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Curriculum Violence: Occidental knowledge hegemonry in relation to indigenous knowledge

Juan Mansilla Sepulveda*, Sandra Becerra Peña, Maria Eugenia Merino

* Faculty of Education, Universidad Catolica de Temuco, Campus San Francisco, Temuco, Chile.

Abstract

Indigenous education in Chile operates within a context of cultural diversity, underdevelopment and colonialism. This problem explains the tension found in 28 rural schools in the Araucania region of Chile between the knowledge systems of the Mapuche culture and those of Western culture. The study is qualitative-descriptive in design. Participants were teachers, parents and Lonkos from Mapuche communities in which the schools are embedded. Semi-structured interviews were carried out and results show that Western curricular content predominates over subordinating vernacular knowledge of Mapuche indigenous culture. It is recommended that cultural knowledge of all participants be equally integrated and promoted.

Keywords: Mapuche knowledge, Occidental Chilean knowledge, Monocultural schools, indigenous children, Chile

1. Introduction

This article reports on the tension that occurs between knowledge systems of both the Mapuche culture and the Western cultural. Qualitative research was carried out in 18 rural schools in the Araucania region in southern Chile. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were carried out with 28 teachers, 50 parents and guardians and 12 Mapuche Lonkos. The information obtained was coded and triangulated based on the criteria of confirmability, transferability, reliability and dependence (Denzin, 2005). In general, the study highlights the cultural clash between Mapuche ancestral knowledge, which aims to revitalize the idea of "being Mapuche" and the Western school, whose focus is on knowledge for the integration of people into the political, social and cultural system of Chilean society.

* Juan Mansilla Sepulveda. Tel.: +56 452 205640
E-mail address: jmansilla@uct.cl
1.1. Western knowledge and Mapuche knowledge

In Chile, diversities of different natures often converge, such as: vernacular indigenous languages, foreign languages, knowledge of Western society, knowledge of the Mapuche culture, and local knowledge generated in different regions of the vast geography of Chile. This complicates education as it challenges educational organizations at different levels (basic, secondary and university education) to recognize diversity due to the fact that internal migration has generated the encounter of the diverse knowledge systems that students bring to the table (Diez, 2004). The processes of interculturality in education are part of a complex discussion. While multicultural countries in Europe are facing the issue from the standpoint of the coexistence of values, in America the knowledge systems of indigenous cultures are incorporated into the official curriculum based on the structural and curricular beliefs defined by the dominant culture (Rother, 2005; Quintriqueo & Torres, 2012; Quilaqueo & Quintriqueo, 2008).

1.2. Monocultural schools and the Chilean State

The establishment of monocultural schools was a predominant feature in much of Latin America in the colonial period. Educational policies established in different countries since the late nineteenth century to present day have consolidated the conditions for unequal relations as well as resistance from indigenous groups, in this case the Mapuche, who oppose "official school education" in Chile (Bertely, 2006). The school has a homogenizing orientation which complicates learning and often disguises social differences since it is not concerned about the individual differences that each student brings to the academic culture, these being either economic, political or native. Students do not leave their family experiences and their cultural baggage at the door when they enter school (Essomba, 1999).

An example of curricular violence is displayed when the school, along with banning the use of indigenous languages, also disrespects the use of traditional clothing and costumes, replacing the indigenous with the Western. Through this, institutions expresses the reduction of the person through a sort of colonial imagery which shows Mapuche membership now dissolved into the figure of the western nation, expressing, in turn, the strength of the mechanisms of submission and subordination (Menard & Pavez, 2007).

The invisibility of Mapuche knowledge is particularly evident in the hindering of the use of the mother tongue due to the fact that Spanish was the language in which contents were taught even in areas with a high density of indigenous population. This is a situation that to this day continues to be a reality. Because of this reality, the school appeared as a governmental mechanisms that consolidated cultural hegemony, a feature that the ruling political groups of the nineteenth century required in order to efficiently implement the new geopolitical and social mindset stemming from the metropolis, whose center is the capital city of Santiago, Chile. In this sense, the school became a transmitter of the dominant culture, which postponed other representations of the cultures that had been defeated. The bodies, space and time of the students were disciplined at school (Foucault, 1980). The presence of schools in the Araucania region after the occupation triggered a process of acculturation, which focused on the standardization of the Mapuche, but not their integration. That was and remains the will of the knowledge and power of the elites and other social agents of the Chilean State.

1.3. Mapuche cultural knowledge sources

Mapuche education traditionally takes place at the level of orality, which is the verbal communication that occurs in a given context. This is a system by which the Mapuche have generated effective ways to convey their worldview (Llanquinao, 2009). The main references of knowledge of the Mapuche culture are:

1.3.1. Kimches

Kimche status has been defined in Mapuzugun as someone wise, learned and scholarly (Noggler, 1972; Tubino, 2011) and, from a socio-educational perspective, they are wise carriers of educational knowledge (Quilaqueo & Quintriqueo, 2008). In many cases they are elders who have extensive life experience.
1.3.2 Lonko

A Lonko is a leader who directs the decisions of the community to which he or she belongs. Generally, it is the community itself that assigns this role. The Lonko must possess several qualities: intelligence, credibility, leadership and especially, the ability to negotiate. He or she must be able to teach and strengthen the Mapuche culture and spirituality. The Lonkos’ symbol is the eagle. It acutely gazes from the height of his or her position and from within in order to see, understand, comprehend and act (Hidalgo, 1996).

1.3.3. Machi

The Machi is a crucial figure, capable of contact with the world of the gods, wielding the power of healing through herbs to fight evil. This gives him or her power within the community. The Machi is a powerful figure due to the fact that he or she dominates and manipulates the supernatural and, by knowing the secrets of plants and trees, has the power to restore the balance to the sick through a ritual machitún. Machi’s have the relationship between life and death in their hands (Duran Catriquir & Hernandez, 2007).

1.3.4. Azelchefe

The Azelchefe is considered as a representative of the community in the school. His or her role is to guide, demonstrate and monitor the process of including the Mapuche culture in schools. The focus of this initiative is an approach that emphasizes the relationship between the environment (culture and nature) and the Mapuche culture (Duran Catriquir & Hernandez, 2007).

2. Research questions of the present study

How is the cultural clash between Mapuche knowledge and that of the Western Chilean culture produced in rural schools of the Araucania region?

3. Methodology

The investigation is developed based on qualitative methodology because it allows an understanding, on a personal level, of the motives and beliefs that are behind people’s actions (Flick, 2007). The level of the study is thick description, in order to thus disentangle the meanings that emerge from the verbal content of school experience, and in an attempt to preserve their wealth as faithfully as possible (Geertz, 1973). The data emerging from the data collection instruments was reduced in an open and axial coding process. The categories were built keeping in mind the ideas contained in the transcriptions of the interviews with prior consent from the key informants. Accordingly, a description of the categories, focusing on the cultural leaders described in the theoretical framework, and themes that emerged from the subjects themselves, was carried out though the Constant Comparative Method, from what is called empirical sampling of the material.

3.1. Participants

The participants are 28 teachers (20 men and 8 women), 50 parents (40 women and 10 men) and 12 Mapuche Lonkos (all men). In the case of the teachers, 28 semi-structured interviews were carried out. Also, five focus groups were carried out with the parents and one focus group with the Lonkos.

3.2. Data analysis

Data was reduced with the help of Atlas.ti 6.2 software through the procedures of transcription and coding (open and axial). The process involved the following steps: (a) categorizing information; (b) structuring or creating
structural networks; (c) empirical and theoretical sampling, and (d) data triangulation.

4. Results

The findings emerge from the coding of primary documents (semi-structured interviews and focus groups), creating the following conceptual network:

Figure 1. Knowledge Mapuche Culture & Knowledge Chilean Culture

Teachers say that the cultural knowledge exchanged from the Mapuche perspective that is most meaningful to students is: the participation in ceremonies, medicinal herbs, native language and food (E1: 12). They also express that the cultural knowledge exchanged from the western world perspective that is most significant to students is: knowledge of the human body, languages, technology and environmental stewardship (E7: 98).
Additionally, parents say that the Mapuche knowledge exchanged that is most culturally meaningful to students is: use of medicine, traditional games, clothes, silverware, craftsmanship, food and native language (GF2: 112). Lastly, Lonkos argue that the Western cultural knowledge exchanged that is most meaningful to students is: football/soccer, television, tradition and values (GF1: 43). The Lonkos indicate that the knowledge exchanged about the Mapuche culture that is most culturally meaningful to students is: natural medicine, protection of the environmental, healthy foods, agriculture, traditions, native language, history, values and worldview (GF1: 112).

5. Conclusions

In the Mapuche culture, knowledge is generated viviencially and based on the wise experience of the elders. The first agent of knowledge is represented by the family (lof-che) who is in charge of forming the identity of the child, under individualized specific guidelines for his or her upbringing. Intercultural education should be for everyone, as it promotes the awareness of cultural diversity both in formal and informal educational contexts (Bengoa, 2002). The mother, father and elders play a fundamental role in the transmission of cultural knowledge and values. The mother tongue, for example, represents a form of self communication, traditions, religion, and the use of nature. All the elements that are essential for life are reflected in the types of nourishment, the use of natural medicine and lastly, the preparation of typical clothing and costumes from plants and animals.

The Lonko appears as a strengthening agent of Mapuche knowledge. He or she must ensure Admapu or, the transmission of knowledge (traditions and customs) to minors, and act as a promoter of community unity (Casas & Fuenzalida, 2010). The Machi, fitted with a special Kimun, is the bearer of beliefs and practices related to the Mapuche worldview and the use of herbal medicine. He or she has full knowledge that allows him or her to be a guardian of this knowledge and cultural traditions. A step below, we can find the lawuentuchefe, who is another carrier agent of knowledge regarding the use of natural medicine and who performs Healings. The voice of the fushakeche, or the elderly, direct the fates of the youngest, transmitting the history and wisdom received from their ancestors and incorporating their experiences and reflexions concerning the future. These people may also be called kimches or, wise people, who possess knowledgeable about all kinds of things both Mapuche and non-Mapuche (Loncon, 2012). Community leaders represented by the presidents of the Mapuche communities are carriers of Mapuche knowledge, and work to manage the relationships between their communities and government agencies belonging to Western culture, whose aims are to achieve social and economic well-being (Cañuléf, 1996). Lastly, the azelchefe, agent of Mapuche knowledge that has been incorporated in schools today, strengthens the native language and traditions of the Mapuche culture in the classroom and works to support education in intercultural.

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Referencias


