**MCh:** At the beginning, they hid their faces with their blanket and turned around because they

didn't want to speak, since we started speaking to them in their language, they have participated a lot. Before I would give money to hear them speak, now I pay for them to shut up! Cultural aspects are very important. One day, we were paid 33 dollars by a session in Quechua. With excitement, we decided to invest that money in our corner of music. We got *quenás* and drums made, bought rattles and legs of lamb. Then I told them: "Children, take your *quenás*". But a girl called Yony resisted until she got up and told me: "No teacher, women shouldn't play the *quena* because when we have children, we won't have milk."

**TAREA: You can't go against their traditions and beliefs.**

**MCh:** More than that, one should identify with that culture. For example, I wear clothing that the community uses and participate creating their poems and songs. With girls and boys, I talk about their mountains, Ausangate and Callancati - which are the most powerful *apus* -, about how we should apologize to them to avoid falling when we climb them. Other customs are pay to the earth and the *huasichapi*.

**TAREA: When do you work reading comprehension? What do you do to have children acquire that competence?**

**EG:** I create a text depending on the level in which I am working with. I am now with third and fourth grades, and we are reading in Spanish but there are texts that we work in Quechua. I use them to prepare writing exercises and ask them questions depending on the level of the children. In first and second grades, we usually work in Quechua, and in third and fourth grades with the two languages. We use texts that come from their reality but also incorporate other different places creatively so they imagine those different realities. After that, the systematization phase can take us up to two days.

**TAREA: Yours is a similar process?**

**LR:** In my case, after reading the text, I have students answer basic or literal questions to familiarize them with the text. We identify the characters and the principal topic. The text also helps me have them exercise how to change gender and number, to identify nouns, verbs, the subject and the predicate. I don't work in block. Sometimes I spend the whole morning doing that. I use few texts in Quechua.



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**(Eda Guevara)**

**MCh:** From the second grade, they start to read books in Spanish, close to their reality, for example *Warmawhuyay* and *Yawar fiesta* by José María Arguedas. In Quechia, I work with texts in Quechua from Ayacucho.

**TAREA:** *Regarding evaluation, unlike other teachers, you do manage to show results. Why do you think is that?*

**EG:** It is because they don't experiment, assuming that it is a failure. We haven't been formed at an IBE school or college. I accepted the challenge, I prepared myself, kept studying, learnt on the path and I never felt defeated. We are the key to achieve learnings, and satisfaction is immense when you see the change of attitude in boys and girls. In the second year, there was a test in Spanish for second grade students. I asked the examiner what the language of the test was and I was told that it was in Spanish. I replied that I wasn't going to let my students, monolingual speakers of Quechua, take the test in a language they are still learning, and which is a second language.

I was told that I was to receive a sanction for not having my students take the test. I started to revise the Constitution, the Law of Education, and prepared my disclaimers. After two years, the school became an IBE school. Then I took the challenge to teach them Spanish. Ideas to create activities with the language came into my mind. I considered that the immersion method would be easier for me and that I was capable of showing that it could be applied to teach Spanish and Quechua, but then I felt it was against children. Then it occurred to me to make covenants in order to have students from other schools who want to learn Quechua come for a week.

**MCh:** Sometimes, colleagues don't want to prepare their classes in Quechua, although they speak it, even if IBE is used in that school. They are lazy because that implies that the sessions are made in two languages. They would have to think in Spanish and in Quechua, and place the indicators that should be considered in the process. So the problem is in the teacher's attitude. Working in IBE means that many times we have to create our materials. Sadly, I see that some teachers of rural areas are the first to oppose IBE, although they have all the chances to be the best. Perhaps that rejection is due to discrimination that makes them renounce their own culture.

**LR:** Some teachers have other jobs and that is why they want everything the easy way. They work with a single text and tell their students to copy from one page to another. They don't go explore the community and work only in the classroom. Rather, we live in the same community and we help students in the afternoon. However, this has changed because the place where our school is located will be a hydroelectric dam, and people are heading towards Sicuani or Arequipa. The company has bought them their houses, then only one or two have remained, and this has meant having fewer students in the classrooms. Now, I use them to prepare my texts.

**TAREA:** *Do you prepare your texts?*

**LR:** Yes, I fix them. I change flipcharts, improve the cartoons, add more, and create my own texts because I can't find any to work with.

**TAREA:** *Do you have texts in Quechua?*

**LR:** The two books that TAREA gave me: *T'ika* and *Pachanchismanta* that I treasure.

**TAREA:** *I see that you have also had your fourth grade children get level 2 in Spanish. This is a miracle. How do you transfer to Spanish?*

**MCh:** In first grade, I work reading and writing in Quechua, but I separate time to work in Spanish. I like watching girls and boys use Spanish, preparing riddles. I teach children twisters, songs, posters in Spanish so they get familiarized with the language. When I finish doing reading and writing in Quechua, I start with letters and consonants in Spanish. I work speaking along with writing because children who have learnt to write in Quechua produce texts in Spanish easily. We reinforce speaking skills with radio programs. In second grade, they are already using small texts, writing news, stories and they are easily learning to do the transferring to Spanish. Now that the Inter-oceanic highway has been built, children hear how people speak and so they learn more.

**EG:** In my case, in the first grade I work Quechua first and then go slowly into Spanish through speaking, at around September. In second grade, we start writing in Spanish. I always give them texts so they start reading and asking. I would like to know what happens inside their brains because when they learn to read and write

in Quechua, they immediately learn to do it in Spanish. I start with short texts, sometimes with a sentence in Spanish: "Manuel's house is burning. What is burning? The house. Whose house is it?" And I go playing with a sentence. I also work with songs and they start learning to read by themselves. It is easy to me to describe the process of transferring. I don't understand how they rapidly go from reading in a language and then in another without having learnt single words on the board. I have to clarify that it is difficult for me to teach Spanish because children don't have many opportunities to listen to it. Their community is Quechua, their parents talk to them in their language. I try to create moments where children learn Spanish and the strategy that has worked is to have them listen to songs they like and ask them what they say. I ask parents to buy them videos in Spanish so their children get familiar with the language.

**TAREA:** *If you could choose to an IBE teacher, man or woman, what characteristics and skills would you look at?*

**MCh:** The least I require is for teachers to master oral and written Quechua, to know local Andean culture and something about IBE because it's not enough to know the language as it doesn't guarantee that the teacher would apply IBE in the classroom.

**EG:** For me, the most important thing is that teachers are willing to take on the challenge. When I started I didn't know Quechua, although my dad and my mom spoke it. So I had to learn it and now I master it 90%. I liked it so much that I studied a second specialty and a M.Sc. in IBE.

**LR:** Teachers should know and be assessed in both languages. Teachers must be able to identify what kind of children they are working with; find out how they communicate and how do their parents. And, of course, they should have empathy with both. Also, it is important to know how to perform a psycholinguistic diagnosis to measure advances in that ground.

**TAREA:** *Finally, what do you suggest the authorities at Ministry of Education's main office and of Cusco region do to improve Intercultural Bilingual Education?*

**LR:** To provide us with workshops, not to forget us because we are ignored. The training is



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**(Lucía Rojas)**

critical; we use methodology although we create our achievements, they are ours. As they are experts and qualified, they should train us. I would ask the Ministry of Education to grant us a resolution congratulating those of us obtaining results, which serves for promotion in the Public Career. Another thing: they should send us a lot more materials to work with, and texts in Quechua for the children because the ones they send us are in Spanish.

**MCh:** They should give us cameras and video recorders so we can spread our proposals in the region of Cusco. We were asked to participate in internships so we can know other successful experiences.

**EG:** To help us in editing the texts that we produce with children. We don't have many texts in Quechua because they just remain in the classroom. We don't have enough education material either. The Regional Government distributed the ch'uspitas (computers) for multigrade schools; however, one-teacher schools weren't awarded the same, when children that study there should have the same rights and benefits. I asked not to continue increasing the gaps: multigrade schools are pushed into the background regarding technology, multimedia and materials. We would like more texts in Spanish as a second language and to continue with teacher training. We also want them to follow up the fulfillment of regulations: it is said that IBE is for everyone but it's not true, we are still looked down. For example, in the area I work, we are IBIS teachers – not even IBE – and we are seen as if we were out of this planet.

**TAREA: Why IBIS?**

**EG:** Because they say we don't teach Quechua very well; they refer to our bad pronunciation, criticize our level of Quechua. That is why we say that UGEL should comply with the norms and respect the children's rights to learn in their own language.

**TAREA: Thank you very much.👍**