

ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

M A G A Z I N E

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Inter-cultural education
in Peru

*India: traditional herbal
medicines for malaria
prevention*

Learn to live life

Teachers fulfil Andean parents' wish for bi-cultural education

Parents in the Andean highlands of Cuzco (Peru) want their children 'to learn how to live life'. This notion seems much broader than the aim of Peruvian primary education to teach children to read and write. As a result of the CEPROSI inter-cultural education project, primary and secondary education in the Cuzco region are now changing to meet the wishes of the parents.

A country-wide survey in 2001 called *How children in the Andes learn*, was the start of the CEPROSI inter-cultural education project that looks set to spread through all levels of education in Peru. One of the main conclusions that triggered critical reflection was that indigenous children following bi-lingual education do not learn to read and write sufficiently. Because the mother tongue of indigenous children is *Quechua*, they find it very difficult and alienating to first learn to read and write in Spanish - the official language at school. Moreover, many of the teachers do not speak the native *Quechua* language. Contributing to the feeling of alienation was the fact that most educational material presents a reality of a middle class urban context, totally different from the rural highland context of most children.

Different teaching and learning

Elena Pardo, one of the researchers and a school teacher by profession, took the research outcomes of *How children in the Andes learn* as a starting point to develop

an alternative programme for inter-cultural education. CEPROSI was established, initially with very little funding. In 2002 the programme started with two schools and five interested school teachers, selected by Elena using her intuition. The main challenges in the beginning were: how to develop a different teaching-learning process? What methodology to use? How to plan a different curriculum for primary education? How to implement it? How to train the teachers? And of course: where to start?

Involve parents

CEPROSI started by talking to the parents. They were asked what they want their children to learn. Moreover, conscious efforts were made to actively involve the parents in the learning process throughout the programme, for example by including their daily activities in the school timetable. The main activities of most parents are in the fields of agriculture, handicrafts and local gastronomy. In a newly established school vegetable garden called *chackra* the children learned with and from parents



Previous article about *Integrating local wisdom into primary schools* in *Compas Magazine* No.10



about their areas of expertise. In this learning process all three aspects of indigenous knowledge (spiritual, social and material) were integrated. On agriculture for example, children learned not only to cultivate food, but also about rituals and festivals during the planting season and other activities to honour mother earth (*Pacha Mama*). Other lessons focused on the role of music in cultural activities, and local handicrafts such as weaving. The amalgam of the teaching-learning process led to 'learning by doing'. Children became enthusiastic performers of their own culture thus enforcing their self-esteem and creativity.

In the second year (2002-2003) parents and teachers launched a local calendar, indicating all main cultural, economic, social and spiritual aspects of life. This turned out to be crucial for the successful implementation of inter-cultural education. Farmers and their wives added local agricultural activities, local gastronomy, rituals, ceremonies and festivals to the calendar. They also made predictions for the rainy season based on important astronomical references. This calendar became an essential part of the planning process for the educational curriculum.

Teachers' interest and commitment

In the second year, seven more teachers became involved in the programme, bringing the total to twelve teachers working in eight primary schools. The schools involved - all located in rural areas - each had around 45 pupils and 1 or 2 teachers. By 2007 the programme had expanded to include 37 teachers in 10 schools reaching a total of around 576

children. Teachers' participation has never been obligatory; the selection of teachers is based on their own interest and commitment. As a result all teachers present at the start are now, six years later, still involved.

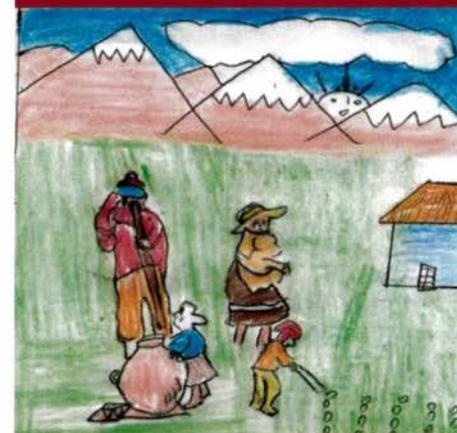
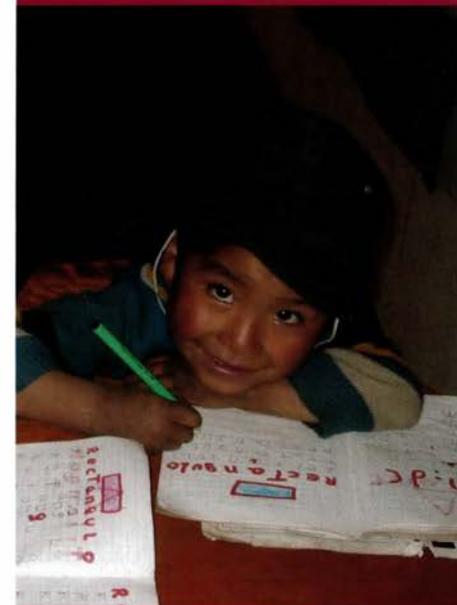
Between 2005 and 2007 the main aspects of the methodology for inter-cultural education were systematised according to the following principles:

- Organise school activities through which children are involved in important cultural and economic practices of their community.
- Include working days in the curriculum so that children are 'learning by doing', in close cooperation with the adults of the community and their areas of expertise.
- Create intercultural friendly spaces, where children feel confident to express their culture and learn from community members who guide the educational process.

The main challenge that still needs to be answered is that of incorporating the wisdom of indigenous local people into the classroom textbooks.

Secondary education

The CEPROSI experience with inter-cultural education in Cuzco proved to be very rewarding. Children rapidly reconnected to their own culture. However, after primary school these pupils then entered into a secondary education system still untouched by the programme. Therefore in 2005 CEPROSI contacted the Latin American coordinator of the COMPAS programme, AGRUCO (Bolivia).





Together the two organisations evolved a plan to include secondary education in the programme of CEPROSI.

With COMPAS funding, CEPROSI started programmes in two secondary schools. They then encountered pupils from 'their own' primary schools and pupils from other schools in the region. Thus CEPROSI was able to compare and evaluate the impact of what had been realised until then. The results were encouraging. According to teachers, pupils from transformed inter-cultural schools scored

better on tests, mastered local handicrafts such as weaving and vegetable gardening, could read and write in two languages, and were better able to express themselves. They were not ashamed of their identity. On the other hand, pupils coming from conventional primary education tended not to read and write in *Quechua*, did not want to touch local musical instruments, made jokes about the others and did not want to wear their typical local dress. Elena refers to them as '*pupils alienated from their local context*'.

Working with secondary school teachers proved to be more difficult. In the beginning, the only subjects taught were 'education for work' and 'all-round communication'. Later in the year the 'arts' and 'history' teachers of the two secondary schools became involved in the programme as well, leading to a total of 14 teachers and 150 pupils.

Challenges ahead

For CEPROSI the process of mainstreaming inter-cultural education from an endogenous development perspective is delicate. Forcing teachers to participate might undermine the sustainability of the efforts. According to Elena Pardo, it instead requires a process of *encariñar* or gentle persuasion. It is mostly about

exposing teachers to the positive results of inter-cultural education or endogenous development. CEPROSI tries to inform teachers by sharing teacher and pupil experiences with inter-cultural education at different levels, and by inviting them to local festivals of music, seed planting or gastronomy. In August 2006 a ceremony for Mother Earth was held at a college that had recently become involved in the programme, which allowed teachers to re-encounter their own roots. CEPROSI strongly believes that these initiatives will encourage teachers to become genuinely interested and committed.

The challenge for the years to come is to make secondary education in the Andean highlands more open to the 'learn how to live life' concept. Education for life should strengthen cultural indigenous identity, while enhancing reading and writing in two languages. The other challenge, no less complicated, is how to get educational authorities at provincial and departmental level involved and sensitise them so as to expand the CEPROSI pilot throughout the Andean highlands.

Interacting worldviews in the activities of CEPROSI

Spiritual

Children affirm their culture and worldview; agriculturally related festivals and rituals.

Social

Traditional authorities share their knowledge; parents actively involved; community organisation strengthened.

Material

Conservation of agrobiodiversity of maize and potato; traditional knowledge for food security.



Based on an interview with Elena Pardo, director of CEPROSI, Peru 2007. For more information, please contact Elena Pardo: ceprosi@speedy.com.pe