

CEPROSI integrates local wellbeing in Peruvian schools



The Peruvian NGO Centre for the Promotion of Inter-cultural Wisdom (CEPROSI) has been working since 2001 on inter-cultural education in the Andean highlands of Cuzco. One of the focuses is on curriculum development in primary and secondary education to meet the wishes of indigenous parents. CEPROSI has developed a successful model of curriculum change based on the 'learn to live life' concept.

Together with schoolteachers and her colleagues at CEPROSI, Elena Pardo has developed a programme on inter-cultural education for primary schools in which a new teaching-learning process is central. The greatest challenge she faces is to establish an educational process that takes into account and integrates the wealth of indigenous wisdom local people possess. Pupils at primary level learn to read and write in two languages. In addition to usual school subjects, such as mathematics, they also learn how to weave and cultivate plants in the school garden (*chakra*). The aim is that the process of schooling does not alienate them from their own local context. However, at secondary level the challenges ahead are even bigger. Here the main obstacle is the highly 'Western' training that teachers in Peru undergo, which is entirely oriented towards 'development and progress' and does not take into account rural indigenous reality.

Six steps to get teachers more involved

In an earlier article (in EDM1) we highlighted the inter-cultural education process at primary school level. This article focuses on the participatory methodology developed to achieve teachers' integration at secondary education level. The methodology comprises six steps and is based on initial work in two secondary schools in Queramarca (Tinta district) and in Libertadores de América (Pitumarca district) both in Cuzco, Peru.

Become interested

The process of mainstreaming inter-cultural education from an endogenous development perspective is delicate. Forcing teachers to participate might

undermine the sustainability of the efforts. Instead it requires a process of *encariñar* or

Endogenous development opens the way for inter-cultural dialogue, with a curriculum that is seen as 'ours'

gentle persuasion, according to Elena Pardo. It is mostly about exposing teachers to the positive results of inter-cultural education. CEPROSI tries to inform teachers by sharing teacher and pupil experiences of inter-cultural education at different levels, and by inviting them to local festivals of music, seed planting or gastronomy. For example, a ceremony for Mother Earth held at a college allowed teachers to reencounter their own roots. These and other initiatives encourage teachers to become genuinely interested and committed, which is the vital first step toward developing a curriculum that includes the 'learn to live life' concept.

Raise awareness

Once teachers at a secondary school are committed to starting a process of curriculum change, CEPROSI conducts a series of workshops. All are directed towards raising teachers' consciousness of the different worldviews present in Peru, their effect on current society and nature, and the worldview that the current educational curriculum promotes. Problems addressed encompass the current environmental, social and spiritual crisis in the region and local answers to these crises. Personal life histories of teachers are also part of the process of

awareness raising. In these workshops individual questioning and introspection are

important, as are visits to sacred places (such as Inca archaeological sites). The outcome is the recognition and revalidation of local Andean knowledge and more respect for local wisdom and the Andean concept *vivir bien*, wellbeing.

Define the institutional changes

Having understood the local vision and started actions to reaffirm local cultural customs and practices, it becomes imperative to define the institutional changes needed. In the case of the two schools these were:

- changes in the curriculum development of a school garden
- participation of local authorities and wise people in the curriculum development process
- improvement of inter-cultural school democracy.

The first source for all these changes should be the local wisdom and experience of Andean nature.

Investigate locally available resources

In order to investigate locally available resources for each desired change, the teachers asked themselves some basic questions: What local wisdom, knowledge and practices can be harnessed to address a particular issue or desired change? What

wisdom, knowledge or practices need to be recovered, strengthened, implemented or claimed as a right?

Teachers and pupils develop a respectful and harmonious attitude towards nature and society

The answers were astonishing. It became clear that while a lot of knowledge and authority is eroding, the Andean concept of wellbeing offers powerful paths to solutions. Much local wisdom was still present, for example on agro-biodiversity, technical agricultural skills needed for the school garden, and local rituals. However, it was clear that local democracy was eroding, and there was no local wisdom that could be applied to the curriculum changes needed.

Integrate endogenous development

At this point CEPROSI brought in its experiences based on endogenous development (an external form of wisdom). In this respect, endogenous development can be seen as an interface between 'development' and the local Andean wellbeing concept. This knowledge had to be incorporated in such a way that it did not frustrate the inter-cultural dialogue. Thus the importance of a participatory process of curriculum development, in which parents, local authorities and pupils were involved, was stressed. The process of joint learning has resulted in the 'learn to live life' concept of education. Although endogenous development was brought from outside, it has clearly opened windows for inter-

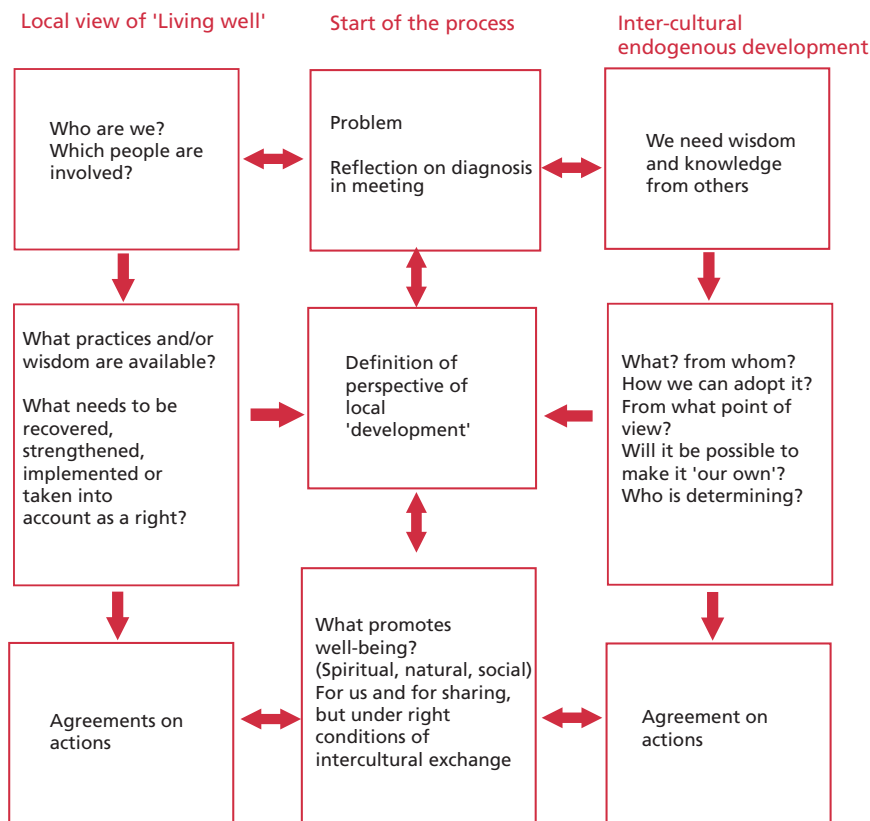
cultural dialogue. The final outcome has become a curriculum that is seen as 'ours'.

Actions to achieve required changes

After both local and external resources had been identified, the teachers and parents involved defined actions and responsibilities required to achieve the

envisaged changes. These took into account the prevailing paradigms: endogenous development and local wellbeing. CEPROSI - being the external expert - initiated an inter-cultural and bi-lingual curriculum based on ED, encouraging local authorities to bring in their wellbeing paradigm. By the same token the school gardens should allow for inter-generational learning.

Throughout the process of implementing this step, participatory holistic experiences were integrated, such as engaging in rituals based on the Andean worldview of space,





time, and people, in which the material, the social and the spiritual are interwoven.

Conclusions

The different changes at secondary schools are intended to create 'friendly' schools:

- based on education that respects the different cultural traditions, own language and rituals; as a result of this, the primary language that children learn at school is Quechua, and Spanish is taught as the second language;
- where the learning process takes into account the agro-ritual calendar and festivals of the community; the guardians of local wisdom are involved in the development of the school garden, art, dance and music as well as the gastronomy;
- in which parents are actively involved in the educational process;
- where teachers are friendly and respectful of the different ways of living of the communities.

CEPROSI and the teachers, pupils and

parents have come a long way, but the political context of Peru and the local conflicts remain an obstacle to the ideal becoming a reality.

Interacting worldviews in CEPROSI's education approach

Spiritual

Revalidating the sacred as a way to encourage intra-inter-cultural learning, incorporating rituals that embody respect for nature.

Social

Development of intra- and inter-cultural activities to manage agro-biodiversity in a participative way, fostering local norms, revalidating local authority and good governance.

Material

Conservation of agro-biodiversity through teaching-learning. Development of inter-cultural and bi-lingual curricula is a pedagogical innovation.



Elena Pardo Castillo,
Melquiadas Quintasi Amani, CEPROSI
ceprosi@speedy.com.pe