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Interculturalism in higher education: experience in preschool education in La Araucanía, Chile

Soledad Morales-Saavedra / smorales@uct.cl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8216-118X>

Segundo Quintriqueo-Millán / squintri@uct.cl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7228-4095>

Pilar Andrea Uribe-Sepúlveda / pilar.uribe@uautonoma.cl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9166-9081>

Katerin Arias-Ortega / ariaskaterin@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8099-0670>

Universidad Católica de Temuco, Chile

Abstract: The objective of the article is to present results of the experience developed in the processes of initial teacher training. The investigation maintains that in the indigenous Mapuche families and communities present in Chile, there is knowledge associated with socio-cultural practices, which would allow supporting a Nursery Education, from an intercultural educational approach, with an epistemic basis in the social memory of parents and sages. The main results reveal key themes in the training, regarding knowledge for intercultural education for children under six years, strengthening communication and work with family and community.

Key words: intercultural, intercultural educational approach, initial teacher training, education and childhood, Mapuche educational knowledge.

Resumen: El objetivo del artículo es presentar resultados de la experiencia desarrollada en los procesos de formación inicial docente. La investigación sostiene como supuesto que en las familias y comunidades indígenas mapuches presentes en Chile existen conocimientos asociados a prácticas socioculturales, que permitirían sustentar una Educación Parvularia, desde un enfoque educativo intercultural, con base epistémica en la memoria social de padres y sabios. Los principales resultados develan temas claves en la formación, respecto a los saberes para una educación intercultural para niños menores de seis años, fortaleciendo la comunicación y trabajo con la familia y la comunidad.

Palabras clave: interculturalidad, enfoque educativo intercultural, formación inicial docente, educación e infancia, conocimientos educativos mapuches.

Introduction¹

The Nursery Education studies of the Catholic University of Temuco in Chile, offers two majors: Intercultural Education and, Pedagogy and connection between family and community. The former focused on the construction of a dialogue between indigenous and Western knowledge and lore. The latter, in the participation of family during the educational process, the recognition of family by the school as a social institution and the valuing of different lifestyles, which are the essential basis to create ideal conditions for children's development and learning.²

The first major is based on the statement of the United Nations (2008: 3) regarding indigenous people's rights, which holds "the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child." In the international context, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), according with the International Labor Organization (OIT, 1989) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Naciones Unidas, 2008), demand respect and being guaranteed cultural diversity, which in the educative field is of great importance.

The inclusion of the intercultural approach is supported by the results of researches online on education and interculturalism –projects: no. 11075083, 2007-2009, no. 1110489, 2011-2013 and no. 1140490, 2014-2017, financed by Fondecyt–. Such projects address the study of Mapuche knowledge as a foundation for elaborating intercultural educative content. In the framework of all these researches several categories of educative contents have been confirmed such as identity, patterns of socialization, educative values, knowledge about family, territory and nature, all framed in the same perspective of personal rights.

However, historically speaking, educative teaching of indigenous children is based on Western contents and purposes, which are opposed to the indigenous knowledge (Quintriqueo, 2010). Thus, while Western knowledge regards the categories of discipline considered in the areas of

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2 In Chile, the education of children younger than six years is called Nursery Education. The person in charge is called teacher of infants (which is the same to preschool teacher)

learning of the syllabus, the indigenous knowledge regards the knowledge represented in the individual, familial, social and community memory (Quintriqueo, 2010). According to Quintriqueo, it is in the family context where children learn a set of knowledge regarding the natural, social and cultural environment, which enables them to develop themselves appropriately in the community.

The complex and modern context presented to the indigenous population in schools accounts for their social-cognitive and identity conflict, which makes difficult their capacity to develop themselves, both in the community and in the national society. Accordingly, “the crisis of identity comes from biographical conflicts linked to social and historical processes” (Quintriqueo, 2010: 13), and children, who are enrolled in schools acquire a set of educative contents and purposes, teaching and learning objectives based on Western educative knowledge.

According to this, Carbonell’s research (2001) underscores that many indigenous children in their first contact with school suffer a threefold trauma: psychological, linguistic and cultural. Concerning the psychological one, they face stereotypes of inferiority due to the disdain teachers show towards their mother tongue, habits and different values, creating fear and insecurity in them (Carbonell, 2001). In the linguistic aspect, by the time the child is enrolled in the school s/he has already structured his or her mother tongue, which is generally rejected along with his or her culture, and so longs for deliverance from stigmatization (Carbonell, 2001). In the cultural area, being culture a central aspect for socialization, when it is rejected in school provokes a progressive loss of his or her socio-cultural identity (Carbonell, 2001). All three factors are vitally important for the development of an intercultural education in the Mapuche context.

So, what sets in motion this intercultural experience in the training of teachers of infants is the lack of knowledge regarding the Mapuche people in the current programs of initial teacher training. Such absence manifests itself in ignoring indigenous children which results in inequality of the education of children under six years. Such issue is associated with a historical initial teacher training, based on a disciplinary, homogenizing and monocultural curriculum (Quintriqueo, 2010). Thus, the consequences of initial teacher training and Nursery Education are the homogenization of educative work, formal instruction and the loss of the essential purposes of Nursery Education (Peralta, 2012).

Through these experiences we aimed to disclose the educative knowledge desirable to be included in the training of teacher of infants which should

take into account the intercultural approach. Its integration in undergraduate education is endorsed in the new programs of teacher of infants, where it is established the need to teach students how to respect others, based on the equality of all people's rights, valuing their socio-cultural diversity (Mineduc, 2012).

Following these ideas, the proposal of a major on interculturalism in the training of students of Nursery Education will incorporate with the support of sages and parents the educative indigenous knowledge, which is desirable to be considered in the undergraduate Nursery Education. This will allow the development of professional competences in the teacher of infants, who works in intercultural environments, so as to empower and strengthen during their training the capacity to know, comprehend, respect and value social and cultural differences. Finally, our objective is to divulge the results of an experience in initial teacher training in Nursery Education, which is based on an intercultural educative approach and aims to strengthen the processes of teaching through the strengthening of communication and work with families and community.

Educative intercultural approach

The educative intercultural approach aims to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in relation to the Western-indigenous knowledge and vice versa, as a mutual learning to create a universality of knowledge, which is the outcome of intercultural dialogue (Quintriqueo *et al.*, 2014). The purpose of this dialogue is to minimize the personal cultural categories and the symbolic universe in order to incorporate to the individual and social development the contribution of other cultures (Ferrão, 2010; Quintriqueo, 2010; Abdallah-Preteuille, 2011).

The education which values and respects differences is promoted through this approach considering it as an opportunity to enrich the processes of teaching-learning. Such process allows us to build more understanding and human systems of relationships capable to recognize differences, advantages and disadvantages, shaping an alternative paradigm of critical interculturalism (Tubino, 2005b and 2011; Viaña *et al.*, 2010). In addition, such approach makes possible the study and comprehension of people who belong to different social and cultural circles, which in some way minimizes knowledge and forces to build a multipolar knowledge so as to overcome discrimination and racism (Ouellet, 2002; Schmelkes, 2009 and 2012; Quintriqueo, 2010; Essomba, 2012).

In the context of indigenous communities, education based on an intercultural approach means going further the limits of the neoliberal, modern and commercialized State, that is, leading vocational training towards an epistemic, political, social, cultural, economical and territorial autonomy from the epistemological pluralism, where a more just, democratic and intercultural citizenry is required (Ouellet, 2002; Akkari, 2009; Tubino, 2011; Quintriqueo *et al.*, 2014). In this way, education based on this approach becomes an alternative which enables to recognize diversity of lore and knowledge converging at school.

Thus, sociocultural and natural contexts constitute the starting point as well as the relevant educative areas for learning the individual cultural heritage in students (Freire, 2002; Akkari, 2009; Tubino, 2014; Quintriqueo *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, the intercultural educative approach is built on a theoretical, practical and methodological approximation which allows studying and understanding the ways in which people of different cultures and diverse societies are in contact. During this process certain ways of conceiving the world such as the way of thinking, speaking, listening, solving problems and responding to certain situations, having self-appreciation and valuing others as individuals and as a social group constitute main aspects (Tubino and Ardito, 1996).

It is an approach whose foundation is the episteme of cultures and societies from a particular socio-historical and territorial context in two dimensions: 1) a well-balanced relationship in which a dialogue of power between the sociocultural groups and communities is created for making decisions and for mutual recognition, and 2) recognition of corresponding epistemic frameworks of educative knowledge. The latter is the basis to develop an intercultural education by valuing social and cultural differences as a rich contribution for the training of future citizens, who progressively become more intercultural.

Experience

The experience takes place in the Temuco Catholic University, which has been characterized by being grounded in a curriculum based on the Eurocentric monoculturalism, in which the competences to work in indigenous and intercultural contexts are not considered in the graduate profile. Since 2011 the university chose to provide undergraduates the opportunity to specialize with the major in Intercultural Education so as to satisfy the characteristics of students and the needs of the environment,

During these 5 years, 57 students have taken the major which offers these subjects: 1) Educative programs and experiences in childhood and interculturalism, 2) Values and knowledge in intercultural education, 3) Knowing others through dialogue, and 4) Development of competences in intercultural contexts. Additionally, includes two subjects of pedagogical internship: a) Pedagogy workshop V, which focuses on the educative programs and experiences during childhood and in interculturalism as well as values and knowledge in intercultural education; and b) Pedagogy workshop VI, which focuses on the development of intercultural competences and knowing others through dialogue.

Such internship takes place in classrooms with Mapuche and non-Mapuche children, in urban as well as in rural environments. Thus, our purpose with this major is to train teachers who favor the dialogue between indigenous and Western educative knowledge, enabling thus children to maintain and strengthen their own culture. In addition, we expect to develop in the students of the major, as education agents, competences which enable them to link school with family and community.

The general objective is to strengthen interculturalism in the initial teacher training. Among the specific objectives there are: strengthening the attention and the quality of education in contexts of ethnic and cultural diversity through understanding and enhancing its pedagogical conceptions and practices regarding possibilities and limitations so as to incorporate Mapuche educative contents to the curriculum from an intercultural educative approach; making future graduates aware to value and respect different cultures promoting esteem, respect and healthy coexistence; strengthening the protection of all children's rights, particularly, of those who are in an inequality situation due to their ethnic group; adding educative Mapuche contents in order to contextualize teaching in an intercultural environment; design, application and evaluation of an educative intercultural project to improve interculturalism in children's classrooms, asking families and communities to participate; and achieve equity and equality between the indigenous and non-indigenous population promoting protection for children's rights.

Results of the process

The results of the educative experience are classified in three categories: a) Mapuche educative knowledge and lore, b) Development of educative competences and c) Strengths and weaknesses during the educative process.

a) Mapuche educative knowledge and lore

This category is created from the interactions of undergraduates with *kimches* (Mapuche sages), parents and families of Mapuche communities, during their internship in schools. As this process took place, the students conducted interviews concerning the educative Mapuche knowledge for the educative training of children. All the results made possible to identify four main categories of educative knowledge: 1) Respect of family, 2) The person as a whole, 3) Rules for coexistence and 4) Relationship with nature

Concerning *Respect of family*, it has been identified that children begin to socialize from early childhood by interacting as they learn and internalize “socio-cultural elements of their environment, which they incorporate into their personality, influenced by experiences and meaningful social agents, adapting themselves to the society in which they live” (Essomba, 2014: 37).

Regarding this category in the interviews stands out the *gülam* (counsel), as a teaching method of contents, procedures and attitudes “to teach children and teenagers values, rules and beliefs of the family and community” (Carihuentro, 2007: 7). This educative method aims to teach the *yamuwün*, which refers to mutual respect among individuals. The *yamuwün* is a macro category which involves respect originated in a superior being (*günechen*), represents a spiritual degree towards spiritual and supernatural forces and also respect towards people who play a role in the community, for instance, the *machi*, who is considered the one who practices a socio-religious work, and possess and transmits knowledge about medicine, health and the spiritual forces of the vertical and horizontal spaces of the Mapuche world. (Quintriqueo *et al.*, 2016: 161).

From this perspective, family is a group in charge of giving the child a sense of belonging, which enables him or her to recognize him/herself as a man or a woman part of a group due to the common features s/he has with the other members. The value of family means expressing, respecting and loving people, and it is expressed in an attitude of love and respect. This includes obedience to Mapuche tradition and elderly people, who possess knowledge and wisdom, as well as loving children and being careful when treating with teenagers and young people, so as to know how to behave in the family and community context. It is highlighted in the conversations with *kimches* that the historically acquired knowledge by the Mapuches is ascribed to spiritual forces thought as a superior being who delivers wisdom and would lead people to the right path.

Likewise, *kimches* remark that in order to educate children in the communities they ought to be led through the path of Mapuche lore, which implies working with family and with those who have the same knowledge in order to guide the training process of the child. From the Mapuche collective memory is maintained that parents and grandparents talk to children with metaphors, morals, besides of *epew* (story or tale), *pewmas* (dreams), *feyentun* (legends) and *guxam* (conversation), all of which are told over again until the child learns them. This is completed with the processes of observing and imitating the daily activities of their parents through game and work.

Regarding the category of *The person as a whole*, the training of people should be according to the Mapuche educative knowledge. For Quilaqueo (2006), *kimches* give the value for educating, they have acquired knowledge by their experience with the natural, social, and cultural environment. Thus, knowledge is transmitted according to a process of personalized education and according to the level of each person's groundings. It starts through the early participation of children in the everyday life activities of family and the community.

The purpose is that the child may learn by observing and imitating the activities of his relatives in order to guide his or her conduct within the ethical and cultural Mapuche criterion, which imply the development of the individual by interpreting and comprehending the social norms, values and rules. From the Mapuche perspective, the education of a person is a socio-educative action called *kimeltuwin*.

According to Quilaqueo (2006), the *kimeltuwin* is defined as the educative knowledge whose objective is to transmit structures and meanings of the Mapuche cultural heritage from four spheres: intellect, values, attitudes and physical ability, all in order to be esteemed in the family and community context. It is in this way that the child who receives his or her *kimeltuwin* is to demonstrate *küme kimün* (good knowledge) and *küme rakizuam* (good thinking).

The category of *Rules for coexistence*, is one of the basic knowledge children ought to acquired and is part of an important cultural norm concerning the attitudes s/he has towards his/her community. Having respect to others is achieved when someone, consciously, knows the importance of respecting values and is capable of respecting community, family, elderly people and above all, human life, particularly of those who have Mapuche blood. For instance, the practice of greeting in children creates the first bonds and relationships with other members of the community, besides, from the Mapuche perspective it helps to acquire the first cultural rules through *chaliwin* (greetings).

The category of *Relationship with nature*, refers to interaction and respect to nature, beliefs, language, Mapuche lifestyle, and abstaining from going to forbidden places. This category portrays the close-knit relationship between the Mapuche and the *mapu* (earth), and it is developed in children in the different areas where they live. It is then from the Mapuche cultural reasoning that children are taught and transmitted how to respect and the way they must behave towards all elements of nature, bearing in mind that people are part of such environment and they must live peacefully with each one of them.

It is underscored the importance that the child be aware of the forces in nature, and to care and have respect for them. Such teachings may serve as warnings so that the child may be more careful when playing and developing him/herself in the environment. According to Quilaqueo (2006), educative Mapuche knowledge and lore can be of three different kinds regarding: concept, procedure and attitude. The first one is called *kimün*, which enables to know and understand the cultural sphere (Quilaqueo, 2006).

The second one refers to the strategies used to transmit knowledge, which are employed for the personal development of people and include *zapin*, *inatuzugu* and *gülam*, which serve to cultivate knowledge, to look for *az* (Mapuche being), and to teach values and attitudes according to the Mapuche *az* (Quilaqueo, 2006). And the third one concerns the value of knowing how to behave among people and encompasses the three kinds of attitudes people should show regarding knowledge: *yamuwün* which refers to respect or esteem for living beings and for meaningful people; *azmawün* which is the respect towards the harmony between man and nature; and *mañummauwün* which is gratitude (Quilaqueo, 2006).

b) Development of educative competences

As the major has progressed we have perceived certain competences in our students, which have to do with: 1) Pragmatic change, 2) Contextualized planning and 3) Research and investigation.

Concerning pragmatic change, it is important to consider that intercultural paradigm has different meanings and context. The position assumed in this paper is associated with the approach which comes from the construction of scientific knowledge, which emerges from interculturalism (Ramírez, 2001). In order to understand the change of paradigm the students manage to develop, it is necessary to indicate the elements for that evolution.

On the one hand, there is the change of the definition of interculturalism, on the other, the understanding of that definition as a process of coexistence, and finally, the organization and approach of educative contents. Regarding the first element, in their early training, students are inclined to ideas of reductionism, which are biased and centered in the differences about interculturalism. As they progress in their training, students manage to construct a more wide and conciliatory understanding, which recognizes the contribution of others and is based on the mutual dialogue between two or more groups resulting in enrichment.

Likewise, the belief that speaking about interculturalism refers only to indigenous communities is broken (Altarejos, 2006; Cortés, 2009). Regarding the second element, the meanings we found are considering interculturalism as a process of human coexistence, which is based on respect to the mutual relationship of values among different cultures. This position has to do with valuing the ethical and social background of different cultures, where the interrelation is precisely grounded in the respect to these values (Ramírez, 2001). Finally, concerning the last element, the widening of the interculturalism approach as a part of the educative culture is managed as the educative contents are organized and approached, also as personal educative knowledge and specific educative contents are united, thus it becomes a complement for each program.

In this way, it is sought to meet the social needs, satisfy the educative requests from families and the educative contextualized knowledge in internship of Nursery Education. From this point of view, the intercultural educative approach would counteract the educative approaches of compensation, comprehension and cultural segregation.

The paradigmatic change of students concerning interculturalism is illustrated in the following words:

[...] being able to change your mind concerning this concept and not constrain it only to indigenous communities but to apply it to groups of people with different ways of religious, political, social and cultural thinking is to evolve. The starting point to achieve this is respect and dialogue, in which different ways of thinking are welcome and which do not change mine necessarily but enrich me (Student of the major, 2013).

According to this student, during their training, students managed to apply the concept of interculturalism to everyone, whether indigenous or not. At the same time, they acquire competences to distinguish the social differences of the environment in which they work. Nonetheless, her words confirm her reluctance to change her monocultural attitudes. In this sense, the change of attitude towards social and cultural differences remains personal and does not necessarily influence professional life.

The second competence is about contextualized planning of the present cultural patterns in diverse social and cultural contexts. During their training the future teachers of infants, as a proposal of education for everyone, should be capable of organizing and specifying the interests of social actors in the educative environment in order to adapt their pedagogic participation. In this sense, it can be said that a contextualized intercultural educative process aims to foster a set of aptitudes and attitudes in students which would enable them to develop themselves in a multicultural society.

This means that during their training students should accomplish the development of several abilities so that in their daily lives they may be able to live with people from different cultures, to solve disagreements produced by diversity, to promote their enrichment based on this reality, to be critical and respectful to other cultures. Knowing family patterns is a component that stands out among those considered as important by students when contextualizing the curriculum:

Knowing, planning and considering the familial and cultural elements of their community, help children value their traditions and be unashamed of their background; but always taking into account the educative programs of Mineduc, it is important that neither the children nor the teacher set these aspects aside (Major student, 2014).

Most of these female students express the importance of considering the personal educative knowledge when planning their classes of internship in order to instill in children appreciation for their cultural identity. From their point of view, such planning must be done within the framework of contents established by the curriculum.

With regard to the third competence, research and investigation of the intercultural educative context, the students manage to identify and recognize the educative, social, institutional and personal needs of actors of the educative context. The objective is to promote efficient changes in teaching internship, in the organization of educative contents and to cause processes of coexistence and to solve intercultural disagreements, all of which is reflected in the following words:

In our training research is important, especially when it comes to [educative] contexts which makes easier to understand and comprehend the particular situations and disagreements that take place in the classroom and allows us to pay more attention to diversity (Student of the major, 2012).

According to this student, research is of great importance during the initial teacher training in order to understand the educative context, intercultural relationships among the subjects of the education field and to make progress in the systematization of the personal knowledge of students.

It is in this way that teachers in their work are called to construct knowledge permanently from their own experience by means of action research.

A teacher of infants, besides pedagogical and personal knowledge, needs to know how to act, this includes a general ability for teaching and an ability to adapt according to the particular situations that occur during work, that is, the ability to comprehend and explain what occurs in real education. To accomplish this, the teacher must judge his or her own performance.

Schon (1992) indicates that practical knowledge can be revealed in the processes of “reflecting on action” or in processes of “reflecting upon the action.” For our purpose, we will focus only in the latter, which encourages teachers to examine their own performances after actions with a critical eye and reflection upon actions. With this it is possible to understand performance and helps to construct models on reality.

It is possible to create research processes according to the model of systematization, analyses of reality, performances, and the sense the actors of education give to their own behavior and the behavior of others. Additionally, it provides an explanation of the social structures, where the educative practice is performed, as well as the way in which it is affected (Castro, 2006), this is verified with the following statement:

To conclude, I must mention that this project on intercultural education helped us realize the worth of self-criticism and to constantly be reflecting upon our pedagogical duty. It is a challenge to convince students to take the major, especially graduates, they are hard to persuade (Student of the major, 2013).

In sum, doing research from the educative practice is an opportunity for students to establish their references and to create a method of work to analyze their practice as they consider the environment of everyday life. This will enable them to use experience as the raw material of intelligence work and creative thinking, and to develop reflection habits on and upon their performance. Besides, it makes possible to recover pedagogical innovations, construct knowledge and comprehend educative action within the social context (Castro, 2006).

c) Strengths and weaknesses during teacher training

During their training, students identify two strengths, which are related to tools and techniques to gather information: 1) Making of portfolio; and 2) Learning to develop an ethnographic data survey. Both of them emerge from the competence of research and investigation in the intercultural educative context.

Concerning portfolio, a tool whose function is educational, enables monitoring and self-evaluating their own performance in order to achieve metacognition regarding the progress of academic learning concerning their work in pedagogical practice. In this way, portfolio helps to gather information about their professional performance periodically and systematically, which favors critical reflection upon their actions and making decisions in order to improve (Korthagen, 2001).

Concerning the second strength, ethnographic data survey, the students declare that this way of reading phenomena and the relationships produced in the school context helps them comprehend cultural school circumstances in a Mapuche context. Thus, with an intercultural educative approach they can adapt their pedagogical practices so as to encourage social relationships between the different educative agents and the community.

The weaknesses observed during the training are linked to the need of strengthening communication and work with families in the pedagogical practices performed in an intercultural context. So it is necessary to provide opportunities for families and members of the community to work together in the school. It is important to address these weaknesses since the Department of Education of Chile in 2002 created the policy of participation of parents and guardians.

Now, in the curricular foundations of Nursery Education (Mineduc, 2001), family is stated as the first teacher and it is suggested that they will share the educative mission with it of two great theoretical trends that compete for that place: 1) the one who considers the participation of parents as a support for the efficiency of the educative process, and 2) the one who promotes the participation of parents as a right and as a space for citizenry, from which fathers, mothers and relatives are competent and needed to take part in the decision making which affect their lives and the lives of their children (Navarro, 2002). The following testimony affirms this:

Another cause which we have perceived is the lack of participation of families with regards to school meetings, they do not express their opinions... I consider it a key and essential element in the process of education due to the cultural heritage children possess which is a vast contribution of knowledge and traditional lore of this culture, and should be transmitted (Student of the major, 2011).

Research like the one of Valverde contributes with data such as the positive impact the participation of parents has in elementary school but not in Nursey Education. In addition, it is noted that regarding the latter less information is known about what are the most effective aspects of the

participation of parents in the school context. The results suggest that the participation of parents is a good sign of the quality of service but that we are not close to evaluate it effectively (Parent Child Care Involvement, quoted by Valverde, 2008).

Valdivia and Valverde, for their part, carried out a descriptive study on the participation of parents with children in kindergartens, evaluating real participation, ideal participation, and the obstacles as well as facilitators to manage it. They come to the conclusion that the general results about what parents and teachers say they do in relation to participation allow to observe the fact that participation is characterized by the first three levels suggested by Flamey *et al.* (1999): information, collaboration and consult (Valdivia y Valverde, 2006).

Even though there is a gap in the type and kind of the parents' participation in school, we should still ask: what occurs in intercultural contexts? It was for this that it was decided to incorporate subjects on family and community to the major in interculturalism.

Such decision is based on the remaining gap about the way different actors involved think and expect the educative practice should be performed by the initial teachers with families during early childhood. The participation of parents is consolidated as a variable of quality (Flamey *et al.*, 1999; Santelices, 2002; Valdivia and Valverde, 2006) revealing the need to correlate the educative institution with family.

Conclusions

The main conclusions of this work allow us to underline the fact that when we think about the training of initial teachers in the intercultural context, academic situations both formal and informal should be provided to lead students in learning how to initiate peaceful relationships with people from other cultures. Most texts on intercultural educative processes in early education scarcely specify what are the contents to be taught and the competences teachers should develop when found in intercultural spheres, what is only stressed is that their abilities should allow them to initiate a relationship with other cultures.

The stress on the strategies to bring cultures closer shows, once more, that people are not being considered implicitly as individuals and particular human beings —as people— but rather the distinction made between them and us is due to their membership to a certain group as Altarejos indicates (2006).

Concerning the first category, Mapuche educative knowledge and lore, we can conclude that the objective is not to eliminate the formal curriculum, but the very opposite: intercultural education is a new treatment between engaging local culture with the curriculum, which is the result of the connection aimed at in the training of students of Nursery Education of the major in interculturalism.

Such experiences have allowed us to identify the knowledge that is essential to be considered for the Mapuche intercultural context during the educative process: the value of family, the person as a whole, greetings and the relationship with nature. In this sense, the educative process is developed in a framework of more flexible limits, which admit disciplinary contents with those of the socio-familiar environment. What we want to highlight with this is that when we think of intercultural contexts a relevant aspect to contextualize the curriculum is to find and search in such environment what are the contents which give sense and meaning to the pedagogical process.

From this paradigm, both the training on intercultural Nursery Education and intercultural education should seek that students may see in the differences not only an alternative to the lifestyle of the culture of origin but a likely alternative to be incorporated in the school as well (Essomba, 1999). This means valuing identity, contents, educative purposes of others for the vocational training of an individual; constructing knowledge and dialogic competences between Mapuche and Western knowledge in the school context (Quilaqueo *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding the category of competences, it is necessary for the major in interculturalism to implement continuous process of specific actions as well as a continuous reflection upon the tasks of institutions which train teachers. In this framework, the professional training of teachers of intercultural education in the national context requires a solid training on research and a vocational commitment.

Research not only should allow to identify ways of thinking based on an epistemological criticism in order to overcome the functionalist intercultural education in indigenous contexts, and the present monocultural teaching in the school, familial and social environment; but also the study of teaching performance in early training as well as in school (Quilaqueo *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding the category of strengths and weaknesses, we conclude that it is necessary to foster certain abilities in students during their training so that they overcome challenges and difficulties with research, investigation, knowledge and recognition of others around, managing a mutual enrichment among everyone, acquiring greater sensitivity to identify and solve social

problems, in a framework of recognition and convenience in diversity. The objective is to accomplish common purposes, promoting the educative knowledge incorporated to school culture.

Evidently, before this social view, unceasingly more diverse and complex, is indispensable to train teachers in a pedagogical style adjusted to the new reality, enabling them to face new challenges and to provide satisfying answers without setting aside comprehension and respect to differences. It is essential, therefore, to permanently and habitually consider the principle of socio-cultural contextualization of information.

Such principle requires teachers and academicians to assign activities of learning, and consequently, curricular contents in appropriate contexts according to the reality of the student body, particularly those whom the students are familiar with and are related with the career they would like to take at the end of the educative training. This intercommunicated and globalized world has become a great challenge for vocational training (Ferro, 2000; CINDA, 2002).

Nursery Education does not escape the needed transformations and innovations which higher education faces at present and which rise due to the changes in internal aspects such as: the growth in the numbers of enrolled students in higher education, heterogeneity, segmentation of education offerings and the new profile of students (Peralta, 2000; Armengol, 2005; Burnet, 2008). So, research has been carried out nationally and internationally about the characteristics and limitations in the programs of initial teacher training, particularly in Nursery Education.

With this paper we want to encourage more professionals of Nursery Education to carry out research and make contributions, and to create educative experiences about the culture of indigenous people, especially of the Mapuches. It is possible to reconstruct culture from the systematization of the discourse of families, *kimche*, *longko* and other members of the community as a way of contributing to the vocational training of new generations. One of the main criticisms to teacher training is that it does not train to face teacher practice appropriately (Veenman, 1984); but rather it leads to endogamous reproduction (Ferry, 1990; Davini, 1995), which is devoid of pedagogical knowledge and overladen with knowledge, turning out to be an academician training.

Such statement is based on the results of the studies carried out by Gibaja (1994), Brockbank and McGill (2002), Carr (1996) and Imbernón (2010), where, by and large, reveal that teachers themselves share critical opinions on the deficiency of their vocational training. Mérida (2009) adds

that it is necessary to consider actions to invert such conditions, and that any consideration that takes the initial training of future teachers into account should be directly related to the clarification of identity of teaching, which they are to develop in their future professional life.

In conclusion, this article aims and encourages to rethink the initial teacher training of teachers of infants presenting the subjects on interculturalism as a necessary aspect to enhance the quality of education, not only in the pedagogical field but also in dialogue, as an encounter among people, society and culture.

The intercultural approach, when it is not exclusively constrained to what is indigenous, allows to address cultural diversity as a wide element for the development of curriculum in the classroom contributing to the training of children from an ethical stance. In this sense, teachers and assistants of Nursery Education have in their hands a task which is complemented with the role of families as the first educative agents, in a context where there can be as many cultures as many children in school.

As a result, interculturalism is not for a few but for all society around the globe. As Cortés (2009) says, intercultural education seeks to foster positive attitudes towards cultural diversity; to encourage coexistence and cooperation; to develop communication skills, whether oral or not, which may allow effective interaction and communication; and to promote equal opportunities in the academic field. All in all, our desire for the students of the major is that as they interact with other cultures they may enrich themselves recognizing diversity as a positive value and an opportunity for mutual enrichment.

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Soledad Morales-Saavedra Master in Psychology, Associate Professor of the Catholic University of Temuco. Assistant researcher of the Centro de Investigación en Educación en Contexto Indígena e Intercultural (CIECII). Lines of research: education and interculturalism. Recent publication: co-author with S. Quintriqueo, D. Quilaqueo and K. Arias, *Interculturalidad para la Formación Inicial Docente: Desafíos para construir un diálogo intercultural*, Chile: Editorial Universidad Católica de Temuco. (2016).

Segundo Quintriqueo-Millán. PhD. in Education, associate professor of the Catholic University of Temuco, Chile; associated researcher of the Centro de Investigación en Educación en Contexto Indígena e Intercultural (CIECII); researcher of the Núcleo de Estudios Interétnicos e Interculturales (NEII) of the Catholic University of Temuco, and associated researcher of the Centre Interuniversitaire d'Études et de Recherches Autochtones (CIÉRA)

de l'Université Laval, Québec, Canada. Lines of research: education and interculturalism. Recent publications: co-author with S. Quintriqueo, D. Quilaqueo, F. Peña-Cortés and G. Muñoz, "Conocimientos culturales como contenidos de la educación familiar mapuche", in *Revista ALPHA*, no. 40, Chile (2015); co-author with S. Quintriqueo, D. Quilaqueo and H. Torres, "Contribución para la enseñanza de las ciencias naturales: saber mapuche y escolar", in *Revista Educacion y Pesquisa*, vol. 40, no. 4, Brazil (2014).

Pilar Andrea Uribe-Sepúlveda. PhD. in Education Research, academician of the degree in Nursery Education. Lines of research: education and interculturalism. Recent publication: Cuadrado-Gordillo, Isabel, Uribe-Sepúlveda, Pilar A. and Cadet, Bernard, "The Case of the Mapuche People in Chile", in Giraudeau, Caroline [coord.], *Psychologie, éducation et vie scolaire*, France: Publibook Université.

Katerin Arias-Ortega. PhD. student in Education, Catholic University of Temuco, Chile. Lines of research: education and interculturalism. Recent publication: co-author with S. Quintriqueo, S. Morales, D. Quilaqueo and K. Arias, *Interculturalidad para la Formación Inicial Docente: Desafíos para construir un diálogo intercultural*, Chile: Editorial Universidad Católica de Temuco (2016).

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