



# Intercambio

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## "Indigenous Education"

**Special Issue  
on Indigenous Education**



**Tikal . Petén . Guatemala**

*Red SEPA - REI*

Poster of III Continental Encounter of Indigenous Educators

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## PRESENTATION

### Special Issue on Indigenous Education



Within the Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA) there are several structures with different foci, but which share common goals. One of them is the Continental Network of Indigenous Educators (REI), a hemispheric alliance of teachers, students and community organizations that struggle for a public education that responds to the cultural needs, worldview and aspirations of the aboriginal peoples.

From November 9th to 12th of 2012, the REI facilitated the Third Continental Encounter of Indigenous Educators in Tikal, classic city of the Mayan people located in the jungles of Guatemala's El Peten province. The Encounter allowed discussion on indigenous pedagogies in various countries of the Americas. Indigenous brothers and sisters from Canada, United States, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Surinam, Puerto Rico and Guatemala presented, discussed and planned future actions to activate community thinking and weave ancestral knowledge in paradigms for an education with balance, harmony and consensus. A new council

of carriers, or coordinators, of the Indigenous Educators Network, was also elected at the event. They are Christine Stewart, Nisga'a from Canada, Julian Jiménez Ramírez, Mixtec, from México, Jean Nilton Campo from Colombia and Guillermo Chen, Achi Maya from Guatemala.

In this special edition of *Intercambio*, you will find articles based on the proposals shared at the Third Continental Encounter by indigenous educators and students representing teachers unions, community organizations and NGO's, from Canada to Argentina. The contributions were many and it is not possible to include them all in just one edition of *Intercambio*. You will find more detailed versions of the articles here, and other materials from the Third Continental Encounter in the section "Indigenous Educators" of the IDEA Network web page at <red-sepa.net>.

We leave you with the words of Guillermo Chen, coordinator of the Continental Network of Indigenous Educators to present this special edition of *Intercambio*.

# Aboriginal Peoples for a public education, but with cultural relevance

Guillermo Chen<sup>1</sup>

Never is there enough time for us to meet to present and seek solutions to our problems as aboriginal peoples, but it is enough to provoke sparks of unity and solidarity and to increase the possibility to real solutions to the issues that affect us, as is the matter of education with cultural relevance and the training of indigenous teachers.

We have analyzed the education processes we have gone through and we became aware that they have always been used as a route for the assimilation of our children by the dominant cultures. The fact that we learn first the dominant cultural expressions and ours appear foreign, in spite of living with them, turns us into passive subjects and a work force for the application of neoliberal policies.

How much richness do the aboriginal peoples enclose? How much knowledge is there about the day to day activities, in our community relations, that for many are simple acts of social relations?

We have presented on the need to begin permanent dialogue and exchanges for learning in the aboriginal communities of the Americas. Educators must facilitate this exchange to systematize ancestral knowledge. Our grandmothers and grandfathers wait impatiently for actions to rescue and strengthen the original cultures.

Public education must be cost-free and of quality, but also with cultural relevance and that is not what we currently we receive in the indigenous communities. A brother pointed out during the conference “we want an education policy that begins from our roots and from the relationship with nature, human life and other live beings”. This proposal is not far from what in Guatemala we know as Nawales. Guatemalan-Canadian writer Tito Medina indicates that “the Nawal constitutes itself in the center point of the link between the individual and her own consciousness, between the individual and her environment, between the individual and her relation to the cosmos. The Nawal facilitates coherence while interpreting the day to day, the history in our communities, understanding who the actors are that participate in the creation of events. Interpreting characters and influence of personalities in the community, it is possible to decode the tendencies of development and challenges that a community may have to carry out certain activities”.

Let us imagine an education where the aboriginal languages are spoken, during recess of the long class hours and that they turn into the most desired space because everything else is irrelevant to our cultural interests. This is not even close to the concept of development of the nawales. It is said that youth and children have lost their capacity to communicate with life, with the sun, with energy, with ele-

ments of nature because they don't want to listen to our grandmothers and grandfathers. This is worrisome, but may still be rescued.

States design curriculum and vaguely include indigenous cultural elements that are turned into mere ornamental factors. It is not that the State can't give it's peoples a public education with quality and cultural relevance, but rather it is not convenient for the groups of economic power who control quality of life of a nation. There are education models in some indigenous nations that demonstrate an education policy with relevance, but unfortunately these are eliminated or restricted in their development as has been indicated in this Third Continental Conference of Indigenous Educators.

No more human beings with accumulation of educative information or building capacities for a globalized world. We struggle for an education that points towards balance, harmony and consensus among human beings and the cosmos.

Remember that when actions of globalization crush reason and the heart of the aboriginal peoples, then processes to strengthen and organize emerge, as has occurred in Canada with the rise of the indigenous rights movement “IDLE NO MORE”, a movement which raises the voices of many indigenous communities to demand respect for the aboriginal peoples and the fulfillment of the agreements signed between the State and the indigenous nations.



1. Continental Coordinator of the Indigenous Educators' Network.  
2. Medina, Tito. The Count of the Nawales Book. CEDIM 2008.

# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF MAYAN EDUCATION

## EXPERIENCES IN MAYAN EDUCATION

Catarina García Domingo  
Member of the Steering Committee, CNEM



The National Council of Mayan Education (CNEM) is a coalition of 15 organizations that have actively participated in the development of Mayan Education since 1993. It was appointed as the governing body of Mayan Education by the first National Congress of Mayan Education carried out in 1994 in Quetzaltenango. And on May 9, 1997, the Ministry of Education, issued a Ministerial Resolution No. 017-97, recognizing the National Council of Mayan Education as an advisor for the process of Mayan Education in the National Education System.

The CNEM's precursor was the Inter-Institutional Coordinating Commission of Mayan Education (CCIDEM) that participated in the National Teachers' Assembly (ANM) during discussions on the Bill on the Regulations of the National Education Law. One of the results of the discussions was the inclusion of representatives of the Mayan People in the National Council of Education. Thus, the CCIDEM was established during communication carried out with the Guatemalan State on Mayan People's educational demands.

Since it was clear there was a need for an institution that would specifically and actively participate in discussions regarding the educational policies related to Mayan People, the CCIDEM agreed to constitute itself as the Council of Mayan Education of Guatemala (CEM-G); this was formalized through a Charter, on November 30, 1993.

The CEM-G changed its name to the **National Council of Mayan Education (CNEM)** after the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress on Mayan Education in 1994, and introduced some adjustments in its structure. The CNEM's new concept was made official in the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1995 – part of the Peace Accords between the Guatemalan State and the insurgent Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity), and on December 11, 2000 it legally became a civil association named: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF MAYAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION.

Among its objectives are: to strengthen the practice of Mayan cosmovision and the technical and political capacity of its member organizations; to periodically systematize and update the Mayan Education model to allow for the training, experience and organization of the Mayan People based on their cosmovision; to contribute to the processes of Educational Reform, incorporating the Mayan vision, to allow for a Multilingual, Multicultural and Multiethnic National Education System and; to establish strategic alliances with sectors of civil society with the aim of achieving the institutionalization of Mayan education within the State.

In accordance with these objectives, the Steering Committee<sup>1</sup>, in its role as the CNEM's representative, promotes and advocates for its partners' educational actions and proposals. Among its lobbying and advocacy strategies, the CNEM has built alliances with other social organizations and groups that have an affinity with Mayan culture and education. Among them are the Indigenous traditional government of Sololá (*Alcaldía Maya*), the Great Council of Mayan, Garífuna and Xinka Ancestral Authorities, local groups and the National Teachers Assembly (ANM) which, for the first time in its history of struggle, now includes Bilingual Intercultural Education as one of the central themes in its work. The CNEM, for its part, has carried out workshops, forums and meetings with each of its allies on the themes of Mayan culture, cosmovision and education.

The theme of Mayan education has not been an easy discussion to broach. Traditionally national education in Guatemala has been monolingual and mono-cultural. The introduction of Bilingual Intercultural Education in the 80s, was used to resolve the problem of multilingualism and not to respond to the country's socio-cultural and linguistic needs. It wasn't until the signing of the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1995 that the implications

1. Board of Directors.





Members of the Indigenous City Council, Sololá, Guatemala

of doing bilingual education (EBI) began to be discussed. Although not enough, there have been advances in the area of EBI to respond to the needs and demands of indigenous peoples. In this context, the CNEM has sought a way to broach the topic of Mayan Education in the framework of bilingual intercultural education, as there is still a great lack of trust on the part of the State in dealing with Mayan matters.

For almost 20 years, the CNEM, through its advocacy activities, has opened spaces of reflection on the quality of national education; it has carried out four National Congresses on Mayan Education, national and international seminars, workshops and forums about Education Reform and its strategies, as well as workshops with teacher and community leaders. It has also developed and presented proposals before the Ministry of Education on curriculum, and the modification of the National Education Law, among others. Through its partners, it maintains a presence in different advocacy spaces in the interior of the country, developing Mayan education and creating awareness in a great part of the indigenous population on culture and education.

In matters of Post-Secondary Education, the CNEM has participated in the establishment of a Foundation to create a Mayan University. It has also achieved the creation of the Chair of Bilingual Intercultural Education in the High School Teachers' Training School (EFPEM) of the University of San Carlos (Guatemala's National Public University).

With the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 there was a certain openness to deal with themes related to the rights of indigenous peoples and, for a few years now there has been work on national education reform. This is reflected in the creation of a National Basic Curriculum that includes elements of the culture and cosmovision of the indigenous peoples. In such a way in the last few years that CNEM has been working in the development of Mayan curriculum and Initial (pre-service) Teacher Transformation. The Ministry of Education leads both processes. In the case of the Initial Teacher Transformation, the CNEM believed it had a transcendental opportunity to develop an education pertinent to

the Mayan People. Unfortunately, the current government of President Otto Perez Molina has ignored this proposal, instead putting forward its own strategy, in which neither the cultural, economic and linguistic interests, nor necessities of the indigenous peoples are reflected, in spite of being the majority of the Guatemalan population.

In 2011, under the previous government, the Mayan, Garífuna and Xinka curricula were created, known officially as Regional Curricula. With this information the idea was to create local curricula in which communities' culture and cosmovision could be developed. In addition, 7,001 schools were designated for Bilingual Education, in 12 of the 22 provinces of Guatemala, in order to meet the specific needs of each school.

As indigenous organizations we trusted that the new government would take advantage of the information and work that has been advanced by the former government. On the contrary, in 2012, the Ministry of Education did not show interest in working with the institutions with which, by law, it had to share decision-making in matters of national education, such as is the case of the National Education Council<sup>2</sup>, and much less, with organizations from the Mayan people.

It is obvious that the current government has its own agenda, in which topics of interest to the indigenous peoples do not appear. In the Congress of the Republic, the new Tax Law was passed in one day; but the Holistic Rural Development Law, which would have benefited Mayan farmers, was debated for weeks and finally remained stalled. In the Ministry of Education's budget, the financing for learning English is easily approved; but the budget for Bilingual Intercultural Education is reduced.

Finally, the CNEM will have to unite efforts with its allies and continue to struggle for a relevant and equitable education; for our main objective is that our culture, language and cosmovision develop as an integral part of the training and upbringing of our Mayan boys and girls.

2. The National Education Council is made up of 15 sectors of Guatemalan society.

# The Challenges of Developing a Common Writing System for Indigenous Languages: the experience of Qom teachers in Formosa, Argentina<sup>1</sup>

Gabina Ocampo<sup>2</sup>

*Nataġala'api, paġaguenataġanaġaicpi qataq  
enuac na ialectaua'a ne'ena hlta'araic naponagac  
qami' siquita'ape. Ie'enaġat Gabina Ocampo,  
haiem qomlashe, hima'ye Barrio Nam Qom,  
sachegaqa'ague ra Formosa- Argentina.<sup>3</sup>*

## Intercultural Bilingual Education

The objective of unifying guidelines for writing in the Qom language, transmitted orally from one generation to another, is to create a tool that will help future generations safeguard this same practice in a changing and difficult world; in addition, it will improve the classroom activities of the M.E.M.A. (Special Aboriginal Teacher) or native teacher graduated from a Teacher Training Institute as they will be able to produce teaching materials in the Qom language. It can be used by Qom and other people with the desire to learn to read and write in the language.

In Argentina, the legal framework that recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples began to be created with the return of democracy in 1983.

The Province of Formosa is one of the first to recognize the Qom as indigenous peoples. The province's legislature passed Integral Indigenous Law N° 426 on August 3, 1984. It turned out to be fundamental and a model for the National Law N° 23.302 and other provinces' laws on the first nations that were published in subsequent years, such as:

Salta, Law N° 6373, 1986

Chaco, Law N° 3258, 1987

Misiones, Laws N° 2435 and N° 2727, 1987 y 1989 respectively,

Rio Negro, Law N° 2287, 1987

Santa Fe, Law N° 11.078, 1993

1. Paper presented at IDEA's Third Continental Gathering of Indigenous Educators, Tikal, Petén Guatemala, November 9-11, 2012.

2. Gabina Ocampo belongs to the Formosan Teacher's Association, a member of the Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic – CTERA, and is coordinator of the confederation's Indigenous Educators Association - E-mail: sandra.tonaguailegoye@gmail.com

3. Greeting presented to attendees at the Gathering. "I greet you in the Qom Language: Authorities present, professors, organizers and public in general I greet you fraternally. My name is Gabina Ocampo. I belong to the Qom People. I live in the community called Barrio Nam Qom in the Province of Formosa which is situated in Northeastern Argentina, in the Chaqueña region. It borders Paraguay to the North and to the East; to the South it borders the Province of Chaco, and to the West the province of Salta."

Gabina Ocampo belongs to the Formosan Teacher's Association, a member of the Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic – CTERA, and is coordinator of the confederation's Indigenous Educators Association - E-mail: sandra.tonaguailegoye@gmail.com

In 1994 we achieved the repeal of Article 65 of the National Constitution of 1853, which had given Congress the authority to keep the indigenous on reserves and convert them to Catholicism. The new text is extensive, but I will share the lines that are relevant to the topic at hand:

It is Congress' responsibility to:

Recognize the ethnic and cultural pre-existence of the Argentine indigenous peoples.

Guarantee the respect for their identity and right to a bilingual and intercultural education;

Our province has been promoting processes of legislative innovation, including significant constitutional reforms, for the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples with the important participation of indigenous people themselves. Four secondary schools with a teaching specialty were created. One in the Nam Qom sector of Formosa City, two in El Potrillo and El Chorro, in the Department of Ramón Lista, and a fourth in the city of Ing. Juárez, Matacos Department. Since the passing of the 1987 provincial law N° 718, the training of Special Aboriginal Teachers (MEMA) began in Secondary Schools for Indigenous Communities. The ADF (Formosan Teacher's Association), member of the Confederation of Education Workers of Argentina (CTERA), regulated the figure of the MEME in the teacher's statute as a special teacher within the teaching structure. The Meme teacher has rights and responsibilities within the public school, incorporating both recognition of language and culture into his or her classroom activities.

With the implementation of Federal Education Law N° 24.195, a law that was passed in the 90s at the height of neoliberalism in Argentina, aboriginal teacher training decreased drastically. This law defines, in Chapter II of the language area and in the subsection on Aboriginal Vernacular Languages, that, "the Wichi, Pilagas and Tobas languages should be taught and learned with increasing formality and systematization in the bilingual school through specific strategies that do not necessarily include the teaching of its writing." However, this tendency to exclude the advancement of the Wichi, Pilagá and Qom languages has been reformulated in the province, taking into account principles from the provincial constitution, the provincial educational system and the holistic aboriginal law. This led to the Formosan congress' passing of General Education Law N° 1470 on April 25, 2005. It is important to highlight that the Formosan community in general participated in the process of creating the

4. Esto se refiere, cuando a nivel nacional generalmente se aprueban las leyes. Por ejemplo la aprobación de la ley integral del aborigen N° 426 en una provincia, que luego, a nivel nación se aprueba y se convierte en leyes para los pueblos originarios.



bill that led to this law. As native peoples we celebrate its implementation; Article 46 takes into account what is stipulated by the provincial constitution, the holistic aboriginal law and the National Constitution, which set out educational policies for Intercultural and Bilingual Education. These policies reaffirm the multi-ethnic and multicultural identity of the province. The articles also guarantees the right to an intercultural and bilingual education, which strengthens the practice of a bilingual approach in the development of communicative competencies at the oral and written level **in indigenous and Spanish languages**.

It also lays out guidelines for free public teacher training with specific programs for intercultural and bilingual education intended for indigenous and non-indigenous teachers. These allow access to technological, scientific and artistic knowledge and practices that favour environmentally friendly artisanal and agricultural production that facilitates integration into the workforce.

At the national level, the need for a new education law emerged in the 90s with the struggle for the abolition of the neoliberal Federal Education Law. In 1997, CTERA started a plan of action that included the installation of a large white tent in front of the Congress, where teachers and social activists carried out an ongoing hunger strike to demand their rights and the abolition of the Federal Education Law. This show of force, known as the "*carpa blanca*", lasted 1003 days, until a national law for educational financing was approved. This landmark act, in turn, gives birth to the abolition of the

Federal Education Law and prepares the terrain for the passing of a new National Education Law.

In this process, the ADF succeeded in including native peoples in the debate on the new education law, which was finally enacted on December 27, 2006. This new law calls for educating critical rights-bearing citizens who do not think only of individual development but also of social transformation. Intercultural Bilingual Education is incorporated in Chapter XI from Article 52 to Article 54. These articles strengthen cultural guidelines, language, cosmovision and ethnic identity, while creating mechanisms for native peoples to participate in the definition and evaluation of strategies for Indigenous Bilingual Education (IBE).

The current work of unifying criteria for writing in the Qom language is due to the ADF's advocacy. In 2004, the union was invited to participate in the Intercultural Education professional development course, developed through an agreement between the Luján University and CTERA, which designates MEMA teachers to participate in this program based at CTERA offices in Buenos Aires.

With the MEMA and native teachers, the task of implementing the mother tongue in the public school has been reinforced by the accompaniment and technical advice of the professors that teach the course. In this way, as members and speakers of the Qom language, we were able to recreate the course and were inspired to carry out workshops on the Qom language with the organization "Native Educators of the Qom people" from the Barrio Nam Qom in Formosa.



In developing a standardised writing for our language, the Qom language teachers decided to use the letters of the Roman alphabet, that is to say, we borrow the letters of the alphabet that is used by Spanish speakers because it is within our reach. It would have been possible to create symbols that represent phonemes that are in our language but this would have required the development of specialized tools. Instead, we decided to adapt our writing to using the existing Spanish language. But as with all languages, Qom has its particularities, so we had to incorporate other signs to represent sounds in our language that are guttural, aspirated or glottic.

We don't expect to create a Qom grammar in this project, but simply to start with the task reinforcing our language - revitalizing and perfecting it through the unification of criteria for writing in Qom.

We reinforce it because it is in the collective memory and continues to be valid. We revitalize it so we can recover ancestral words that new generations have the right to hear and know. We perfect it because we seek to capture the orality of our mother language through writing.

## Conclusion

The final step of this experience is the publication of five thousand books to be distributed in aboriginal schools throughout Formosa, and to those other institutions that will use the book. There is already progress in designing the book through the National Gathering of Territorial Organizations (ENOTPO), a space for the political coordination of territorial organizations of more than thirty native peoples in Argentina. In this space, the diversity of cultures present in the territories is reclaimed and made visible.

Currently, the challenge we face as members of the Wichí, Qom and Pilagá native peoples of Formosa, is the proposal before the Ministry of Culture and Education on the free, prior and informed consultation of the contents to be included in future curricular design in Intercultural Bilingual Education. This includes the participation of the MEMA, native teachers and elders, who would once again take up the cosmovision of our peoples who had the wisdom to implement an education that shaped people with a true identity, conscious of territorial, social and cultural diversity, while developing a well-adjusted and balanced conscience between human beings and nature.

As well, the creation of a council of indigenous educators - elected from MEMA, native teachers, and Wichí, Qom and Pilagá community members - would take on the role of accompanying and supervising the native teachers' projects in the schools at the preschool, elementary, secondary, post-secondary and university levels.

This proposal arose in the IV Congress of Native Educators organized by the commission of the Organization Native Educators in 2008.

To those present at the III Continental Gathering of Indigenous Educators and to those who might read this paper, I leave the following message:

This work is a tribute to the indigenous people who still make themselves visible after suffering linguistic and cultural genocide from people with economic power. Those of us who are present maintain the recognition of our millennial culture in order to open a space for reflection, to share strategies that bring together processes and outputs in search of a better world in Latin America or in all of ABYA YALA.



# Language Nests: a strategy to revitalize the native languages of Oaxaca, Mexico

## From the Pedagogical Movement to the Language Nests

Julián Jiménez Ramírez<sup>1</sup>

Oaxaca is one of the Mexican states with the greatest cultural and linguistic diversities in the country. Due to the contrastingly different geographical features of the land, there is a wide variety of elements that people use to understand, interpret and explain nature, the world and life itself; since each culture has created a whole set of expressions. The cultural wealth of the First Peoples is expressed in their daily activities and it is contained in their systems of organization, production and education; based on their real needs from the past and present.

After reflecting upon the role schools play in First People's towns, an education project called the "Pedagogical Movement" was promoted by the Chief Office of Supervision Zone 21; better known as the Pilot Plan, or the CMPIO (Coalition of Teachers and Indigenous Promoters of Oaxaca for its acronym in Spanish). Its goal was to create an educational system that embraced the direct beneficiaries and the knowledge they bring from their background and perspectives. Several activities were planned to create spaces and opportunities for analysis and reflection with the teachers, parents and communities.

The movement has developed in different stages. The process starts with self-reflection and self-evaluation by the teachers where they acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses. Then tasks are planned to rethink the role of teaching with the input of students, parents, authorities and people from the community.

The work of the Pedagogical Movement has caused changes in the way teachers, children and towns understand and value the original cultures, since for centuries they have lived their culture in a clandestine way. That is to say, they are aware that their people have their own culture, but they

do not practice it. Many understand the native language but they do not speak it because they have been forbidden to do so or have been discriminated against for using it, even in their own schools.

Among the techniques used for rescuing, strengthening and spreading the cultures and native languages, there is one called **the language nests**, inspired by the experience of the Maori people from New Zealand/Aotearoa:

"The language nest is a program that has children aged 1-6 totally immersed in their original language; especially in communities where the spoken language is not their native one. The intention is to create a space and an environment where small kids get used to listening only to their original language from the few people who still speak it (adults and elders), so they are raised as native speakers of their heritage language"<sup>2</sup>

In Oaxaca, language nests were created after learning from the strategy of analyzing the linguistic and cultural situation that First Peoples face; through the participation in the CMPIO-Pilot Plan in the Intercultural Education National Congress (CNEII):

"In the second general meeting of the National Indigenous and Intercultural Congress -carried out in the city of Oaxaca in October 25-27, 2007- an agreement was made to create the first language nests in Mexico to revitalize the original languages and cultures in those towns and communities where they are at risk."<sup>3</sup>

This agreement turned out to be a great aid in strengthening activities to promote education, from and with the communities. It stirred a strong sense of commitment; but also brought challenges for the communities where the language nests were to be established. "...As of February 2008,

COMMUNITY	FIRST LANGUAGE
Guadalupe Llano de Avispa, Tilantongo, Nochixtlán	Mixteca
El Oro, Nuxaa, Nochixtlán	Mixteca
Yolotepec de la Paz, Yosondúa, Tlaxiaco	Mixteca
Coápam de Guerrero, Concepción Pápalo, Cuicatlán	Cuicateca
Tlalixtac Viejo, Santa María Tlalixtac, Cuicatlán	Cuicateca y Mixteca
Plan del Carril, Huautla, Teotitlán de Flores Magón	Mazateca
Santa Catarina Lachatao, Ixtlán	Zapoteca
San Juan Evangelista Analco, Ixtlán	Zapoteca
San Andrés Yatuni, Santiago Xiacuí, Ixtlán	Zapoteca
Santiago Camotlán, Villa Alta	Zapoteca

1. Pilot Plan-CMPIO.

2. Meyer, Lois M. and Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez. The Next Language

CMPIO-CNEII-CSEIIO Guidelines, OAXACA, México. 2009, pág. 9.

3. *Op. Cit.*, pág. 15.

## Original territory of the Nuú Sau (Mixtec Region)



the first language nest was created through an agreement with the assembly of the Mixtec community of Guadalupe Llano de Avispa in Tilantongo, Nochixtlan.”

It is important to highlight that only five language nests were originally planned, but due to the impact that this recovery and revaluing strategy has had regarding in halting the processes that are displacing the native peoples’ language and culture, the communities and teachers of five other communities also requested language nests. In the end, 10 language nests were established in different regions in Oaxaca, as shown in the following table:

The first language nests focused only on four of the 16 languages that exist in Oaxaca. Still, it is deemed as progress because the communities became aware of why it is important to keep their languages alive. Thus, there is a deep commitment from many community members, but unfortunately not from all of the population. The most interested members are the elders.

In order to develop the strategy, it is necessary to acknowledge that even though there are successful cases, it is not easy to create the conditions everywhere, since people live the experience differently. It was necessary to do training to orient the activities and to involve all interested parties: the children, parents, teachers, guides (elders), local authorities, as well as researchers. The most important aspect was to analyze the experience of each language nest to design workshops based on the results, difficulties, needs, challenges, materials, questions and attitudes of the children.

“To strengthen the effort, six workshops have taken place in Oaxaca (from March 2008 to March 2009) with the

support of the CNEII, the New Mexico University and the CIESAS program from Unicef. They have involved the guides, mothers, fathers, teachers and town authorities where the nests are ...”

Below we share some examples of language nests that were implemented in terms of their creation, functioning and activities.

Who has given life to the language nest of Yolotepec de la Paz?

### Background

The community of Yolotepec de la Paz is located in the high Mixtec region of Oaxaca and it belongs to the Municipality of Santiago Yosundua. It is a small community since most of the young people migrate to other places in Mexico, looking for jobs or other lifestyles. Many return when the town has its annual fiesta celebration; but very few come back to stay after having lived elsewhere.

Schools are very important in this community. They have a preschool center that belongs to the indigenous education subsystem and an elementary school that belongs to the general sub-system. In both places, there are teachers from different communities but within the same Mixtec region. Some speak Mixtec, others do not.

The children and youngsters did not learn Mixtec as their native language. Even people who are older than 40 years old say they do not speak it; even though it has been noticed that they do understand it, they do not want to accept it.

1. Ibidem-Meyer, Lois M. Pág. 15.





Preschool children observe the process of elaboration of Chileatole.

Nowadays only the population over 60 speaks Mixtec fluently, but they are forgetting it since the school forbade them to speak it more than 40 years ago.

Because of the CMPIO Pilot Plan and thanks to the nature of indigenous kindergartens, the community was offered the chance of a language nest. The first ones to be approached with the idea to recover, strengthen and spread Mixtec were the local indigenous authorities. Then, the plan was taken to the general assembly of the communities. The participants agreed to create a language nest after hearing what it is and how it works. In Oaxaca, the preschool and elementary children are coordinated by the teachers who arrange their nest activities where the Mixtec-speaking elders act as guides. Only Mixtec is spoken during those periods and there is no translation into Spanish.

Sometimes, it happens during school hours or outside of them, according to the conditions in the communities. It is important to say that the guides were selected not only because they speak the language, but also because they know the cycles and wisdom of the **community**.

The nest started with three guides: Mrs. Agripina, Mr. Francisco, Mr. Asuncion and Professor Adela Isabel Lopez Pacheco, who took turns to coordinate activities with all the children in the preschool education center and those from the elementary and junior high schools. But the older ones eventually withdrew from the nest.

*Mrs. Agripina, Mr. Asunción y Mr Francisco, the guides of the Yolotepec de la Paz Language Nest.*

Picture: Julián Jiménez Ramírez

The plan was to work one day a week with the each one of the groups. The preschoolers would have nest activities during their school hours and in their own facilities. In their case, it was not an extra-curricular activity.

### **The learning experience in the nests**

#### **Preschoolers watch how to prepare "chileatole"**

In the language teaching program, the teacher and guides

base their plan on the activities of the communities. The actions selected are those that are closer to the experience of the children, like food preparation, greetings, agricultural activities, etc. The guides give all the instructions in the original language. The converse in Mixtec while demonstrating an activity, showing the body language, and proving direct participation and handling; so the students relate and interpret the verbal instruction with the mimics and gestures. Thus, there is a greater chance of appropriating the message and paying closer attention to Mixtec. There are no translations into Spanish in the nest.

### **Some activities that are being rescued and revalued**

With the language nest active in the community, the inhabitants are beginning to realize how important Mixtec is in their relationship with nature and with each other during family or community activities. They also realize that they have abandoned some meaningful acts that are important, since they help them know and value the sacred places of production. That is when the original language words simply sprout.

Another example of change in community activities is Tavinxí, the summoning of the souls on the day of the death; or Calend in which the godmothers now dress in denim to dance. With the children learning in the language nest, new strength has been given to the festivities and customs, which has led people to reflect on why they matter. Recovering these and other activities is of great relevance, since they are a way for the language to be reborn or adopted.

### **Some ways to promote learning**

A language is only learned by listening to it and by using it in contexts and environments where there is direct participation. Thus, guides speak only Mixtec when naming objects, explaining an activity, giving instructions or asking explanations from the students. Guides never use loose words but rather full sentences to provide full context while in an activity with the children.

Games are often played by the guides and children either in the nest, the classrooms or the school yard. Stories are always present in the language nest since they are important to provide anecdotes and to reflect upon the philosophies of the community. They are even more attractive when accompanied by body movements or when they are told in the place where the event took place or if they go back to the times of the guides.

Touring the community with the guides. This is a very useful activity, since it allows the children to know and value their community by visiting natural environments or institutions (hills, wells, building, etc.) that are relevant for some historical reason, for the benefits they bring to the community, for the activities that take place in them, for their names, for the families who live in those places, for the plants that are produced or for any other relevant fact of the community landmarks.

Children's participation in the activities. The children participate directly with their parents in some community activities such the festivities, "tequios" (collective community work), and the meetings of the communities or institutions. They prepare meals and tortillas, they help in the sowing of corn, etc.

Participation in school activities. With the objective of inviting parents to stop hiding or denying their knowledge of Mixtec, guides are invited to speak at ceremonies with the children such as paying respects to the flag, the closing of a school year, etc. In this particular example, the guides and the children conducted the end of school ceremony in Mixtec

### Some progress

Acquiring a new language requires developing different skills: listening, speaking, relating, valuing the language, etc; as well as having the mouth and tongue muscles exercised and adjusted. The mind needs to differentiate the sounds that exist in other known languages and the new ones and to get used to them to pronounce them. Finally, it has to understand the most difficult part: figuring out how to organize words in a dialogue.

In this particular experience, we could clearly observe that for the learning of a second language, the children first became aware of the fact that the original language existed, that their grandparents spoke it but that it is currently rarely used. They became aware that they can communicate amongst themselves with it, they can name the natural and social worlds and that it is different from Spanish (their first language). However, it is just as valuable and as important as the latter.

Most of the children understand and follow instructions in Mixtec. Thus, we can see that their oral understanding is growing, since they interact with actions and signs. The most advanced children pronounce and use loose words in the right contexts and situations.

At the community level, the population is becoming interested in rescuing and valuing Mixtec. Many people acknowledge they cannot speak it but they do understand it and

would like to know more. The ones who do speak it tell jokes and try to improve their pronunciation.

### Challenges and tasks:

In spite of the very important progress achieved in the language nest, which is different from other nests, it also faces challenges to obtain better results:

Spreading the information and materials that have been constructed for rescuing the original language.

Rescuing community knowledge for producing yukes, mezcal, cheese and other products that are no longer being made and reinforce those activities that are still alive.

Promoting and looking for strategies to encourage parents who speak Mixtec to do so with their children at home or when doing chores.

Implementing strategies that allow the language spoken in the community to be used in different spheres and activities, so that the children become more fluent.

### Some concerns

The progress made by the language nests has been very important, though it is fair to say that they all have different levels of language and cultural development due to the reasons why the original languages were abandoned for years to begin with. The nests of Yolotepec, Yosondua and Tlaxiaco, in Oaxaca are no exception, and they have their challenges in the short, medium and long run. We also found that there are several concerns to be addressed, such as the generations who understand the language but claim they don't, and refuse to speak it. At different levels, there is a scorn towards the language and culture, even amongst the teachers. Another concern is that all of the school activities are carried out in Spanish, as in the rest of the institution where Spanish is the official language; a fact that weakens Mixtec.

Another question is how to keep the teacher in the language nest so that they are not transferred to other schools. Obviously, teachers look for their self-interest and the communities and children come second. Even though there are the guides selected by the communities, they cannot be there all the time, so the role of the teacher is pivotal. However, having a teacher makes the activities school-centered, which goes against the objective of the nest of being school-independent.



Ms. Agripina, Mr. Asuncion and Mr. Francisco, guides of the Language Nest.  
Photos taken by Julian Jimenez Ramirez

# VALUES-BASED COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROPOSAL BY AND FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF MICHOACAN<sup>1</sup>.

Local 18 – Mexican Education Workers' Union - Michoacán



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The federal government's structural reforms are legal mechanisms by which to impose goals set by international organizations, which are unconnected to the lives of Mexican people, yet backed by business and most media which is at their service .

Within such a context, the right to education, as established by Article Three of the political constitution of 1917, is currently being extinguished both in its implementation and its full enforcement of such guarantees by the imposition of education reform at a national level. The right to education, rather than being a service rendered to the population in general, is now in the process of privatization through the 10 lines of action proposed in the so-called Alliance for Educational Quality, (Alianza por la Calidad Educativa, a recent Mexican government initiative that extends standardized testing and competition among schools).

One of the sectors that has been most heavily affected by these neo-liberal policies is indigenous education, a part of the national education system and whose purpose is to support the native people of the country, but whose results to date have been negative. Only "castellanización" – (i.e. making Spanish the official language), and the massive loss of identity have been achieved, proving that this does not solve the educational and integrated development needs of individuals and communities that arise from the specific characteristics of each culture and language. Instead it has brought about the systematic weakness and cultural disappearance

of several groups through education policies that have been being applied in the past and in the current century.

Of the four most well-known indigenous languages in the state of Michoacán, the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, UNESCO, has established that the Purépecha language is vulnerable, Mazahua is at risk, and Náhuatl and Otomí are in serious danger. This is according to the 2009 edition of the World Atlas of Languages at Risk of Extinction, based on census data from 2009, ([www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00136](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00136)).

This is a significant and concerning trend, in spite of UNESCO's recommendations and the Accords of San Andrés Larrainsar on indigenous cultural rights signed between the Mexican State and the Zapatista National Liberation Army, and despite increased interest in native cultures and languages. Currently there are isolated initiatives and efforts, but to stop this trend and achieve real change, it is essential to implement the education proposal by and for the indigenous peoples of Michoacán developed by a joint working group made up of the Section XVIII of the National Education Workers Union (SNTE)- member of the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE)<sup>2</sup>, communities, schools and other groups committed to indigenous education in the state of Michoacán.

## RATIONALE:

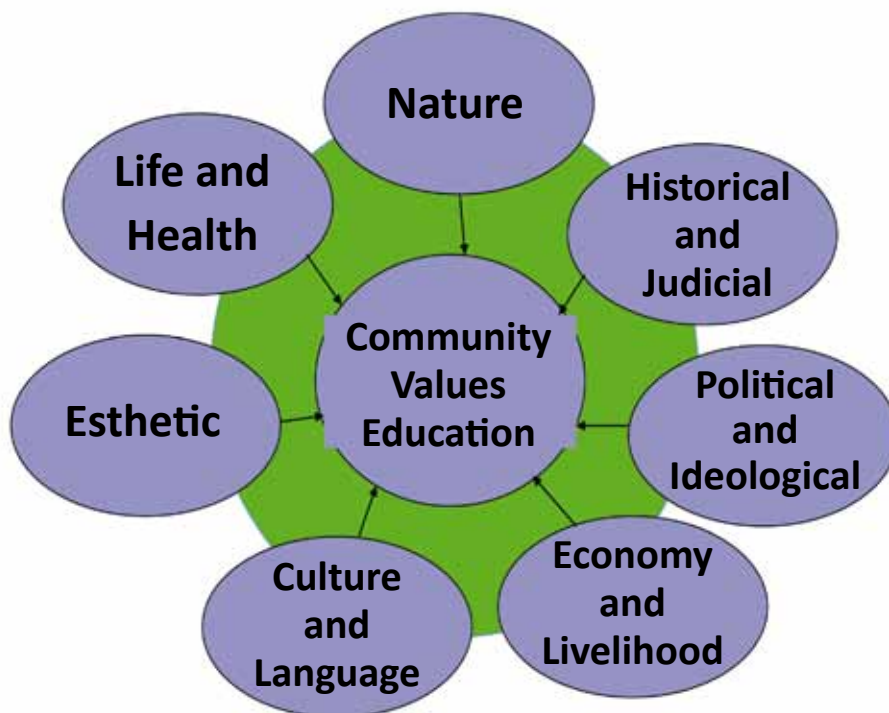
In these times of overall crisis, it is necessary to search for alternatives to rebuild the social context with a harmonious

1. Michoacán is a state located in the central-west region of Mexico. It has a long tradition of popular, campesino, worker and teacher struggle and a significant indigenous population. Editor's Note

2. Mexico's National Education Workers Union, the SNTE, is the largest in the Americas with 1,800,000 affiliated members. However, its national leadership



## DIMENSIONS CONTEMPLATED BY THE PROPOSAL



relationship between human beings and nature, where there may be peace with social justice.

We must re-build an ethical code of conduct, of values, of civilized life in society, in it and from it. We have the huge task of generating the objective and subjective conditions that will allow us to satisfy our basic needs.

The Mexican State must assume its social responsibility, based on the political constitution of 1917, in Articles 3, 27 and 123, among others, by taking responsibility for the creation, strengthening and growth of educational spaces for the development and self-management of indigenous peoples according to their autonomy. To recognize cultural plurality seriously and deeply, and develop spaces of true dialogue, we cannot continue to ignore the voices demanding the full exercise of the rights of the native peoples of this country in particular and all social rights in general.

The community school aspires to be emancipating, humane and socially just, in conjunction with a more critical, reflexive, analytical, democratic, equitable and supportive society. It aims to enable development that uses the potential of culturally diverse native peoples and promotes, from every social and natural context, a holistic education in individuals that serves the interests of its peoples and society and is not at the exclusive service of the interests of private enterprise.

For these reasons some teachers in Michoacan have set themselves the task of developing an alternative kind of education, counteracting the neo-liberal reforms imposed by the government and trying to implement projects with resources obtained through the organizing and struggles of section XVIII.

for decades has been in the control of forces that not only support neo-liberal reforms that privatize education but even worse, promote them. This is why, starting three decades ago, a huge democratic teaching movement of unionists and advocates of public education as a social right emerged from within the official union; this movement is represented by the CNTE.

### ALTERNATIVE PROJECTS IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION:

These projects are taking place at schools in different municipalities, with the main focus being "the rescue and strengthening of indigenous language and culture" within the indigenous communities of the state.

### GENERAL PURPOSE:

To strengthen and develop the native peoples of Michoacan, starting with the formation of new generations through community education based in their own culture. To raise young people committed to their culture and their community in the different levels and modalities of the education that is taught in the indigenous environment.

### SPECIFIC PURPOSES:

To develop, in the next generations, reflexive attitudes and critical awareness of the current situation of their communities and their future.

To build on the immense knowledge of the individual, based on the philosophy and cosmovision of the native peoples.

To see that the individual acquires an awareness of belonging in nature, where he or she recognizes him or herself and takes action for the protection and preservation of the environment and life itself.

To develop in individuals the linguistic skills that will enable them to communicate within their culture and the world in general.

To guide the education of new generations from the extensive knowledge and pedagogy of the native peoples, aware of the universal theoretical contributions that complement such education to achieve the social construction of knowledge.

To enrich the formation of the individual with the scientific and technological advances that help in the preservation and development of his or her people.

#### THE RULING PRINCIPLE: Communalism

- a) Life and nature
- b) Values Education (kaxumpikua in the case of p'urhe)
- c) Inclusion
- d) Science and technology

#### OUR ANALYSIS:

Historical-Social: Native cultures are still being subordinated.

Political – ideological: Indigenous identities are being lost, more and more.

Cultural: There is a cultural transgression.

Economic: Native peoples are subject to the economic power of the state and transnational policies. .

Legal: State laws are not applied in favor of indigenous peoples, and their systems and traditions are not recognized either.

Linguistic: The loss of indigenous languages has accelerated.

Natural: Nature is devastated.

Aesthetic: The arts and trades of indigenous peoples are still regarded as handicrafts and their value is minimized.

#### NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES AND PARENTS:

To promote the values of the native peoples from the school through practice.

Teaching of and in indigenous languages in schools in a systematic way.

Careful and rational exploitation of natural resources.

To re-value ceremonial rituals (when cutting trees, planting corn etc.).

To recover and encourage the diet of native peoples as part of the preservation of the culture and the health of the population.

#### CHILDREN'S NEEDS:

The continuity of their cultural practices, traditions and customs at school.

Preservation of the environment.

Learning to speak and write in indigenous languages.

The right to a healthy life.

#### AREAS OF ATTENTION:

The Indigenous Education Administration handles 44,176 students in 612 educational centers, including pre-school, special education, primary, secondary, boarding schools, Indigenous Teacher Education Schools, and reading and cultural recovery rooms, which are community centers where teachers work extra-curricular time with children and youth in order to revitalize their language and culture.

#### METHODOLOGY:

The proposal recommends teaching and learning through team work, interdisciplinarity and the transversality of community values and practices, with participation from parents and placing emphasis on indigenous languages.

HOLISTIC EVALUATION: must be qualitative, quantitative, theoretical-practical, and ongoing.

#### IMPACT OF THE ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL:

Recovery of community values and life: Kaxumpikua, jarhuatperakua, janhanarhikua

Formation of children with awareness of identity and collective work.

Participation of teachers, parents and the community in the education processes of their children through input into educational content that strengthens their culture.

Schools become aware of the problems of the communi-





ties and contributes to their solution, by being a part of them and not an imposition from outside.

Recovery of the traditional ways of production of goods and services to maintain a natural balance.

Consideration of the means and ways of production, science and technology.

Social production for self-consumption and self-development.

Development that comes from the people themselves

#### STRATEGIES:

Take into account the participation and guidance of parents and elders of the community in school practices.

Use existing social, community and educational spaces and create new ones.

Use communal cultural transfer methodologies to teach.

Set up interdisciplinary teams that systematize knowledge (of society and nature) and validate and reflect the contributions of community actors to the sciences.

Take into consideration the contributions of indigenous teachers and the writings and proposals that have been made by other institutions working on language and native culture.

Revise the content of existing materials and textbooks in indigenous languages as well as their strategic use.

#### ROLE AND ATTITUDE OF THE EDUCATOR:

Close relationship with the education community (educator-student-family parents-community)

Recovery of the community's identity.

Open-minded and critical attitude

Willingness to work outside the schools.

#### ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY:

Relationship with and commitment to the school.

Recognition of education as a means for the solution of its problems and its development.

A guide for the education process.

Critical attitude of service to the education system.

Inquiry into local knowledge and the relationship between academic content and universal knowledge.

Facilitator of learning

#### JOINT COMMUNITY-SCHOOL ACTIONS

Recognition of community problems and proposals for their solution

Revitalization of communal knowledge, arts and trades.

Recovery of traditional clothing and games.

Guidance regarding diet and school health

Formation of the elements of cultural identity (cultural events, paying homage to the flag and native anthems)

Integration of the school into the community through the recovery of materials, community teaching resources and ethno-pedagogy.

This alternative ethno-education project, created by teachers, parents and students in politically organized indigenous communities, legitimizes, in both the discourse and practice of participating families, the need for a "true education" that will respond to their daily demands and problems in terms of learning content with collective value.

Parents and grandparents, who are often illiterate, have shown themselves to be enthusiastic about these plans for an alternative education because, in their eyes, it represents the possibility of revitalizing the language and popular culture that the dominant political and economic system proposes to destroy. Regardless of these attacks, these cultures continue to resist, transmitting themselves generation after generation and creating the spaces to develop educational alternatives based on community work and on a true practice of values.



# Full Circle: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Ways of Knowing: A resource for Indigenous Approaches to Learning in Ontario, Canada

Alison Wallace



*Full Circle: First Nations, Métis<sup>1</sup> and Inuit<sup>2</sup> Ways of Knowing* is the fifth in a series of Common Threads Resource documents produced by and for members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, OSSTF/FEESO. This education workers' union, founded in 1919, has 60,000 members across Ontario, Canada. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education. Each Common Threads project in the series tackles an important social issue that is cross-curricular in nature and compels students to examine their beliefs, choices and actions. These projects address a gap in curricular resource materials and create opportunities to form partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), international unions and other advocacy groups.

The writers of this curriculum resource self-identify as First Nations or Métis, or have extensive experience working with Aboriginal students across the province. They have created a document that is authentic in its approach to sensitive, value-laden topics, and honours traditional "Ways of Knowing" by taking a holistic approach to each topic. Over the past five years, as provincial curriculum documents have been revised, they have included a statement about the importance of using learning resources that are inclusive of

and sensitive to diverse cultures, including Aboriginal people. Despite this commitment by the Ministry of Education, there are few resources to help implement these curriculum expectations. The *Full Circle* project will assist educators in achieving the goal of integrating knowledge and understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, history and culture into a variety of courses within Ontario secondary schools.

The diversity among First Nations, Métis and Inuit people means that some teachings and symbols are not universally recognized by all Aboriginal people and the Common Threads writers acknowledge this fact. Where possible, specific names and titles have been used to describe groups of people, however, the word "Aboriginal" has been used as a collective term to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit people as the original inhabitants of North America and their descendants.

The symbol of the turtle used on the cover of this project is a reference to "Turtle Island", a term used by the Haudenosaunee<sup>4</sup> to refer to North America. The turtle is also commonly used by environmentalists to indicate their solidarity with the land and its creatures. The turtle is used as a sign of longevity and the writers use it to signify the original people of Canada and their resiliency in the face of great challenges. In many cultures, the turtle represents knowledge or wisdom and in this document the turtle symbolizes "Ways of Knowing".

An important feature of every Common Threads project is an audiovisual component. In *Full Circle*, the videographers have profiled three First Nations youth, a young Métis woman and two Inuit siblings. The stories of their struggles and triumphs as they come to terms with and celebrate their

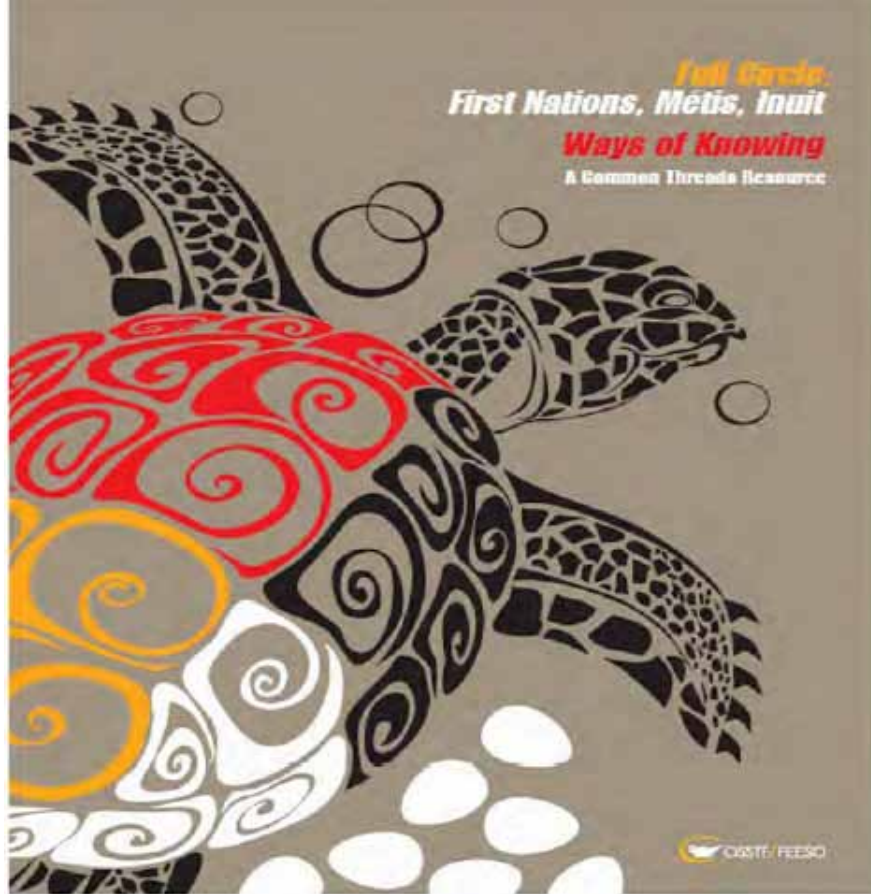
1. First Nations: In Canada, this is synonym of Indigenous or Aboriginal Peoples.

2. Métis: a distinct culture that arose from the children of French fur traders and aboriginal women in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and are now recognized a distinct aboriginal group in Canada.

3. Inuit: Inhabitants of the Far North of Canada and Quebec that see themselves as distinct from southern First Nations. Once known as "Eskimos" in North America and Europe.

4. Member of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation- OSSTF

5. Haudenosaunee: A confederation of six indigenous nations in Ontario, Quebec and Northeastern US states. Sometimes called "Iroquois" by non- Haudenosaunee.



cultures and heritage illustrate the universal themes of teenage angst in a quest for identity. All students will recognize a part of themselves within these young people as they ask the quintessential questions of identity: who am I and why am I here? This is the common thread that runs through each of the lessons.

The title *Full Circle* is meaningful to the writers and many First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. While it is recognized that not all Aboriginal people identify with the Medicine Wheel, the symbol of the circle or medicine wheel is used throughout the document as an organizational tool and provides a holistic and balanced approach to these sensitive topics. The circle is a common symbol used in many cultures to denote wholeness, inclusion, femaleness (womb), and eternity. For many First Nations and Inuit people, the circle has a spiritual connotation as the symbol of the moon and the sun. The Métis infinity symbol, the joining of two circles, illustrates the joining of two cultures and the unending existence of a people. The title *Full Circle* also refers to the unending journey that many Aboriginal people find themselves on as they claim and re-claim their culture, their land, and their identity.

For some, the circle is seen as whole and never ending. It can be balanced or unbalanced, depending upon what is placed on or in it. In this resource, the writers have attempted to balance the lessons in all four quadrants using four thematic areas: identity, health, residential schools and land. Each of these themes has up to ten lessons within it. The lessons in the Land unit ask students to consider the unique relationship that Aboriginal people share with the land, as well as the topics of treaty rights and unresolved land claims. The Residential School unit tackles the philosophical under-

pinnings of the residential school system; looks at the legacy of physical, emotional and sexual abuse suffered by the children and the ongoing impacts of that system on Aboriginal people today. Many of those long-lasting effects are studied in the health unit, where students will learn about the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal people in Canada as they face poverty, isolation, and reduced resources for health and education. Finally, the Identity unit speaks to the hope and resiliency of the Aboriginal people of Canada as they reclaim their history and embrace their diverse culture, sharing their gifts and knowledge with the people of this nation.

OSSTF/FEESO has continued its tradition of creating socially based curriculum resources that tackle the difficult issues of politics, social responsibility and social justice. Each lesson uses interactive and differentiated instructional strategies that match overall course expectations and provide opportunities for assessment as learning, of learning and for learning.

*Full Circle: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Ways of Knowing* is a high quality, educator-ready resource that will be welcomed by educators who are committed to helping students achieve a higher level of understanding of Aboriginal people and their important place in Canadian society. The project is to be released in the fall of 2012. Electronic copies will be available on the OSSTF/FEESO website along with the four previous Common Threads projects.

*"Alison Wallace is an Executive Assistant with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) and is the secretariat liaison to the Common Threads project team. She was formerly the Chief Negotiator and President of OSSTF/FEESO Teachers Bargaining Unit in Durham region, and was a high school teacher for 20 years."*

# When Will They Learn?

## Cuts to Indigenous Kindergarten programs in British Columbia, Canada

By Gail Stromquist<sup>1</sup>



The intention of the Canadian government for a century and a half has been to assimilate the indigenous population. For nearly a century, Indigenous children were removed from their homes and placed into residential schools where their cultural practices and their language were forbidden. This sad legacy had, and continues to have, devastating effects on our Indigenous communities

The last residential school closed its doors less than two decades ago. As disturbing as this is, the fact that so few people knew about the existence of these schools for decades worsens the blow and speaks to the intent of keeping this concealed. Not only was there a systematic, well planned process to assimilate the indigenous population, but also a cover up to keep this sad part of our history swept under the carpet. Few teachers in our schools today were educated on the true history of the treatment of our indigenous children. It is a sad history that we share.

Our hidden history, though, is being revealed and people want to know more. This is crucial to understanding why the current education system does not work for our indigenous children and families. When we no longer hear comments such as “get over it, that happened a long time ago,” then we will know that there is an understanding of the extent and depth of the fall out from this attempted genocide.

We must continue to promote the decolonization process. The status quo is not okay. A case in point:

EAGLE was an Indigenous Kindergarten program in British Columbia infused with cultural teachings, through teachings from local Elders as well as Elders from other indigenous communities. Teachings that possess and honor indigenous perspectives were integral to the success of the program. Programs like this were needed and put in place to address the needs that were not being met in a mainstream system that often promotes opposing values and teachings. Our Elders have made it clear they don’t want our children reproducing the dominant system.

In these programs, children learn from the Elders by listening to their stories (many important lessons are taught through story telling), through observing them (i.e. weaving, making bannock, beading, plant identification, storytelling) and by guided patience. Seeing that their Elders are valued participants/leaders in their education is also essential for the development of a strong, positive sense of identity.

Many of the children who attended the EAGLE program were children “in care<sup>2</sup>.” Over half of our children “in care” are Indigenous and many of these children are there as a result of the residential school legacy. For some of these children, this connection to the Elders and other cultural teachers was the only exposure to cultural teachings they would receive.

1. British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, Aboriginal Education Program Coordinator. This BCTF program involves Aboriginal teachers in the Federation and advocates affirmative actions to raise the number of Aboriginal teachers.

2. In Care: Under the administration of the Ministry of Social Services



Unfortunately, implementation of full day kindergarten for all students within two years eliminated all public school Indigenous Kindergarten programs. Those in charge of education policies continue to look for the magic solution to the “Indigenous problem,” of low graduation rates. Yet while dangling that carrot, they strip away what has worked for the better part of the last decade in programs such as EAGLE.

There are no quick solutions to problems that run so deep, problems created by deeply oppressive measures expressly designed to remove the “Indian” from the child. Yet when the decision makers don’t see immediate results, programs are pulled. One has to wonder how truly committed our educational leaders are to improving Indigenous Education when quick fixes are so often applied to problems that require long term commitments.

Cultural presenters and Elders from our community often share about the sense of belonging that was created in the EAGLE class, the strong positive sense of identity that they see in the children who have been a part of the program as they succeed through the later years in school. When cultural teachings are integral to your program, one is honoring a different worldview of educating, building a strong foundation for our children and creating a path for success to graduation and beyond, a path that honors walking in both worlds.

So within the last two years of full day kindergarten implementation, what has happened? Families and teachers were assured that everything was going to be okay. They were assured that there would be Indigenous content in all kindergartens for all children. Suggestions from educational “leaders” were made to create a box of Indigenous materials to have in kindergarten classes. What follow through has there been? And how does a box replace teachings from our Elders? When did our Elders’ teachings become a commodity? At what point do educational leaders lose their vision on what’s best for our children. It seems they become lost in their ability to assess who prospers and who loses in maintaining the status quo.

Even this small effort to provide a cultural grounding and space for indigenous students has been swamped in the flood of programs aimed at the more than 90% of students who are not indigenous.

When we talk about taking two steps back for every step forward, it’s clear where we are on this one. When will they learn?

*Gail Stromquist is the Aboriginal Education Coordinator at the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) in Canada. That BCTF program engages indigenous teachers in the union and advocates for affirmative action to increase the number of indigenous teachers.*



# Bilingual Numeracy Education and Indigenous Rights: a Community Based Initiative From Suriname

by Dr Ellen-Rose Kambel<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This article presents an intercultural bilingual education project which was initiated by indigenous peoples in Suriname as a way to improve numeracy education, while protecting their own languages and cultural heritage.

Suriname is a former Dutch colony located on the northeastern tip of South-America, which achieved independence in 1975. The ethnically diverse population of approximately 500,000 is largely based in and around the capital Paramaribo. The Interior or hinterland is the domain of some 12,000 indigenous peoples (Amerindians) and 50,000 Maroons. Maroons are the descendants of African slaves who escaped the plantations 300 years ago and formed culturally distinct groups with their own traditions, languages and government systems. Although not indigenous, Maroons are recognized under the Inter-American human rights system as tribal groups with the same rights to self-determination and property as indigenous peoples.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous and maroon traditional livelihood practices, based on hunting, fishing and rotational farming, is under pressure as more areas in the Interior are opened up for gold and bauxite mining and logging. While Suriname has ratified numerous human rights treaties, it remains the only country in the Americas which has not recognized any collective rights of indigenous peoples to their lands and territories.<sup>3</sup>

*Maroon community and school children in the Interior of Suriname (photos: Rian van Wijk and Sabine Loeve).*

## Education

With regard to education, there are clear disparities between indigenous and tribal children and their peers living in the urban areas:

Indigenous and maroon children repeat grades almost twice as often than children in urban areas;<sup>4</sup>

they take much longer to complete primary school: only 1.2% of indigenous and maroon children complete primary

school before the age of 12, compared to 24% of urban based children;<sup>5</sup>

if they complete primary school at all: passing rates for secondary school have consistently been 30% lower for indigenous and maroon children compared to the national average.<sup>6</sup>

In 2007, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted with concern: "... that significant disparities exist in the quality and delivery of education between the coastal areas and the interior of the country and that a large number of primary schools in the interior are managed by teachers with limited training...."<sup>7</sup> In fact, the majority of the teachers in the Interior are not or not fully qualified to teach at a pre-school or primary school.<sup>8</sup> And while the language of instruction is Dutch, at least half of the children in the Interior enter school without any knowledge of Dutch.<sup>9</sup>

## Language and culture loss

Today, all indigenous languages of Suriname are considered severely or critically endangered.<sup>9</sup> Communities have realized that their traditional rules for sustainably using natural resources are at risk because this knowledge is not taught at school and "...people do not stay for months at their agricultural plot anymore, because the children have to go to school. In the past the children were simply taken along. As a result, the knowledge that we have tried to record in this report, risks being lost".<sup>10</sup>

Suriname approved the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. The Declaration recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages. In 2009, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that Suriname give adequate recognition to native languages and encouraged the government "to seek strategies with a view to introducing bilingual education".<sup>11</sup> So far, this has not resulted in any concrete measures.

1. Dr. Ellen-Rose Kambel (ellen-rose@rutufoundation.org) obtained a law degree and a PhD in Social Sciences and has worked for over 15 years with indigenous peoples as a trainer and consultant in human rights education. She is the co-founder and director of the non-profit organization Rutu Foundation on Intercultural Multilingual Education. The math initiative described in this article is supported by the Rutu Foundation.

2. Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Saramaka People v. Suriname*, Judgment of 28 November 2007.

3. Ellen-Rose Kambel and Fergus MacKay, *The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons in Suriname*, IWGIA, Copenhagen, 1999.

4. Ministry of Education (MINOV 2011), *Data map Research Planning and Monitoring*, 2011, pg. 8.

5. Ministry of Education (MINOV 2008), *Implementation Plan Education for the Interior 2008-2015*. Plan of action to realize the right to quality education for every child in Suriname, January 2008, pg. 21.

6. See MINOV 2008, pg. 22 and MINOV 2011, pg. 6, comparing passing rates between the District of Sipaliwini.

7. *Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations to Suriname's Second Periodic Report*, UN Doc. CRC/C/SUR/CO/2, Jan. 2007.

8. To teach in the interior, a special 'Bushland Diploma' is sufficient which does not qualify to teach in the capital or coastal districts (MINOV 2008, pg. 20).

9. MINOV 2008, pg. 33.

10. Marauny Na'Na Emandobo Lokono Shikwabana. 'Marowijne: Our Territory'. Forest Peoples Programme, Moreton-in-Marsh, 2006, pg. 108.





Preschool boys and girls in the country side of Surinam.  
Photo: Rian Von Wijk and Sabrre Loeve.

### **“Maths, Naturally!” – a bilingual intercultural math initiative**

In 2010, indigenous parents, teachers and village leaders decided to embark on a project which would improve the quality of education and enable them to protect their languages and pass on their rich ecological knowledge to future generations. The project focuses on the design of an early grade intercultural bilingual numeracy method, called “Maths, Naturally!” with illustrations and examples drawn from the local environment and culture. Numeracy was chosen because teachers felt that it constituted one of the main stumbling blocks for the children.

Teachers and education experts regularly met with community translators and artists to discuss the content of the books. To ensure feedback from the community, parents were interviewed by community researchers and village meetings were held to discuss the project. Teacher training was part of the project: workshops focusing on numeracy teaching were combined with classroom visits. Finally, teachers were provided with calling cards so they could connect with each other via mobile phones and, since most teachers now possess smart phones, a platform on Facebook was created to share information and updates.

### **Results**

The learning materials are currently used by about 250 children in six indigenous and maroon villages throughout

Suriname. They have been translated into two indigenous languages (Kari’na and Lokono) and one Maroon language (Saamaka). While it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the method, teachers and students are enthusiastic. Children refer to the math book as “our Kari’na book”, indicating that they regard the materials as something belonging to them and start cheering when it is time for math. One teacher described the math book as “a dream come true. Those government books are so abstract, they are discouraging, even for me as a teacher”.

The project also attracted wider attention: teachers and village leaders from South-Africa, Brazil and Mexico have expressed interest in translating and adapting the materials for their own use. To facilitate this, an online software tool is currently being designed in partnership with the University of Querétaro (Mexico).

### **Conclusion**

Whereas bilingual education policies have been introduced throughout Latin America during the past three decades, Suriname has held on to its submersion policy. This model of education which leaves children no choice but to attend a school in a language they do not understand, is considered a “cruel form of schooling that forces children to make sense of a foreign medium of instruction while devaluing their languages, cultures, identities and overall self-esteem.”<sup>12</sup> Indigenous parents, teachers and village leaders have taken the lead to reverse this process. If successful, their efforts will improve their children’s numeracy skills - considered an important predictor of later educational achievement<sup>13</sup> - while protecting the unique knowledge and traditions of their ancestors.

11. CERD, Concluding Observations: Suriname, UN Doc CERD/C/SUR/CO/12, 3 March 09, pg. 16.

12. Carol Benson, ‘Designing Effective Schooling in Multilingual Contexts: Going Beyond Bilingual Models’. In: Skutnabb-Kangas et al, Social Justice Through Multilingual Education, Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2009, pg. 63-84.

13. Greg Duncan et al., ‘School Readiness and Later Achievement’, in: Developmental Psychology, Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 1428–1446, 2007.



# BILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, PERSPECTIVES AND CURRENT REALITY

Sisa Pacari Bacacela Gualán<sup>1</sup>

The education system in Ecuador plays an ideological role in maintaining the power of the dominant class, while destroying indigenous cultures. Whenever there is a crisis of their economic model and power structure, the liberal States reform their educational policies and develop legal standards that seem attractive for the indigenous nationalities so that they themselves become “participants in the destruction of their peoples and culture”<sup>2</sup> though the so-called democracy.

## The ideological role of the State: assimilationist, reformist and ethnocidal

After 520 years of ethnocide in the Americas, capitalism is readapting itself to the demands of new social subjects by advancing assimilationist policies for indigenous peoples. During the last 20 years, mass assimilation mechanisms have been developed with institutions that undermine the cultures of the indigenous groups and their organizations, using a mental modeling of symbolic violence.<sup>3</sup> They have homogenized the symbolic codes of western reasoning and promoted a disdain for indigenous codes and wisdom.

Today we face a monopolistic and globalized “civilizing” model that requires a society stripped of political opposition. Thus, Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa has attempted to coopt the social movements and organizations that support indigenous cultures and autonomy, through an assimilationist political project known as “State ethno-phagia.”<sup>4</sup> One of its strategies is to co-opt organization leaders to incorporate the indigenous people to the State’s Institutions so they themselves legitimize and endorse their own destruction and exclusion.

The integrationist State assimilates indigenous cultural practices at a State level and folklorizes the social and political proposals of indigenous peoples. “The inclusion of the concepts of multiple (*pluri*) nationalities, interculturalism and the concept of Living Well (*vivir bien*) in the new Ecuadoran Constitution, and in the policies of ‘XXI Century Socialism’ governments are not a part of a genuine de-colonization process because their legal, economic and political practices turn their backs on those same principles.”<sup>5</sup>

For the Centralist State, the System of Intercultural Bilingual Education (SEIB) is only meant to be a discourse at



the service of the dominant class. It is an extension of colonialism and it is still meant to destroy the indigenous cultures.

Nevertheless, we have seen some progress in the development of an intercultural education that responds to the needs of our peoples.

## PROGRESS MADE BY THE INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

(SEIB FOR ITS ACRONYM IN SPANISH)

During the last 20 years, bilingual intercultural education has achieved a degree of mental decolonization and it has made cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge more visible. There have been linguistic research and publications in all of the languages in Ecuador to determine their writing systems. The MOSEIB was created and is an improvement on the curricular reforms that the Ministry of Education has copied from other Latin American countries.

The Curricular Redesign includes important pedagogical innovations:

It has been implemented on nine levels (2nd to 10th grades).

Five-month school semesters have been introduced based on the agricultural/ecological calendar

There is continuous student enrolment that allows for a learning process that suits the individual rhythm of the students.

Pedagogical staging has been used to allow the 4 areas of knowledge to develop: proficiency, application, creation and socialization.

The use of local dress is permitted in place of the school uniforms.

The construction of the SISEMOE (Educational Monitoring and Evaluation System)

6. School period of five months

1. Secretary for Bilingual Education, Unión Nacional Educadores del Ecuador. IDEA-REI Network - Guatemala

2. Patzi Félix: modern shapes of symbolic violence. La Paz, Bolivia.

3. State ethno-phagia: The process of cultural ethnocide in a discreet way and in the long-long term to destroy the indigenous peoples.

4. State ethnography: process of cultural ethnocide by hidden means and at long term to destroy indigenous peoples.

5. Sergio de Castro Sánchez: "Socialism and Acculturation". [www.kaosenlared](http://www.kaosenlared)

The EIFC model (community early childhood education) and community high school curricula have been developed.

A special learning module for the Amazonian region has been developed and implemented

Dictionaries for 12 languages developed and published

Training of 5 thousand new elementary school teachers and 389 specialists on bilingual education

## LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

The SEIB is based on international agreements, such as Convention 169 of the ILO on independent tribal and indigenous peoples; as well as on the UN declarations on indigenous rights.

More specifically, the Constitution of Ecuador states:

Art. 1: Spanish, Kichwa y and Shuar are the official languages for intercultural relationships. The rest of the languages are of official use for the indigenous peoples.

Art. 57, Section 10: Indigenous communes, communities and peoples have the right to create, strengthen and empower the Bilingual Intercultural Education System with criteria for quality; from early education to the higher levels, according to their cultural diversity and teaching/learning methodologies. Section 19 defends the right of indigenous children to wear their traditional clothing and symbols.

Art 347. Section 9: The State is responsible for guaranteeing the Bilingual Intercultural Education System, which will use native languages and Spanish as the languages of the intercultural relationship, will do so with full respect for the rights of the communities, peoples and nationalities. The Children and Adolescence Code (Art. 34) states that boys, girls and adolescents have the right to preserve, develop, strengthen and recover their identity, and spiritual, cultural, religious, political and social values.

## The INTERCULTURAL ORGANIC EDUCATION LAW establishes:

The SEIB is an integrated group of policies, standards and members of the educational community, from the grassroots level to the circuits, districts and zones that have a direct relationship to the processes of learning the ancestral and official languages (LOEI 77, Regulation Art. 241). The establishment of special SEIB units is required at all levels, which will be intercultural and bilingual (20, 27 of LOEI), with a special attention to intercultural and bilingual education. (92 LOEI).

The intercultural bilingual curricula will promote the development of inter-culturalism, starting from the cultural identities and use of indigenous languages to the rest of the larger process, including honouring the ancient knowledge, practices and values of Pachamama/ Mother Earth (92 LOEI).

The SEIB curricula will be developed under the framework of the current module (MOSEIB), in accordance with the national curricula, to reflect its plurinational and intercultural nature (Art. 78); including inter-culturalism as the cross-cutting theme of the national curricula and texts in a mandatory way. "The national curricula will be taught in the official languages of the nationalities" (Art.6, g).



## CURRENT REALITY OF INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN ECUADOR

The administration of the "intercultural" districts and circuits by mono-cultural professionals under a single cultural policy and following a single national curriculum is a form of education massification. It implies a castration of THE diverse visions and cultural expressions. It goes against the current Ecuadorian legislation and different international standards that protect the rights of indigenous peoples to an education that preserves their culture and history. It is to go back half a century to when we lived in rural areas and communities with Spanish teachers and foreign content that had nothing to do with the native communities.

Monolingual education in "Spanish" has enormously affected the indigenous students by halting the development of skills and attitudes, shaping thought patterns according to the western logic of "modernity." It has hindered the development of our own understandings of life and philosophy, since it does not take into account our cultural and linguistic context. As a result, children feel a deep shame of their historical roots, cultural identity and language.

The one-culture model in schools, high schools and universities is designed with curricular content that reproduces and maintains the system of domination, colonization and death of the indigenous cultures. Teachers do not take advantage of the prior knowledge of indigenous students; which should always be a rule. There is a constant exclusion of knowledge drawn from their cultural and linguistic background.

The result is a loss of their culture and identity and the adoption of an "inter-cultural" education model that is useful for the State. Thus, the bilingual and intercultural education, promoted by the State and neoliberalism, is a trap for destruction. It is a cultural imposition and a symbolic violence.

The SEIB is subordinated to the one-culture policies and of the dominant colonial educational system. The presence of the administrative authorities who respond to the government policies is not strengthening the SEIB. The Deputy Ministry of Bilingual Intercultural Education is responsible for adopting actions to make the administration of SEIB a collective and participative process by its members (Regulation 246). However, in reality, this is not achieved due to centralist policies and social/racial prejudices. The authorities of the Ministry believe that "coordinating" means "subordinating", so we are once in the system of vassalage

that we have lived through for the past five centuries ago. Many bureaucrats cannot conceive the existence of other visions and truths and cannot accept a curriculum that strays from the national model. Cultural knowledge, wisdom and symbols are taken as mere folklore or merchandise. They believe that offering an ancestral language as a subject is enough to classify the system as intercultural and bilingual. In vain, regulations (Art 276) say that to occupy a position in the SEIB, candidates aspiring to the positions of directors or consultants must speak and write the native languages. All is forgotten when personal appointments are made to the monolingual people linked to the ruling party.

The centralist policy of the State is a return to colonialism. As academic Catherine Walsh observes, "When the task of promoting inter-culturalism is in the hands of the State, there is the risk because its purposes and intentions don't always correspond to those originally contemplated by the peoples and their organizations in their demands"<sup>7</sup>.

The intercultural bilingual educational centers are in the process of closing and merging with Spanish-speaking schools. Without the autonomy and decentralization of Bilingual Intercultural Education, there can be no way to practice collective rights or the possibility to develop an education with a model of our own.

In Imbabura, in the cantons<sup>8</sup> of Otavalo and Cotacachi, more than 10 bilingual schools have been closed in remote indigenous communities. More than 400 students are left without education and their teachers were fired. The same thing does not happen with the Spanish education schools.<sup>9</sup>

### Why are bilingual schools being closed?

The indigenous peoples are considered to be obstacles to a capitalist development model based on mineral and hydrocarbon extraction and the destruction of the environment; which has grown more intense recently and faces growing resistance from the indigenous peoples. The government of President Rafael Correa is criminalizing the struggles for human and collective rights, as well as those in defense of the environment. He has established a centralized model of political and ideological control based on neoliberalism. This system demands educational policy that is massifying, individualistic and competitive. It regards bilingual education as a threat that awakens critical awareness and the reclaiming of rights, since it changes people so they can change the world. Education is intentional: It can either free people or domesticate them. **Education will always be foremost a political problem, and then a pedagogical one.**

### Intercultural education exists only in discourse

Incorporating intercultural bilingual education and its approaches in the articles of the Inter-cultural Education Law

is just an empty statement; a collective illusion of equality and of social transformation. That is because the ministry has no real will to understand cultural diversities through other ways of thinking, feeling and acting. There is no will to "learn to unlearn in order to re-learn." Rather there is the imposition of a single framework of thinking. The bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education must reform their monocultural way of thinking about truths and paradigms. They must understand and accept that on this planet Earth and in Ecuador, there are two fundamental elements to respect, accept and share:

The biodiversity of *allpamama*, where all men, women and plants live.

Cult-diversity (multiple cultures and multiple truths).

The inclusion of "Interculturalism" as a cross-cutting theme in the curricular reform of 1996 never had an impact on Spanish-only education. That is why the educational system continues to raise youth belonging to the hegemonic cultural group in power without any concept of cultural diversity. Inter-culturalism shines in its absence from the objectives and profiles of students graduating from the Spanish-only system.<sup>10</sup>

School texts do not include the intercultural perspective either. There is no information on the current cultural situation, knowledge and practices of the peoples and nationalities of the indigenous and the Afro-descendent populations. The texts contain stereotypical visions that still speak of tribes, ethnic groups and races. Instead of contributing to a deeper and critical understanding of cultural diversity, they reproduce the prejudices about the indigenous and African populations that have historically excluded and discriminated against them.

Interculturalism and education are oriented towards the development of two aspects: a curriculum that develops cultural, social and linguistic diversity by acknowledging the legitimacy of indigenous ways of knowing wisdom and traditional relationships, and; a pedagogy inspired in diversity to promote a balanced approach and dialogue between the knowledge of the first peoples and the cultural products and technologies of the dominant society.

### The resistance

We feel and know that with or without law, our ancestors left a path for us to follow. The best weapon for the indigenous peoples is to feel, think and act with wisdom in this unequal and unjust planet.<sup>11</sup> The resisting and the struggle have been, and will be, **the only path** for the peoples and nationalities to face a capitalist State and its servile governments.

The indigenous peoples have been creating spaces of sharing and spiritual and physical healing. We are recovering and reconstructing our right to happiness without losing sight that our struggles are those of all society for better days. It is the only path left for us to follow.

7. Catherine Walsh, quoted by Sebastian Granda, op.cit. p. 93.

8. They are territorial divisions smaller than provinces. Note of the editor.

9. Ecuachasqi. September 7, de 2012. Educational Leader from Chijallta, Imbabura. The leaders and mothers march on October the 8th to the Ibarra Education Office to demand the reopening of the educational centers that were closed.

10. Granda Merchán, Sebastián, op.cit. p. 92.

11. Palechor Bolaños, Nelsy Rocío: The indigenous resistance, Bilingual Education Certification Program, Intercultural environment forum, October 24, 2011.





## CONTINENTAL INDIGENOUS EDUCATORS NETWORK – IDEA

### THIRD ENCOUNTER OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATORS

*“For the rights of indigenous peoples and unity in diversity”*

Indigenous educators representing teachers’ unions and community organizations from ten countries in the Americas came together November 9-11 2012 in Tikal, Peten-Guatemala with the purpose of sharing experiences and strategies for strengthening indigenous education in the Western Hemisphere.

In addition to teachers and other educators, members of MoveMayas of Guatemala (Mayan Student Movement) also participated. The various presentations included the experience of the Nasa indigenous people of the province of Cauca, Colombia. The spokesperson for the tejido de educacion (education network or “tapestry”) of the Northern Cauca Indigenous Council (ACIN) explained that Colombia has a population of forty-two million people, of which 1,600,000 belong to 102 indigenous groups that speak 63 different languages and dialects.

The indigenous nations of Cauca include the Yanokona, Ingas, Esperara, Siapidaras, Misak, Nasa, Totoro and Kokonuco.

#### **An Education System of Their Own**

The following are excerpts from a presentation by ACIN’s tejido de educacion coordinator Jeann Nilton Campo on the educational system established by the indigenous peoples in Cauca:

An education system that really belongs to a people results from reflection on what education means in the perspective and practices that have been handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. It creates and recreates values, traditions, myths and artistic expressions as well as languages, means of production, wisdom and self-understanding to strengthen a shared view of the world, collective identity, spirituality, and traditional systems of authority, territoriality, political organization and other specific elements of the culture. All this is done by exercising autonomy in mutual exchange and reciprocity

with nature, with community members and with other cultures.

It is a vital process that creates knowledge, awareness, feeling, ways of being and learning that are acquired before birth and continue to be developed during all of the life cycles, guided by family, elders and the world of spiritual beings.

Thus, education is shaped by the world view of the peoples, our cultural identity, and it considers a balanced relationship with Mother Earth to be Holistic Well-Being (“wet wet finzenxi”).

Education should be a fundamental right and must be free and guaranteed by the state through educational policies that come from the grassroots; it must be a bottom-up approach with direct participation and real democracy. Education must contribute to building a critical perspective that defends the land, cultural identity and the construction of autonomy. It must teach collective awareness to resist colonization and to be able to move forward in self-determination.

This indigenous educational system, conceived by the peoples of the Cauca, represents a historical and cultural heritage. It comprises a set of political organizational processes and pedagogical and administrative procedures, combined with guidelines to respect the knowledge, actions, spaces and times of the different life cycles.

Interrelated and governed by their own rules in the search for cultural survival, indigenous people also seek harmony with Mother Earth, by strengthening their identity and spirituality and by revitalizing all of the dimensions of their cultures to fully exercise their territorial, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental autonomy.

Jeann Nilton Campo’s full presentation and other documents from the III Gathering of Indigenous Educators are now available on the IDEA Network webpage at

[www.idea-network.ca](http://www.idea-network.ca)

## José Ramos Bosmediano

### Exemplary teacher and internationalist



Jose Ramos, front row, fifth from left to right. Indigenous Educators Network Encounter, IDEA Network. Cancun, Mexico

The Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA Network), and the democratic education movement of the region as a whole, lost a great teacher, philosopher and activist on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012 with the passing of José Damaso Ramos Bosmediano.

Professor Ramos was the Secretary General of the Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores de Educacion del Peru (SUTEP) on two occasions (1989-1992 and 1995-1997), which were particularly difficult times for the union under the neoliberal dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori. Later, as the International Secretary of SUTEP, he participated in the international meeting in Mexico in 1988 where the proposal to create the

IDEA/SEPA network first emerged. If memory serves us right, it was Jose himself who suggested the name for our network.

He was the main author of the IDEA network's base document: **"Alternative for Democratic Education in the Americas"**, which was ratified at the founding congress in Quito, Ecuador, in October 1999.

Compañero José Ramos represented the Andean Region on the first international coordinating committee of the IDEA network between 1999 and 2001. Later, when he was no longer the national leader of SUTEP, he actively participated in the coordination of our Educational Research





Network (REI), where he contributed to the defense of public education across the hemisphere through his own writing, by collaborating with the regional research committee and as a member of the editorial committee of *Intercambio* magazine.

Jose had very clear political principles, but he was never sectarian, and while his participation in the political and pedagogical debates of the network was very lively, he was always willing to listen to others and to try and reach a dialectical consensus. He contributed greatly to the development of our perspective as an organization. All of us in the IDEA network will miss his knowledge, human warmth, commitment and international perspective.

Aside from his dedication to the continental fight for public and democratic education, Professor Ramos had a long history as a teacher, union leader, writer, philosopher and political activist in Peru. You will find some highlights of his biography below.

#### JOSE "PEPE" RAMOS

Professor Jose Ramos Bosmediano was born on July, 1942 in the riverside community of Pobre Alegre, in the Amazon province of Ucayali, Loreto, Peru. His mother was the only teacher at the village school where Jose first studied. Since

the Pobre Alegre school did not cover all of the elementary grades, he had to move to Contamano and live with relatives to finish his basic education.

However, because of his mother's economic difficulties, Jose had to drop out of school at age 12 and start working as a farm labourer on the Lisboa plantation. When he was 15 years old, he participated in his first strike where the workers were able to earn a salary increase in a short time.

By the time he was 17, he had saved enough money to apply to the National School of Requena, which had a boarding program for out-of-town students. Later, he moved to Yurimaguas to continue his high-school studies at the "Monseñor Atansia Juaregui Goiri" National School, where he earned the "Excellency Award" that granted him direct access to the National University of Trujillo, where he graduated as a philosophy and social science teacher. His thesis was on the pedagogical foundations of Paulo Freire.

Shortly after completing high school in 1964, he began teaching at his old Yurimaguas High School while attending university. He became one of the most outstanding teachers at the school.

When he graduated from university, he kept on working as a teacher and also emerged as a left-wing political leader and social organizer, especially with the teachers of the recently founded SUTEP (1972).

Pepe Ramos worked in the Libertad Region, at the "Victor Raul Haya de la Torre" school in El Porvenir. He contributed to the strengthening of Libertad SUTEP. Those were years of intense political and revolutionary activity in Peru.

Because of his work with SUTEP, Professor Ramos was imprisoned several times under different repressive governments, as well as losing several jobs arbitrarily. While he was in jail during the Fujimori dictatorship in the 1990s, he participated with other political prisoners in a hunger strike that lasted several weeks and left him with life-long health problems.

In 1992, during his first term as National Secretary General, he wrote the first SUTEP Educational Project.

Professor Jose Ramos wrote articles for the newspapers "La Voz" and "La Republica" in Lima. He was a tireless fighter against the Fujimori-Montesinos dictatorship for which he was persecuted, arrested and dragged into 18 trials "for crimes against the state".

His role as a national and international speaker and his political and union work allowed him to learn about the realities of many foreign countries, as well as to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the problems of our times. His articles on politics and education, which still circulate on the web, are widely known and respected.

Because of his prestige as a teacher and citizen committed to his time and to Peru, the teachers and parents of Yurimaguas named his high school after him, setting an example for present and future generations of the type of leaders needed for real transformation in the Americas.

To his wife Teresa Geldres and to the three children Jose was so proud of, we send them our deepest condolences for the loss of this great man.



# The struggle to defend Public Education and the Creation of Alternatives – A hemispheric glance at 2012-

Maria Ramos Casiano<sup>1</sup>



In much of the Americas, 2012 was a year of policies against public education and education workers, but also of a blossoming resistance by students and educators.

Many governments cut budgets for basic and higher education, leading to a reduction of the universities' roles, tuition increases, the laying-off of workers, and a greater promotion of charter schools (schools run by private interests, but financed by tax payers). There were also systematic attacks against collective bargaining and unions, and an absence of bilateral negotiation in the work place; either through intransigence by management or legislation that stripped workers of their basic labor rights.

Governments and large corporations increased media attacks against teachers, blaming them for all the problems in education. Administrative and police repression continued to be employed by those in power against educators and students. But in several countries, students, educators and other members of the education community came together in unprecedented numbers to defend public education and win changes aimed at strengthening it.

In South America, in countries such as Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela and Argentina, where democratizing processes have taken root, paths were opened to recover labor rights,

respect for freedom of association, and the necessary resources for public education.

The mobilization of students and workers to defend public education and to construct democratic alternatives was a common theme from Canada all the way down to Argentina.

We can highlight two trends moving in very different directions:

1) The strengthening of "standardized evaluation" as a tool to control and disqualify teachers and students and transfer to them the blame for educational deterioration.

2) The growth of alternative and emancipating pedagogical movements, still scattered, but alive and vibrant throughout the continent. With continental pedagogical gatherings organized in December 2011 by Education International Latin America, and in April 2012 by IDEA, these local and national initiatives are beginning to coalesce into a hemispheric movement.

The following stories provide examples of the above-mentioned trends.

## Standardized evaluation as a power tool

An important challenge to neoliberal educational policies in the USA was the historic September 2012 strike of the Chicago Teachers' Union. The work stoppage, the first in decades,

1. Member of the Technical Secretariat, Social Network for Public Education in America- SEPA Network.



raised awareness that the reward-and-punishment logic behind standardized evaluations to measure the alleged “quality of education” only serves to worsen learning and teaching conditions. Thus, a core demand by the Chicago union was fairer treatment for teachers, and that spurred a reaction from teachers in the rest of the country. The Chicago struggle became a point of reference by the end of 2012, when teachers in the rest of the continent began to also mobilize to demand better wages and an end to high stakes testing, and to defend public education and universal access.

The Chicago teachers’ strike would set a precedent because it was the first organized by teachers in the USA in 25 years. The Chicago teachers demanded better salaries, a restructuring of how teachers are evaluated, and an improvement on teaching/learning conditions.

Another example of imposed standardized evaluation is Honduras. In November 2012, the Ministry of Education of the *de facto* regime announced teacher evaluations as part of a national educational policy. The measures that accompanied the decree also punished and criminalized social protests and labour action. In that context, almost a thousand teachers who had participated in pro-democracy demonstrations were fired, and others received pay cuts.

It is important to highlight that throughout the year, the people of Honduras - which since the 2009 neoliberal coup has become the murder capital of the world - suffered relentless violence and repression. Victims of the repression made several human right violations claims to international institutions, but that did not stop the *de facto* regime from attempting to legalize repression and make demonstrators criminals. During 2012, the *de facto* government enacted several bills aimed at restricting teachers’ right to strike and

to free association. Meanwhile, in the streets, much of the regime’s police violence was directed at educators and students.

In Mexico, President Enrique Peña Nieto took office in December, restoring the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to power. With the return of the PRI, attacks by the business sector and international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on public education in Mexico worsened. The new government is arbitrarily using standardized evaluation as the criteria to control the labour life of teachers, the performance of students, and to decide what being a teacher means. With the help of the National Congress, the Mexican constitution was amended to facilitate the privatization of education and to limit teachers’ rights. This year, standardized evaluation is being used to hire new staff and to offer promotions and tenures; a violation of all existing labour legislation since it makes unjustified firings easier.

The constitutional amendment was approved despite widespread resistance from the democratic teachers’ movement to “universal evaluation”. But, since now it is constitutional, it is compulsory.

At the beginning of 2013, *Mexico’s National Union of Education Workers* (SNTE) went through a major event. After 24 years of corrupt alliance between SNTE president-for-life Elba Esther Gordillo and the government, she was arrested and charged with embezzlement. Although the arrest of the corrupt union leader was long overdue, the break between the government and Gordillo is more related to the fact that thousands of teachers were joining forces with the *Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (CNTE, the democratic opposition within the official teachers’ union)

when they realized their jobs were in jeopardy, and this had pressured Gordillo and her subordinates to oppose the constitutional changes regarding public education.

### **Violation of labor rights and anti-union offensive**

In Canada, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) fought against Bill C-22 (the "Improvement of Education" Act), presented to the British Columbia Legislature Canada in March, 2012, which removed the right to strike or take other collective action. The bill violated the International Labor Organization's (ILO) convention on freedom of association and the right to free association, ratified by Canada in 1972. But this is not new, since years earlier; the ILO had ruled that the BC government had violated the Convention when in 2005 it enacted Bills 12 and 19 as a weapon to curtail the collective bargaining rights of teachers in the province.

Another important battle in Canada was fought in 2012 by the Ontario School Teachers' Federation-OSSTF against the Ontario governments' Bill 115; which ripped up the negotiated collective agreement and imposed a new contract, froze wages, reduced sick leave days, and prohibited strikes by education workers. The assault on teachers in the province used a "divide and conquer" strategy; since the governments' argument was that to optimize reduced resources and keep some educational programs alive (like full-day kindergarten or small classes), privileges had to be taken away from "those who abused them." But what became evident in Ontario was an arbitrary use of power against teachers and the imposition of an austerity agenda that seeks to curtail education funding and labour rights.

### **Mobilizations for wage increases and a stronger budget for education**

Professors at the federal universities of Brazil, organized with the National Union of Higher Education Professors-ANDES-SN, launched a strike from May to July, 2012 to demand a change in the Professional Career Plan that regulates academic life in Brazilian post-secondary institutions; as well as to defend public universities, the teaching profession, dignified wages, the role of teachers in academic life, professional training, greater resources for higher education and better labour conditions. The movement involved professors at almost 50 universities and higher education institutes, plus students and administrative workers, in one of the most important strikes to defend public education in Brazil in recent years.

Argentina had a year full of regional education mobilizations, and a national strike. The first episode was a 24-hour national stoppage supported by diverse teachers' organizations, the first to be held during the administrations of President Cristina Fernandez Kirchner and that of her predecessor and husband, Nestor Kirchner. Their terms have included favorable policies for public education, and salary increases for education workers, but in the wake of the global economic crisis, Fernandez opted to implement some austerity policies. During the second half of the year, the Buenos Aires teachers led an effort to improve salaries, to reject cut-backs and to reinstate services such as school

diners and buses; as well as to ensure a better infrastructure.

### **Student resistance and state repression**

Throughout 2012 there were large mobilizations of high-school and university students in several countries of the Americas. The most emblematic ones were those in Chile and Quebec.

Chile was once again in the international spotlight as students returned to the streets in the tens of thousands to demand a universal public education system. The students protested President Sebastian Piñera's lack of political will to comply with commitments made following mass student demonstrations in 2011. They continued their efforts to restore the free, public and quality education system that had been abolished following the 1973 neoliberal military coup. But throughout the year, the government's response was stonewalling and repression. Instead of negotiations, the government spread fear and a climate of violence by allowing its security forces to invade the universities and assault and imprison students.

Meanwhile, Quebec experienced the most impressive student mobilizations ever seen in its territory; not only because of the huge numbers of participants and its creativity, but because it directly questioned the neoliberal model. The students took the streets for several months to oppose drastic tuition hikes and reject Bill 78, a law approved by the National Quebec Assembly in May 2012 that severely restricted the right to freedom of assembly. The enactment was a throwback to the dictatorial conditions of the 1960s, since it restricted the right of society to express itself, associate and hold assemblies.

Quebec's government responded with violence, hundreds of students were arrested and jailed, dozens of others were injured in police repression and student leaders faced extremely high fines. Nevertheless, 150 thousand students maintained the strike for 6 months in schools and universities throughout Quebec. And, as government repression grew stronger, tens of thousands of other Quebecers took to the streets in support of the students in spontaneous demonstrations to demand the government's resignation.

The strike was not resolved by negotiations between students and government and university authorities. It was resolved through the ousting of the ruling Liberal party. In Quebec's elections to the National Assembly in October 2012, the social democratic and sovereigntist Parti Quebecois won, and as promised, repealed the controversial tuition increases.

### **Alternative Projects**

In countries where progressive governments hold power, people are moving from defensive actions to the creation and implementation of alternatives to redeem the role of public education in transforming a society. However, liberating pedagogical alternatives are also being explored by social and labour organizations throughout the Americas. Some are further along, while others are still reflecting on the type of education their country or region requires.



Unfortunately, such pedagogical initiatives face many challenges, since they threaten the hegemonic top-down model and thus, entrenched interests seek to discredit or, in extreme cases, destroy democratic pedagogy alternatives. An example of this is the persecution of the Autonomous University of Mexico City (UACM), an avant-guard model, since it is a public education institution that is free, with open access and alternative evaluation schemes. However, the labour rights and autonomy of the UACM workers have been attacked to the point where the 2012 elections to the University Council were tampered with by the President's Office, to alter voting results that favoured the left slate. As a result, the students of the UACM carried out a strike from August to November to demand respect for the democratic autonomy of the university and labour rights, and to demand an end to student persecution and criminalization.

In Peru, the Unified Education Workers of Peru (SUTEP) went on strike in September 2012 while the Peruvian Congress debated two education bills that affected teachers: one presented by SUTEP, and another presented by the administration of President Ollanta Humala. A key demand of the strike was for a new law to restore rights, such as freedom of association and professional autonomy, that had been stripped from teachers by previous governments.

### **Idea Network in 2012**

#### ***Teaching for Transformation: Intercontinental Gathering of Liberating Pedagogies and Resistance to Neoliberalism***

An important pedagogical encounter took place in Vancouver, Canada in April 2012 with the participation of organizations, teachers and students representing 18 different American countries; as well as union representatives from England and Africa.

The purpose of the event was to share experiences in the construction of transforming pedagogies in the Americas, and to understand the ways neoliberalism has penetrated conventional pedagogies in public schools and is used to reproduce neoliberal values in children.

#### **III Continental Encounter of Indigenous Educators**

Indigenous educators from teachers unions and community organizations from 10 countries of the Americas gathered in the sacred Mayan city of Tikal in Guatemala November 9-12 to share experiences and strategies to strengthen indigenous education in the continent. Mayan students of the Guatemalan MoveMaya movement also participated. The meeting centered on intercultural and bilingual education, an analysis of education policies for native peoples imposed by governments, and the sharing of alternative indigenous pedagogies in elementary and higher education.

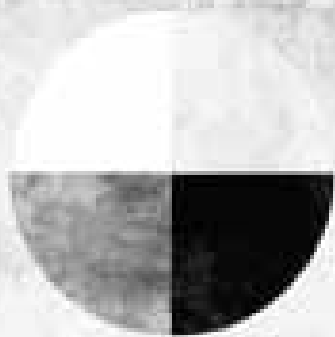
Throughout 2012, IDEA also published a special issue of *Intercambio* magazine with a focus on alternative pedagogies, and maintained ongoing support for, and coverage of, the various struggles to defend and transform public education in the Americas. On several occasions, IDEA mobilized its member organizations in solidarity with students and educators facing threats and violence for their defense of universal, free and democratic education.

For further information on the Teaching for Transformation Gathering, the Third Continental Encounter of Indigenous Educators, or other IDEA activities please visit

[www.idea-network.ca](http://www.idea-network.ca)

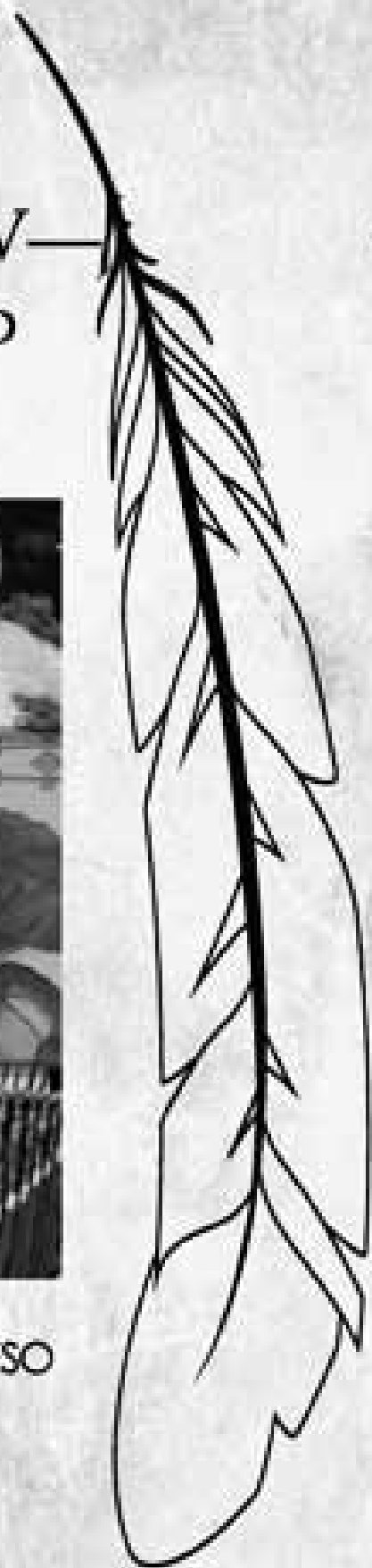
This article is a compilation of different materials and information provided by several student and teacher organizations throughout 2012, as well as from information obtained from newspapers and social networks by SEPA/IDEA network.





# COMMON THREADS V— VOLUNTEERS WANTED

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES IN EDUCATION





# Intercambio



Mayan Ceremony: Inauguration of the III Encounter of Indigenous Educators