



INTERNATIONAL GATHERING  
ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION  
AND KNOWLEDGE

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE  
AND EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

Monkul Lof Mapu, Carahue, Araucania, Chile

OCTOBER 24-28, 2022

## Table des matières

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	3
<b>Monkul: A Place of Meeting(s) in Mapuche Lafkenche Territory</b> .....	4
<b>The Main Topics of Discussion</b> .....	6
<b>Local Indigenous Education Initiatives</b> .....	10
<b>Initiatives aiming to create proposals and materials with a decolonial approach.</b> .....	11
<b>Out-of-school Education with Families and Community Stakeholders</b> .....	12
<b>Visit to Collico Ranco public school, Puerto Saavedra</b> .....	13
<b>The importance of sharing contexts and initiatives between nations.</b> .....	14
<b>Recommendations for the continuation of the Indigenous Knowledge and Education Project / Partenariat savoirs et éducation autochtones (PSÉA)</b> .....	15
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	17

## International Gathering on Indigenous Education and Knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge and Education Partnership / Partenariat savoirs et éducation autochtones (PSÉA)

Monkul Lof Mapu, Carahue, Araucanie, Chili

October 24-28, 2022

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Photo 1 : Ekos del Monkul, the meeting place  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte

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<sup>1</sup> Université du Québec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT)

Our thanks to Julio Parra Cayupil for his efforts with the educational authorities that made possible our visit to the Collico Ranco public school in Puerto Saavedra. In this sense, we are deeply grateful to the principals, teachers, traditional educators and students of this educational center for welcoming us in a ceremonial and festive activity in which we were able to exchange knowledge, languages, practices, experiences and expectations with Mapuche students. In the same vein, we are also grateful to the school for providing the space for part of the team to share the results of their research, with Mapuche teachers and educators, on Indigenous education in the context of the Atikamekw Nation.

We are grateful for the excellent work of Ekaterina Legaz, Camille Varnier and Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert as translations of the meetings and discussions during the event.



*Photo 2 : Opening of the IKEP international meeting  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

### **Monkul: A Place of Meeting(s) in Mapuche Lafkenche Territory<sup>2</sup>**

Our meeting took place in person in the Mateo Nahuelpán Mapuche community of Monkul, in the municipality of Carahue, province of Cautín, in the Araucanía region of Chile, from October 24 to 28, 2022. This place was not chosen at random, but because it reflects the fundamental meaning of the PSÉA project: to bring together people from different backgrounds to discuss education and the transmission of knowledge in Indigenous territories. Indeed, one of the most

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<sup>2</sup> The Lafkenches are a subdivision of the Mapuche nation. The basis of their identity is the cosmogony, practices and knowledge related to the sea (Martínez, 1995).

important meanings associated with this vast territory known as Monkul refers to a "meeting place". Different types and currents of water converge here in the form of sea, river and wetlands. In addition to the water component that gives the landscape its particular characteristic, the encounter between human beings and Mapuche mythical forces has occurred in this territory since time immemorial.



*Photo 3 : Monkul wetlands and the Pacific Ocean on the horizon  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

This link is reinforced by the organization of ceremonies in which local people thank the guardian spirits of nature (*ngen*) and ask for their protection for the well-being of their communities. In fact, our meeting officially began with the celebration of a traditional ceremony led by a spiritual leader (*machi*) accompanied by a group of Mapuche assistants. We all gathered at a specific location near the sea, around the fire, the offerings, and the branches of a sacred tree to participate in the ceremony (Photo 1). At the end of the ceremony, the offerings are shared with those present and are also poured into the sand and sea. The objective is that the different elements that make up the Mapuche world accompany us in the carrying out of our work. Far from being an inconvenience, the relative isolation of the community of Mateo Nahuelpán has fostered a climate of exchange, solidarity and trust within the team.





*Photo 4 : Mapuche opening ceremony at the international IKEP meeting.*

*Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

### **The Main Topics of Discussion**

The discussions at this meeting highlighted some very interesting aspects of the perception of formal school education in Chile, Mexico and Canada. From the perspective of Indigenous peoples, the content and methods of education designed by nation-states do not reflect their worldviews, languages, values, and traditional practices. Public policies intended for Indigenous peoples in education are more focused on cultural assimilation and justification of dispossession of their territories. Indigenous community members see state-imposed education as having negative socio-cultural consequences.

Today, the tangible effects of these educational policies are reflected in the loss of their languages, the stigmatization of their cultural identities, and the rejection of their forms of transmission of traditional knowledge within educational institutions. This phenomenon is spreading and reproducing itself in other spheres. Despite this trend in the history of formal education in the Americas, there are a growing number of teachers and community leaders who are aware of the need to reverse these processes by reclaiming their own traditional ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge for new generations. From the point of view of these stakeholders, it is important to work on strengthening the Indigenous identity of the new generations and to go beyond the role of simple educators in order to integrate families in the building of other models of society.

In these scenarios, there are many challenges for educational and community stakeholders involved in building relevant and autonomous education in Indigenous territories. Teachers must be creative in integrating the knowledge and practices of their Indigenous communities into the school curriculum. While they have some flexibility, they are not compensated for the extra time and expense involved. Despite an emerging discourse on intercultural education, states do not

encourage Indigenous teachers in schools to teach their languages and cultures. Achievements depend more on their will and personal convictions. In addition to complying with the official forms and schedules required by their workplaces, teachers spend much of their free time on maintaining connections with their communities and organizing extracurricular activities. To a large extent, progress in integrating Indigenous languages and knowledge into the school system varies by country, region, and level of organization of each Indigenous nation.



*Photo 5 : présentation of Gerardo Muñoz*  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte

While some progress is being recognized, there are still several aspects in schools that hinder the promotion of Indigenous languages and cultures, even in schools that promote an intercultural approach to education. Most of these barriers are related to the way in which states continue to conceive of schooling and education. Several needs have been identified by Indigenous stakeholders in education:

- ✓ Need for appropriate physical spaces to organize community activities that are essential to the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. There are only common spaces for civic activities related to the reclamation of national histories. In the vision of the State, education is limited to the knowledge transmitted in the classroom.
- ✓ Need to give Indigenous teachers more time to work together and closely with community members to develop appropriate educational materials. The State does not recognize these efforts as part of the teacher's workday and does not provide the tools and materials needed to teach Indigenous cultures and languages.

- ✓ Need to collaborate with teachers from other Indigenous contexts to develop proposals for educational autonomy by region and by Indigenous nation. The challenge is to build a system created by each Indigenous nation and not remain at the level of a simple State-regulated program.
- ✓ Need to strengthen ties between teachers, but also between teachers and Indigenous families. It is essential to establish minimum criteria for working with communities. If the separation between schools and Indigenous families is maintained, education based on racism and colonialism will continue to prevail. In rural schools, there is greater closeness between families and teachers, as women still play a central role in education and there are more human resources.
- ✓ Need to develop alternative assessment criteria in schools that are consistent with the teaching of Indigenous languages and cultures. Currently, the Indigenous norms, values and knowledge that teachers incorporate into their subject matter must be translated into formal criteria in terms of objectives, duration and specific outcomes. In other words, learning is measured by standardized assessments. In contrast to this institutional focus, education in the Indigenous vision is aimed at living in community and in balance with nature.
- ✓ Need to reduce discontinuities between school and home education in Indigenous contexts: content selection, fixed schedules, reasons for learning, cultural meaning and purpose of education. There is still a widespread belief that Indigenous cultural knowledge contributes little to school education.
- ✓ Need to create culturally relevant educational materials. Educational materials provided by states are of poor quality and, in many cases, outdated. They do not reflect Indigenous visions and realities. Indigenous history, languages and territorial knowledge are completely absent from school materials and curricula.

There are at least two important aspects related to the educational policies recently implemented by states in Indigenous contexts. The first concerns the way in which the authorities responsible for education in each country conceive of interculturality. What does interculturality mean for the State? Who is responsible for the design and implementation of intercultural policies? How is interculturality put into practice at different levels of education? There seems to be a growing institutional misuse of the concept of interculturality, without a clear discussion of its meaning: is it a political strategy focused on creating schools or programs to meet the demands of marginalized and excluded Indigenous populations, but without fundamentally addressing structural inequality and racism? What are the differences between the state conception of interculturality and that which is practiced in communities and by Indigenous peoples? How does intercultural and Indigenous education meet the social and economic expectations of Indigenous students and families?





*Photo 6 : Janis Ottawa introduces herself to the students at the Collico Rancho school ceremony.  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

The second aspect concerns the training and profile of teachers working in intercultural and Indigenous education contexts. Beyond their disciplinary affiliation, there is little knowledge about the characteristics, skills and competencies of teachers to be developed in community settings. Gaps and deficits in the training of these teachers are evident. Most teachers have little awareness that there are different structures of understanding in Indigenous settings than those they learned in their training. For example, in the teachers' specialized view, water is H<sub>2</sub>O, but in the Indigenous perspective, water also has life and everything is in continuous motion. Many teachers reproduce the bias that "low" levels of learning in Indigenous contexts are due to students' "low intelligence". This is why it is essential to work on the training and decolonization of teachers in intercultural and Indigenous education. The coexistence of the two knowledge systems is possible in a kind of epistemic pluralism.



*Photo 7 : Presentation of Janis Ottawa  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

## Local Indigenous Education Initiatives

The main initiatives created by teachers and leaders of Indigenous communities are developed alongside the teaching of State-mandated programs and content. In most cases, the official recognition of these initiatives is, candidly, non-existent and implies a double workload for the teachers. The Mesa de Educación Intercultural (MEI) in the municipality of Purén stands out for the number and diversity of schools covered by its activities. The MEI is composed of principals, community leaders, traditional educators and Mapuche teachers who work in schools of different educational levels: kindergarten, primary and secondary. At the organizational level, the MEI has a coordinator who is in charge of articulating intercultural activities in the different schools of the municipality.

The way in which the members of the MEI articulate the teaching of Mapuche culture is based on a circular vision of life and on the development of certain instances of learning. These instances are linked to scenarios recreated in the schools according to the most significant milestones and events of Mapuche communities. The MEI of Purén has created a general calendar of Mapuche festivities and ceremonies. Some of these activities are carried out in each school separately, but others involve the participation and coexistence of students from different schools. The creation and reinforcement of these events allows Mapuche and non-Mapuche students to learn about Mapuche culture and language in an active way. The participation of Mapuche language and culture teachers in the MEI does not prevent them from innovating in their annual program planning, as they are able to organize activities according to their own priorities.

The way in which IEM members coordinate the organization of a community event can be seen in *Ayekantun* (Photo 2). It involves Mapuche and non-Mapuche students from rural and urban schools of different educational levels. It is a community gathering around Mapudungun language singing, Mapuche music and dance, in which teachers no longer play the main role. In order to promote the Mapuche language and culture, the students take on the role of protagonists by performing various songs, playing traditional instruments and performing dances. An important element is the support that the students receive from their families, especially in the making of traditional clothing. With the production of *Ayekantun*, the students put into practice the knowledge they have acquired in school about an important part of the Mapuche culture and language. Students' views and experiences are shared in the days following the event for discussion and reflection at MEI meetings.



*Photo 8 : Students at Ayekantun organized by the MEI of Purén  
Photo by Julio Parra Cayupil*

### **Initiatives aiming to create proposals and materials with a decolonial approach.**

One decolonial initiative that has been little implemented in schools in Mapuche territory concerns the recovery and teaching of the history of families linked to their lands. The Chilean State's fear of reviving certain claims of dispossession prevents such a proposal. Another type of decolonial initiative in the Mapuche context tends towards the co-construction of educational models. The proposal aims to generate common work between researchers, school principals, teachers, parents, grandparents and various actors related to education in order to influence public policies. The objective is to organize co-construction workshops in rural areas. Together, the actors gathered to reflect and discuss the problems that prevent them from working in the same path. Despite the preponderance of the Spanish language in these workshops, Mapuche concepts appear at different times.

In the Meseta Purépecha of Michoacán, Mexico, the Purépecha language and culture teaching initiative is being carried out in one preschool and two elementary schools. The teaching and use of the Indigenous language is a crucial part of the learning process. Teachers who teach in the Indigenous language transmit knowledge from a holistic perspective and not just specific content. In the center of Veracruz, Mexico, teachers are working on didactic projects to recover and strengthen the Indigenous culture of the Nahuatl Nation. The didactic projects build the capacity of the students, revalue the Indigenous cultures from within, and make the teachers' educational work culturally and linguistically relevant. In the didactic projects, course content is linked to traditional knowledge in the Indigenous language. Each project is linked to a particular theme: ceremonies, food, festivities, plants. Once the theme has been chosen, people from the communities who possess this specific kind of knowledge are called upon. The knowledge transmitted, with the support of the didactic projects, touches on different subjects. The different stages of the development of a learning project involve the democratic participation of teachers, students, parents and other community members. The evaluation is based on the acquisition of



concrete skills, the use of the Nahua language and the coexistence between students, teachers and community authorities. The educational material used is in the form of albums, photographs, card holders or videos (Photo 3).



*Photo 9 : Materials for educational projects  
Photo by Noël Palestino de Jesús*

### **Out-of-school Education with Families and Community Stakeholders**

Despite the lack of support from federal authorities, the teaching of the Atikamekw Nehiromowin language is more structured in Quebec than in Mexico and Chile, following the agreements adopted by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in 1972. The language teaching material is produced and reprinted by the education sector of the Atikamekw Nation Council. A large part of the educators' efforts to revive the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw culture and language is based on activities outside of school. These initiatives involve key community stakeholders in the transmission of traditional knowledge. Among the initiatives developed with the children and teenagers of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw Nation, we can cite the following:

- ✓ Teaching water cycles in the natural environment.
- ✓ Outdoor food preparation with the participation of community elders (Photo 4).
- ✓ Identification in the Atikamekw Nehiromowin language of the different types of animals present on the territory (Photo 5).
- ✓ Production of traditional objects with different types of wood found on the territory.
- ✓ Collection of maple syrup during the winter session.



*Photo 10 : Food preparation*



*Photo 11 : Identification of animals*

*Photos by Janis Ottawa*

It is important to note that in the Mapuche and Atikamekw Nehirowisiw contexts, current initiatives include the use of social networks and new technological applications. MEI initiatives are shared on a page created on the Facebook platform. Among Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok youth, Tik Tok, YouTube and social networking sites are beginning to take on importance in the design of educational strategies for teaching Indigenous language and culture. Radio has been used in a Mayan context. Further north, in Quebec, the revitalization of Inuit culture and language is also taking place in a variety of ways, such as the promotion of traditional practices like throat singing, igloo building (Photo 6) and dog sledding during a cultural week. Co-teaching in schools is used whenever possible.



*Photo 12 : Construction of an igloo on Inuit territory  
Photo by Gloria Pellerin*

### **Visit to Collico Ranco public school, Puerto Saavedra**

On the morning of Wednesday, October 26, we traveled to Puerto Saavedra, as we were invited to the Collico Ranco public school. We were welcomed by students, community leaders, traditional educators, parents, and education authorities. Several members of the local and neighboring communities were present. After a brief introduction of those present, the agenda was organized as follows:

- Welcome ceremony. Prayers and music with traditional instruments around a sacred tree placed in the central part of the school's common area (Photo 7).
- Presentation by students dressed in traditional Mapuche clothing.
- Offering of gifts. The visitors received some plants as well as bags containing medicinal leaves to prepare in infusion.
- Exchange of language and experiences between Mapuche youth and visitors.



- Presentation of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw history program by Christian Cocoo, David Gascon and Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert. Compilation of testimonies in different media and grouped by themes.
- Guided tour of the school's facilities and a quick visit with some students in class.



*Photo 13 : Élisapie Lamoureux et des élèves de l'école Collico Ranco  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

### **The importance of sharing contexts and initiatives between nations.**

- The meeting provides an opportunity to compare the social and educational conditions of the Indigenous nations of the Americas.
- It creates the basis for new narratives to tell the story from Indigenous nations' own visions.
- It allows us to strengthen the construction of a common history of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, without losing sight of their specificities.
- It allows us to contribute to the reclamation of the identities and cultures of Indigenous nations.
- It makes it possible to reproduce certain initiatives in Indigenous education, taking into account different social and political contexts.

- It brings together Indigenous peoples who are located in the same country, but who are historically disconnected.
- It allows for the sharing and inspiring of new ideas to be incorporated into the curriculum of schools and universities. For example, the proposal to recover connections to territory and communities was incorporated into the Bachelor of Arts in Mayan Language and Culture program at the University of the Orient (UNO) after listening to the Mapuche experience at the IKEP meeting in June 2022.



*Photo 14 : Sharing activity  
Photo by Gabriel Marcotte*

### **Recommendations for the continuation of the Indigenous Knowledge and Education Project (IKEP) / Partenariat savoirs et éducation autochtones (PSÉA)**

On the final day of the meeting, the breakout sessions identified some recommendations for the PSÉA project. Some of these proposals include:

- In addition to strengthening the networks built to date between the Atikamekw, Nehirowisiwok, Maya, Purépecha, Inuit and Mapuche Nations, the project could integrate representatives of other Indigenous nations.
- The project could become a support body for the development of educational materials. Members of the PSÉA project would act as allies to teachers in Indigenous contexts to enhance the development of their activities.
- The PSÉA project would have more presence and dynamism if the members of the project mobilized and shared different resources aimed at the transmission of Indigenous languages and cultures. One proposal would be to promote the construction of a bank of

pedagogical activities that could be circulated between members of a nation and between nations. Another would be related to its role in the construction of regional structures that contribute to the networking of stakeholders and schools in the territories

- Within the PSÉA team, it is important to share the visions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and teachers. One way to do this would be to create a website where project members could share their ideas and experiences. In other words, to make the team more visible.
- Training programs are proposed to attract teachers who wish to learn how to develop teaching materials adapted to Indigenous realities. Universities do not provide such training.
- Connecting educational authorities and politicians to create greater awareness of Indigenous realities.
- The reflections and discussions generated at the two PSÉA project meetings can be used to create an international Indigenous education program. This initiative could be piloted in one of the schools participating in the project.
- Finally, promote more frequent face-to-face meetings.



*Photo 15: Group photo at Ekos del Monkul  
Photo by Kevin Papatie*

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