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Curriculum Violence: Occidental knowledge hegemony in relation to indigenous knowledge

Juan Mansilla Sepulveda^{a*}, Sandra Becerra Pena^a, Maria Eugenia Merino^a

^a 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 the western curricular content predominating over subordinating vernacular knowledge of Mapuche indigenous culture. It is recommended for cultural knowledge of all participants to be equally integrated and promoted.

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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 express 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 mechanism 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 (Llanquiao, 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.

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