

The epistemological challenge of indigenous and school educational knowledge in intercultural education^{1*}

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Abstract

The object of this work is to understand and explain the epistemological tension between indigenous educational knowledge and the Eurocentric monoculturality of national education systems, from the complexity implied by school education in the contexts of the indigenous peoples of America. The justification for this style of education has been the colonisation of indigenous peoples and their integration into national states, denying the epistemes of their own educational knowledge in school education. In this scenario, we propose an epistemological critique of the construction of intercultural knowledge as proposed by states, based on epistemological pluralism. Specifically, we analyse the cases of the Milpas Educativas project in Mexico, the educational action called kimeltuwün in the Araucanía Region of Chile, and the education policy of the State of Roraima, Brazil. We consider the political context that regulates intercultural education in the Bilingual Intercultural Education experiments of national states and the recommendations of Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organisation. In conclusion, we propose a form of intercultural education that takes into account the epistemological tension between the indigenous and school epistemes. We also propose the need to construct a form of intercultural education adapted to the context of each indigenous people, in the framework of their interethnic relations with non-indigenous societies, through dialogue from the perspective of epistemological pluralism.

Keywords

Intercultural education – Cultural pluralism – Interethnic relations – Epistemology.

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Introduction

In the present article we offer an epistemological critique of the construction of intercultural knowledge in schools, based on the investigations of Latin American researchers who have studied the incorporation of indigenous epistemes into school curricula. The underlying concepts of this critique are the idea of indigenous education, which has been denied in schools, and the predominance of monocultural school education used as a means for the colonisation and integration of indigenous peoples by national states. In the analysis we consider three perspectives of the incorporation of indigenous educational knowledge into school education from the intercultural approaches of three cases: the Milpas Educativas project in Mexico (BERTELY, 2015; BERTELY; SARTORELLO; ARCOS, 2008); the educational project of the State of Roraima, Brazil (REPETTO, 2012, 2019; REPETTO; CARVALHO, 2015); and *kimeltuwün* or Mapuche educational action, in the Araucanía Region, Chile (QUILAQUEO; QUINTRIQUEO, 2017).

These three cases were chosen because they present different methods and contexts for addressing the subject of indigenous and school knowledge as incorporated into the contents of intercultural education. The case of the Milpas Educativas project provides knowledge about a plurilingual intercultural education model; the education project of the State of Roraima, Brazil, shows tensions between the State on the one hand and indigenous businessmen and communities on the other; and *kimeltuwün* educational action shows indigenous epistemes which differ from, and in some points run counter to, the pedagogy taught in schools.

These three cases are analysed to recognise the common ground between indigenous peoples in the implementation of intercultural education, and the epistemic characteristics of indigenous education. To do this we use the epistemological pluralism of Olivé (1999, 2004, 2009) as a basis for critical reflection on educational practices in indigenous contexts. The object of this work is to understand and explain the epistemological tension between indigenous educational knowledge and the Eurocentric monoculturality of national education systems (BERTELY, 2014; REPETTO, 2012; WALSH, 2010). The intercultural approach, according to Olivé (1999), enables us to recognise that absolutist or extreme relativist approaches are not appropriate for the construction of knowledge in the context of schools with pupils of indigenous origin. The object sought is the “[...] shifting outside one’s own centre, the discovery of the frame of reference of the other, negotiation and mediation” (COHEN-EMERIQUE, 2013, p. 2); in other words, promoting relations based on respect to counteract monoculturality and exclusion between different cultural groups (GROSFUGUEL, 2016; SANTOS, 2012).

We observe that the problem in the construction of intercultural education in schools is reflected in the asymmetrical relations between indigenous peoples and people of European descent (BRIONES, 2013; OLIVÉ, 1999, 2004), since for all their good intentions, interethnic relations make manifest the exclusion and discrimination which exists in social institutions. This problem has a particularly strong effect on the indigenous peoples of Mexico, Brazil and Chile, which are subject to conditions that have promoted the epistemicide of indigenous knowledge (RIVERA CUSICANQUI, 2010; SANTOS, 2017).

Schmelkes (2004) presents two existing situations: 1) the existence of asymmetries in the school system which result in reduced access to schools for indigenous populations; and 2) more seriously, indigenous children learn less in schools because the teaching is not contextualised to their cultures and they are not taught what they really need to know. Consequently, we consider that epistemological pluralism is a means of countering epistemicide, since it allows indigenous knowledge to be recognised and included in the construction of intercultural education in indigenous contexts (OLIVÉ, 1999, 2004, 2009).

The proposal to make epistemological pluralism a tool for intercultural education allows interaction and negotiation between different actors in society to achieve the formation of people who are conscious of differences and capable of working together to construct jointly a fairer, plural society (WALSH, 2010). It also accepts different perspectives which alter the definitions of social reality in the construction of knowledge (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 1991), since it implies incorporating the social context and the co-existence of people with different cultures and ways of life. We see how intercultural education allows the construction of knowledge through a combination of indigenous knowledge and what is considered universal knowledge, based on deduction and totality (ALCOREZA, 2014). Epistemological pluralism provides criteria of validity that can legitimise traditional knowledge in relation to scientific knowledge (OLIVÉ, 2009). This is observed, for example, in the Intercultural Inductive Method (IIM) proposed by Gasché (2013) which promotes intercultural education based on conceptualisations of interculturality which go beyond the relations of tolerance implied by multiculturalism.

This article takes as its frame of reference the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality. In the concept of interculturality, as proposed by Fornet-Betancourt (2002), the mere fact of defining it assumes a conflict, since the need for a universal definition is a feature of positivist Eurocentrism, the definitions of which tend to objectivise what they define, being articulated from a specific discipline. Thus multiculturalism in education stresses the recovery and preservation of each individual's culture, with equal opportunities in which no distinction is made on the basis of ethnic or cultural origin or economic situation (BANKS, 1995). To this definition, Sleeter (2018) adds the idea of a higher concept in addressing the subject than didactics and the curriculum, proposing that education is an arena of struggle in an unequal world.

Interculturality on the other hand, which deals with interactions and promoting the harmonious coexistence of peoples or groups originating from different cultures in a single space, proposes that social interactions should be lived without discrimination, with equality of rights and respecting diversity (ROMERO, 2003). In other words, it proposes going beyond mere cultural tolerance in order to seek a form of social coexistence that will enrich all the elements of society, in every sense, in pursuit of cultural transformation (FORNET-BETANCOURT, 2002). The challenge of this path is to reclaim those dominated cultures that have survived colonialism and the homogenisation imposed by the schools of nation states (GUILHERME; DIETZ, 2015). In other words, it seeks recognition of cultural diversity and the awakening of pluricultural awareness around the world in response to globalisation and other factors (SCHMELKES, 2004). Thanks to this recognition of cultural variety, scientific production in the area of intercultural education has grown

steadily since the 1990s, addressing different fields such as ethics, policy, epistemology and education (FERRÃO CANDAU, 2010).

To sum up, this essay focuses on the indigenous and school epistemes as they relate to the construction of intercultural knowledge in schools. It comprehends the struggles of indigenous social movements and their demands for recognition, rights and social transformation (WALSH, 2010), since these struggles have helped to further the construction of intercultural education in Latin America where relations of social and political domination have produced the asymmetries that still exist (BRIONES, 2013).

The text is organised as follows: 1) legislative evolution of intercultural education in Latin America, describing the political context which regulates intercultural education, and stressing Bilingual Intercultural Education and Convention N^o. 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1989); 2) description and evidence of social and political tensions experienced by the indigenous peoples of the State of Roraima, Brazil, as reported by Repetto (2012, 2019) and Repetto and Carvalho (2015); 3) description and explanation of the Milpas Educativas project, created by a group of researchers from Mexican universities to implement a teaching method based on the epistemes of Mexican indigenous peoples; 4) description and explanation of the episteme of the Mapuche peoples of south central Chile, based on their educational action called *kimeltuwün*; and 5) conclusion with a critical reflection on the construction of intercultural knowledge in Latin America.

Legislative evolution of intercultural education in Latin America

Legislation on intercultural education was introduced into the agendas of Latin American governments as a result of the claims raised by different indigenous peoples. These groups mobilised to obtain a school education which would take into account their own cultures and education, to allow them to coexist within a single national society. The construction of intercultural knowledge in schools has therefore not been free of tensions, due to “[...] cultural identification, right and difference, autonomy and nation” (WALSH, 2010, p. 5).

Studies and political recognition of intercultural education in Latin America started in the 1980s. Education policy in Mexico played a pioneering role, with proposals for Bilingual Intercultural Education (BIE) (WALSH, 2010). According to López and Küper, implementation of BIE improves the “[...] cognitive and affective development of pupils, which to date has been the object of indigenous peoples” (1999, p. 72). However, BIE has been criticised as an activity organised from above, by the State, without the participation of the indigenous peoples (WILLIAMSON, 2004).

Thus the important next stage in the construction of an intercultural education is related with the signature of ILO Convention No. 169. This international legal instrument establishes the principles and obligations of national states with respect to indigenous peoples (COURTIS, 2009). It was ratified in most Latin American countries immediately after it had been signed at the Convention held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1989. Mexico ratified it in 1990 and Brazil in 2002 (ASSIES, 2007); Chile on the other hand, abstained, and did not ratify this Convention until 2007 (DONOSO, 2008).

Convention 169 establishes rights of indigenous peoples, such as deciding their development priorities, conserving their customs and institutions, using natural resources available in their territories, participating in the policies which affect them directly and reaffirming their rights in culture, language and education (DONOSO, 2008). In the field of education, the Convention stresses, among other things: equal rights; contextualisation to include the history, knowledge and technical skills of indigenous peoples; and participation in the creation of study programmes. Nevertheless, this Convention manifests the differences between indigenous and western individuals, showing that they do not belong to the same society, since “[...] it is clear that the universe of indigenous life is considered to differ from the universe of national or western society, and that the special rights of the Convention are consequences of this difference” (GASCHÉ 2008, p. 12).

Thus the legislative environment is important for the construction of an intercultural education. Nevertheless, the institutions responsible for creating these agreements, for applying them in countries and for ensuring that they are respected, are the same institutions responsible for the perpetuation of hegemonic domination over indigenous peoples; thus they delegitimise the indigenous peoples’ educational aspirations for contextualised teaching and for recognition of the epistemes that they have used for centuries in the education of their children.

Intercultural education project in Roraima

The State of Roraima, in northern Brazil, is home to various indigenous peoples classified into the following language families: 1) of the *Karibe* language group we find the *Makuxi*, *Taurepang*, *Ingarikó*, *Yekuana*, *Patamona*, *Sapará*, *WaiWai* and *Waimiri-Atroari* peoples; 2) of the *Aruak* language group the *Wapixama*; and 3) of the *Yanomami* language group the homonymous people (MANDULÃO *et al.*, 2012; REPETTO, 2012).

The indigenous peoples of Roraima present a complication with respect to their language as “[...] not even they learnt to speak the indigenous languages, because their parents’ and grandparents’ generations deliberately did not teach them, as a strategy of invisibilisation in the face of the prejudice and cultural exclusion that they encountered in school and in the regional context” (REPETTO, 2019, p. 81). These protective practices against discrimination used by the parents and grandparents have contributed to the cultural homogenisation of the children to facilitate their integration into Brazilian society.

From the legislative angle, these peoples are characterised by their maintenance of different educational proposals promoted in the regulatory framework of Brazil’s indigenous education policy (REPETTO, 2012). In this policy, the State’s proposal for intercultural education has been annexed to their struggles to defend their territories from usurpation by Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English settlers (SANTILLI, 1994). For these peoples, the State maintains a system of schools for indigenous children provided in the framework of education policies. These schools are designed to deliver a form of education that will promote the integration of indigenous peoples into Brazilian society, through the formation of “[...] workers committed to progress and the country, strengthening the use of national symbols, territory, religion and language (Portuguese)” (REPETTO, 2012, p. 133). Indigenous educational knowledge and language are excluded from the school curriculum.

In the area of school education, indigenous struggles have been strengthened by the creation of the Indigenous Education Nucleus (Núcleo de Educação Indígena – NEI), founded to administer and supervise the activities carried on in schools located in indigenous communities (REPETTO, 2002). The indigenous communities express their dissatisfaction with the education given to their children, with the Brazilian education system and with the performance of the non-indigenous teachers, who use violent punishments in class and overvalue the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture. There is also a marked disdain for indigenous culture and language, and teaching is obviously based on cultural acceptance of the dominant society allied to socio-political submission (REPETTO, 2012). Meanwhile the communities demand a form of education that provides knowledge useful for the contexts of their lives.

To further the demands of the communities, a group of researchers and educators have created an administrative and academic unit, the *Insikiran Institute of Indigenous Higher Education*, in the Federal University of Roraima. This institute offers an Intercultural Teachers Training Course, a bachelors' degree in Indigenous Territorial Management and a degree in Indigenous Collective Health Management. These university courses have been designed and created to meet the demands of the indigenous peoples of Roraima (INSTITUTO..., 2016). It should also be noted that a group of researchers and teachers of the Insikiran Institute work in research and teaching using the Intercultural Inductive Method (GASCHÉ, 2008, 2010).

Legislative policy (the Law of Guidelines and Bases for Brazilian Education) establishes teaching of Brazilian history constructed on epistemological plurality, taking into account indigenous, Afro-descendent and European points of view (REPETTO, 2002); in other words, indigenous education in both Portuguese and their own languages. This is a differentiated form of education, designed for indigenous peoples, which respects and promotes their cultures, contextualising the contents and ensuring the participation of members of the communities through teaching practices from a bilingual intercultural perspective (BRASIL, 1996). Specifically, the National Reference Curriculum for Indigenous Schools (Referencial Curricular Nacional para as Escolas Indígenas – RCNEI) responds to the “[...] object of defending a specific, differentiated education” (REPETTO, 2019, p. 83). The principal action of the RCNEI is to provide subsidies and guidance to enable schools to draw up school education programmes for indigenous pupils, contextualised to the reality of their communities, teacher-training and the creation of teaching material (LACERDA; SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2017).

Despite the good intentions of the Law, however, it is not respected in practice, due to the lack of teaching materials and of economic resources to comply with its requirements. Repetto argues that “[...] the indigenous school education modality can be understood as a subsystem of the national education system; it is affected by these other modalities, and lacks clear educational objectives” (2012, p. 139).

In this context, within the indigenous communities we find two clear postures towards intercultural education related with schools. According to Repetto (2012), one group backs the land-owning entrepreneurs in indigenous territories, echoing their discourse on the development of the population, and on improving the quality of

education to bring it up to the level of the cities; yet for these landowners, the culture, the episteme and the language of the indigenous peoples has no value. This way of thinking about intercultural education represents the epistemicide of indigenous knowledge and perspectives (SANTOS, 2017). The other posture is that of the indigenous peoples who defend their customs and their ways of life and of learning. Their aspiration is to get rid of the landowners, to defend their territories, through changes which respect their own ways and allow the construction of high quality, contextualised education, arguing against those who claim that city education is better.

With respect to the difficulties presented by the construction of knowledge from the intercultural education promoted by regulatory politics in Roraima, we share the general view proposed by authors like Santos (2012, 2017); Tubino (2004, 2011) and Walsh (2010). Briefly, these views express the difficulties of proposing an intercultural education that is only for indigenous children, since it perpetuates colonisation, silences epistemological discussion, devalues indigenous culture and values western elements exclusively over indigenous. This raises the urgent challenge to construct intercultural knowledge based on respect and epistemological pluralism (OLIVÉ, 1999, 2004, 2009).

Milpas Educativas project in Mexico

The Milpas Educativas project is being implemented in Mexico, in the States of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Puebla and Yucatán (NIGH; BERTELY, 2018). The stated object of this project is the construction of a contextualised, plurilingual, intercultural educational model, which will support the cultural practices of indigenous communities (BERTELY; SARTORELLO; ARCOS, 2008). The theoretical basis is the intercultural inductive method (IIM) (GASCHÉ, 2008), defined as a participative method which comprises reflexive subjectivity, participative, social cultural construction, and contextualised learning. It also includes the information contributed by the pupil from his/her experience of life, with a generic structure which starts with nature, natural skills or transformation, and social objectives (GASCHÉ, 2010). The Milpas Educativas project arose from the need to respond to indigenous groups by providing an education contextualised to their ways of life, which would promote “living well” and an educational space that recognised their perspectives of a close relationship between society and nature (SARTORELLO; AVILA, 2012).

In the context of the last point, the bilingual intercultural education project is closely related with territorial education (BERTELY, 2014): actions of the Milpas Educativas project can be carried out in the school context or in the pupils’ homes, in either case to generate learning which will be useful for “living well” (BERTELY, 2014; NIGH; BERTELY, 2018).

From the premise of “living well”, the social and epistemic progress presented by this project is related with consideration of indigenous and western knowledge by dialogue, to improve the construction of knowledge and to strengthen intercultural education by critical analysis of social reality and epistemic plurality (SARTORELLO, 2016).

In short, Milpas Educativas is an intercultural education project with IIM as its theoretical-methodological basis (GASCHÉ, 2013). IIM has helped to promote a solution for the problem of contextualising the education of indigenous children in the States of

Chiapas, Oaxaca, Puebla and Yucatán (NIGH; BERTELY, 2018). Starting from the premise that the purpose of education is to enable the subject to “live well”, as proposed by Sartorello and Avila (2012), the main objects can be summarised as the production of knowledge, valuing the territory in indigenous terms, education for the autonomy of indigenous peoples, and construction of an education that promotes “living well” and prevents misuse of the land (BERTELY; GASCHÉ; PODESTÁ, 2004). It must be stressed that this project is not a policy of the Mexican states where it is implemented; it is an initiative by researchers committed to the construction of an intercultural education funded by private development agencies. Their contribution is only an initial step on this path, an academic contribution to show that the construction of knowledge in an intercultural school with an indigenous perspective is possible.

***Kimeltuwün* educational action**

Kimeltuwün educational action is a theoretical proposal by researchers into Mapuche educational knowledge developed in the Araucanía Region, Chile. *Kimeltuwün* also includes an open methodological proposal in Mapuche family education, which allows the social construction of educational knowledge by parents (QUILAQUEO; QUINTRIQUEO, 2017). This educational action shows that it is possible to carry out home education through the interaction of an adult with children or adolescents, with the object of teaching-learning contents related with the family, the territory, and respect for people and the traditional authorities (QUILAQUEO; SARTORELLO, 2018).

Kimeltuwün is defined on the basis of six methodological stages: 1) *gübam* represents the attitudinal discourse through which learners value and strengthen family and cultural knowledge; 2) *güxam* is conversation in the family environment by which knowledge and wisdom are socialised; 3) *kimkimtun*, relates to training by the method of “learning by doing”; 4) *güneytun* consists in learning by observing nature and the ceremonies held in the community; 5) *günezuam* means learning to identify contents, values and symbolisms to help children to understand conceptual, procedural and attitudinal contents; 6) *pepilün* is the application of knowledge in relations with society and nature. These stages of educational action are directly related with the Mapuche way of seeing the world, characterised by close connection with nature, to which a high value is attached; thus the principal contents are nature, the person, the family, the community, spirituality and territory (QUILAQUEO; QUINTRIQUEO, 2017).

Nevertheless, Mapuche educational action – *kimeltuwün* – and the Mapuche episteme have been absent from the Chilean school environment, since the regulatory school environment promotes universality, Eurocentric monoculturality and an exclusively western episteme which is treated as superior to the Mapuche episteme. The constant devaluation of the episteme of Mapuche educational knowledge in most interethnic relations has resulted in the racism present since the first colonial invasions, passing through the war known as the *Pacification of La Araucanía* and continuing down to the present (RADOVICH; BALAZOTE, 2009).

In the legislative field, the Indigenous Law (Law no. 19.253, CHILE, 1993) proposes a series of initiatives including: preservation of the language wherever an indigenous population is present in a school or territory; and the creation of a bilingual intercultural education system with the object of preparing indigenous people for development in their own community as well as in society as a whole. These proposals are not honoured in reality, however, since “[...] the endogenous knowledge of the Mapuche is not valued in Chile’s educational reform [...] with the result that Chilean society tends to remain fixed in the idea of a unicultural world” (ROTHER, 2017, p. 81).

We also see the implementation by the State of the Bilingual Intercultural Education Programme (PEIB) in the Araucanía Region. This programme has attracted both plaudits and criticism. One of its recognised benefits has been to draw attention to indigenous affairs in Chile, contributing to understanding in society of the diversity that exists and the extent of the issue of interculturality in the public system (WILLIAMSON, 2012). The criticisms on the other hand point to that fact that the PEIB is regarded as a feature of special education, and is not contemplated in the regular teaching space of the school system (WILLIAMSON, 2012); it does not take into account the racism, discrimination and low social consideration to which Chile’s indigenous peoples are subjected, since it is treated as differentiated education but in practice the pupils must pass the standardised examinations. This creates a risk of making it more difficult for indigenous pupils to obtain good academic results, and of increasing their frustration, among other problems (RIEDEMANN, 2008).

Similarities and differences between the three cases with epistemic tensions

The natures and bases proposed in the studies of the three cases analysed present similarities and differences. In the case of the Mapuche episteme, expressed in the educational action called *kimeltuwün*, the study describes, characterises, comprehends and explains how people in the Mapuche context have been teaching-learning in their communities for hundreds of years, relying on their own episteme and educational tradition. The Milpas Educativas project, on the other hand, is a didactic project to implement an educational method in the indigenous context. In this case, a series of actions were proposed on the basis of intercultural studies prior to the implementation of the project, with the object of proposing and executing education for indigenous pupils using the intercultural inductive method.

The investigations of Repetto and Carvalho (2015) differ from the Milpas Educativas project and the educational action of *kimeltuwün* in that they focus principally on the legislative area of the education offered by the State, with a critical analysis of the indigenous communities where the educational experience of the indigenous peoples has been investigated. The studies discussed in this article show evidence of the political episteme in Latin America, which is founded on western principles; it disdains the indigenous view and implements the monoculturalising western episteme (WALSH, 2010). This is reflected, for example, in the epistemic difficulties, conflicts and tensions of the

indigenous communities, in addition to their tensions with the Brazilian regulatory political system and with the landowners.

In general, it may be seen that education in intercultural contexts in Latin America is functionalist (ADAMS; KEE; LIN, 2001), with emphasis on the technical factor in “[...] cost-benefit, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness analyses, goals-based management, and social indicators” (ESPINOSA, 2009). The functionalist political episteme takes precedence over educational policies with a critical approach, which postulate that political legislation should be consistent with the identification and correction of repression, exploitation and sources of domination – assuming a role in the claims raised by indigenous peoples, oppressed and/or discriminated groups, women or any other category that suffers constant subjugation (PRUNTY, 1985).

Unlike the western educational episteme, the educational epistemes of indigenous peoples present common points which arise from the political struggles in each context, dating back to the European colonisation of America (RADOVICH; BALAZOTE, 2009; RAMOS, 1992; SANTILLI, 1994). This historical process has led to the epistemicide of indigenous knowledge (RIVERA, 2010; SANTOS, 2012, 2017); consequently, the construction of education with an intercultural approach founded on recognition, dialogue and negotiation has been set back by centuries (COHEN-EMERIQUE, 2013).

The three research proposals reviewed share the thinking of interculturality from a relationship of colonising domination versus indigenous submission (GASCHÉ, 2008; RIVERA CUSICANQUI, 2010). This challenge led the Milpas Educativas project to value nature, and to adopt it as the learning laboratory. The same occurs in the case of the Mapuche, with *kimkimtun* or learning by doing, *güneytun* learning by observing and *pepilün* application of knowledge in nature.

Turning to the difficulties of intercultural education in the three cases analysed, we share the view expressed generally in the literature reviewed in this essay (REPETTO, 2012; RIVERA CUSICANQUI, 2010; SANTOS, 2012, 2017; TUBINO, 2004, 2011; WALSH, 2010), since we see that the authors present alternatives for establishing an intercultural education contextualised to the colonisation history of each country, and for implementing a plurilingual intercultural education system. We observe that the functionalist view of policies in most Latin American countries perpetuates colonisation, silences epistemological discussion, disdains indigenous culture and exaggerates the value attached to western culture, hindering progress towards intercultural education in schools based on respect and epistemological pluralism (OLIVÉ, 1999, 2004, 2009).

Final reflections

The proposals and reflections of this article can be homologued with the real experience of pupils in schools located in all indigenous contexts, particularly in intercultural education experiments directed exclusively towards Latin American indigenous peoples. Examples can be found in Peru (ESPINOSA, 2014) and Ecuador (SCHRODER, 2006), where scarce action is observed among teachers in terms of raised awareness of the cultural plurality of their classrooms (SINGH, 1988); consequently they underestimate indigenous

epistemes in the construction of knowledge in schools. Thus the construction of education from a single episteme has repercussions for education at both the systemic-structural and the micro level. It is observed, for example, in the difficulties experienced by indigenous pupils in learning mathematics, due to the rejection of their epistemes (GONZALEZ, 2018).

From the investigations analysed, we propose that the construction of knowledge should take indigenous epistemes into account, breaking the pattern of disdain of the knowledge of the dominated culture and using mediation by horizontal dialogues that overcome the asymmetries of power: intercultural dialogues that recognise the history – of epistemicide through colonisation – that nation states continue to provoke (SANTOS, 2017). We agree with the words of Fonet-Betancourt (1994) that “[...] the necessity for intercultural dialogue in Latin America is connected with the history of the conquest and the colonisation of the sub-continent” (FORNET-BETANCOURT, 1994, p. 5).

The need for progress in the construction of intercultural knowledge in schools is more pressing every day. It is therefore fundamental to analyse critically the studies carried out in Latin America, in order to make progress in the construction of a participative intercultural education, in which no episteme is excluded, equal value is attached to all, and dialogue is fomented between people who live in the same context. In this way a form of education can be constructed with an intercultural approach in which each learns from the other, without raising any particular knowledge above the others.

We have found that, in general, proposals for intercultural education are tools for the cultural recognition of indigenous children; however, indigenous groups say that social segregation may result as the product is one-sided, with the non-indigenous population not receiving an intercultural education. For this reason we propose intercultural education for all, not just for indigenous pupils, since segregation in education helps to perpetuate asymmetrical relations. Thus we wonder, from the perspective of epistemological pluralism: Is creating an intercultural education for indigenous pupils is the best option? Or should we seek to create an intercultural education for all children, be they indigenous, immigrant or of mixed blood, and of rural or urban origin? Would it be better for education to be adapted according to the context, territory, society and culture, and not solely in compliance with a functionalist political decision by the State?

In conclusion, empirical and theoretical evidence shows that the construction of knowledge based on a dialogue of types of educational knowledge enriches nations. We propose that the dialogue of types of educational knowledge should be based on the construction of knowledge produced both in schools and in the families of indigenous peoples. In other words, sustained on epistemological plurality, so that what and how pupils learn is not decided exclusively by the State, since people in an indigenous context are familiar with both western education and their own teaching-learning system.

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