

Chapter 25

Intercultural Education with Indigenous Peoples and the Potential of Digital Technologies to make it Happen

Evaristo Ovide
University of Salamanca, Spain

ABSTRACT

Internet and the technologies linked to it (ICTs) have greatly expanded the linguistic and cultural domains of the most widely spoken languages in our global world. At the same time, endangered languages that were already excluded from the traditional media have an even smaller presence in this larger world. However, the Web also offers a great opportunity for these languages to have a voice and a presence, as it would have not been possible before, though it is normally rather difficult for numerous reasons. This chapter seeks to create a theoretical and practical framework consisting of five steps: Documentation, Dissemination, Community, Education, and Monetization. Each of these steps considers traditional methods and tries to improve their efficiency and effectiveness by using ICTs in an interdisciplinary and holistic approach.

INTRODUCTION

The reasons that explain situations where different cultures live in the same place can be very complex and it is not the aim of this work to establish a clarifying classification between them. However,

for the sake of a better understanding of the context that will be described in this chapter, we will make a distinction between two broad situations where different cultures may coexist.

Sometimes, the same space is shared between different cultures as a result of migratory movements. A culture moves to another city/region/country that they consider better than their home

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4979-8.ch025

place for whatever circumstances (economic, political, social or other reasons). This is a situation typically found in developed countries, such as the USA and Canada receiving immigrants from other less-developed countries in America or such as Western European countries receiving immigrants from African or Eastern European countries.

The other scenario, which is the context for this chapter, took place further back in time, sometimes centuries ago, although cultural conflict is still evident today. This scenario is the result of a foreign culture invading and conquering the local one and it presents elements of consideration (from a historical, cultural, legal, political, social, and economic point of view) that differ from those arising from the previous scenario mentioned. Indigenous/original peoples in America would be clear examples of those cultures conquered by Europeans (Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, etc.).

This second case implied the imposition of a new political, economic, legal, and social system ruled by a language that was alien to the locals, who, from that moment on, would be deprived of lands, power, and authority. As the “civilization bearers” became a bit more civilized, what was acceptable five centuries ago it is no longer acceptable today by international standards. Thus, the situation nowadays reflects the tension between many years of the dominant culture ignoring the rights of the natives, taking their land and exploiting their resources and the recent moral obligation (which becomes legal) of respecting their rights and taking into consideration their claims. Education has played a fundamental role in repressing these indigenous cultures and it might also play a very important role in changing their future.

In this work, when we refer to indigenous peoples and their situation, we will be talking, in general, of indigenous peoples in America, and more precisely, those in Argentina, which is the area where the ideas shown in the project described at the end of this chapter are currently being

implemented, in collaboration with the *Centro de Investigación y Formación para la Modalidad Aborigen (CIFMA)* in the province of Chaco.

IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING INDIGENOUS CULTURES

A very extended opinion among non-academic population is that indigenous peoples, their language, and their knowledge have no value nowadays. We are referring to non-academic population in the same place where indigenous peoples live, as outside that area it is common that they are kept invisible by the media, even local media. With immigrant cultures from other countries, the question of whether governments should make an effort to help them keep their language, traditions, etc. is not so fundamental (though as tax payers they should also be taken into account in the society where they live) because that culture will continue intact in their home places as the dominant one. However, with indigenous peoples, this question is of paramount importance, as they do not have a land of their own where they are the dominant culture. They are not immigrants bringing a sample of a culture; they are the last representatives of the ancestral owners of the land. Therefore, if measures are not taken to protect their way of living, the result can be the total disappearance of civilizations with thousands of years of history and knowledge.

Languages are probably the most important sign of identity of a culture, as it shows more clearly than anything else the unique perception of the world of its speakers. The UNESCO Ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages states that, “the extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural, historical, and ecological knowledge. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2). Languages codify reality in a unique way, closely linked to the place where they are spoken. A foreign language,

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