

Sisichakunaq Pukllaynin : A Radio Experiment in Rural Andean Schools

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Everything that exists, becomes human, feels, has a voice, speaks, communicates with man
and is with the rest of its cosmic brethren.

Radio then, amplifies and empowers that multiple and magical ancestral voice.

All of this lives, beats, speaks, sings, laughs, dreams and is created here in "Sisichakunaq
Pukllaynin"

Sarah Corona Berkin-Leonidas Casas

I would like to thank the University of Florida for inviting me to be part of this conference. It is a great opportunity to reflect, meet, and learn from all the experienced participants who join us here today.

This work shares the experiences of a single experiment involving Quechua indigenous culture, Andean government schools, and radio. In hopes of providing a more complete understanding of our proposal I would like to first present information that provides context to our experience. Keeping the conference objectives in mind, I would then like to highlight three components: culture, schooling and radio and conclude by analyzing our results.

Background Information

Since June 2003 we have suggested the introduction of radio in public school in hopes of fostering a social movement committed to an intercultural understanding that would strengthen of the identity of our people.

Our work takes place in Quechua indigenous communities and schools in the region of Cusco located in the Andes of southern Peru. I would like to highlight three aspects of our cultural reality:

1.- Cultural Invisibility.

Cusco, the capital of the ancient Incan Empire, and self-proclaimed “Navel of the Word,” holds a complex social history in which a battle between indigenous identity (ethnic concept) and rural identity (classic concept) still rages on today. These Andean societies develop their capacity for resilience by confronting a symbolic violence that manifests in the constant denial of who they are, what they think, and what they believe. This violence manifests itself in the institutions of the Peruvian democratic system such as legislation, public administration or political representation.

Peruvian educator Javier Monroe¹ maintains that cultural invisibility in different social spheres, is brought about to reinforce universal discourse, to establish a culturally different power sphere, and to create in many ways a cultural identity that is foreign to our people.

We must ask ourselves: Who is responsible for their national representation? Who will ensure they will be able to exercise their rights? The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report² acknowledges ethnic exclusion as one of the chief reasons for the violent situation, and consequent loss of life, my country has experienced over the last 20 years.

2.- A Living Culture

These Cuscan and Andean cultures share a common cultural origin that is clearly visible in the local and regional areas where they coexist.

¹ Javier Monroe, Peruvian educator, researcher and author of books on interculturalism, currently directs the Amautas and Quallanas of Bartolome de las Casas Center program in Cusco.

² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was appointed by the Peruvian government to research the country’s violent situation from 1980-2000.

These societies vigilantly maintain myths, ceremonial systems and practices. They stay productive and are social all the while with worldview, a common history, knowledge system as well as values from another time. Yet at the same time we cannot ignore the permanent scars inflicted by the constant battle between Andean and colonial paradigms. These societies consequently rely on a wide range of cultural survival strategies. They claim local territorial autonomy as their only action plan.

Their Quechua language, spoken by more than 3,184,422 of the total twenty two million inhabitants of Peru, and particularly in our region causes problems for the standardization of language which inhibits the unification of the Quechua communities.

This is a culture seen by some scholars, agronomists, social researchers and anthropologists, as a subtype of all the ecological proposals in the world.

3.- Redeveloping Cultures in a Modern Framework

Cusco, the country's first hub for tourism, profits from the influx of foreign and domestic capital. This influx in turn, according to social scientists in my country, exerts heavy pressure to imitate contemporary models of peripheral or colonial modernization.

This pressure requires that our own people surrender to external parameters that do not syncretize with our current Andean indigenous culture and inhibit optimal development of our needs and of our cultural design.

Animosity between modern and traditional creates sociocultural problems (racism, prejudice, structural violence) and creates a challenge for migrants building their own identity as they integrate into the urban landscape. Anthropologist Xavier Richard³ argues that one must know how to define his or her position within the national political sphere, know what differentiates oneself and from there build their claims for redistribution of power.

For those of us who have worked in education for more than twenty years, building ones identity is an essential part of schooling. Many attempts to establish intercultural exchange in this country remain reproductions of old pedagogical models (geared more towards a western bound Spanish-speaking society) that have been adapted for minority Amazonian and Andean cultures with less than satisfactory results. This is compounded by the lack of input from indigenous communities in proposed adaptations and adjustments.

We believe that genuine intercultural exchange should respond to a humanistic, educational and dehomogenizing movement that allows free citizens to prepare to control their own destiny. To achieve this, schools should examine their standards in search of new approaches, ones that enrich cultural essence and indigenous way of learning and seize new cultural understanding.

These pedagogical concepts slowly build through the development of educational programs, in daily classroom methodology that integrates language, culture and understanding in discourse, as well as in the

³ Dr. Xavier Ricard Lanata, anthropologist, author and compiling editor of many books published by the Bartolome de las Casas Center in Cusco, Peru.

work of the educational community in general. To empower this intercultural exchange we must promote and strengthen positive popular opinion that is committed to the cause. Community requests, families, parents, children, the educational community as a whole, not to mention the use of all the known and unknown classroom space, all need to be taken into consideration in this type of work. The role of the media is indisputable, even more so when we consider how often in Peru the media sways public opinion away from dominant cultural norms.

We hope to reverse this situation and transition the population from “listening users” to true producers or “critical users.” This means facing the challenge of converting media into intercultural pedagogical instruments in order to use them as tools to encourage the participation of children as well the educational community in hope of promoting indigenous cultural expression.

Radio was chosen because more than a decade ago an effort was made to foster alternative radio and now entire groups adopt this means of communication. Community radio also exists in almost all rural areas. Bonds of communication develop between communities through music, familiar messages, and daily events as they breathe life into communicative space absorbed in the cultural hegemony. Radio is therefore an important tool because it emphasizes oral expression and is a central part of our rural communities. Virginia Zavala states:

Knowing what is going on in the rest of the country while at the same time understanding that others are listening to the very same station builds on the idea of the imaginary community proposed by Anderson (1991).

The challenge we face in developing an intercultural educational initiative stems from making radio work for Andean societies, especially children, so that they use it and share their ways of thinking, communal successes, organizational and productive strengths, dynamic personalities and religious beliefs all in their native language.

For this very reason we decided to look at the possibility of incorporating radio into schools and daily classroom work, not to mention advocating on behalf of these communities while making radio shows important components of intercultural curriculum in schools. Our efforts focus on observing both the potential and the limitations of this new variable in schools.

Contextual Data

Project Objective:

Children with community support strengthen their personal and sociocultural identity. They redevelop their oral culture and become key figures in their society.

Anticipated Results:

- Children use radio to strengthen their sociocultural and personal identity.

- Instructors teach following IBE (Intercultural Bilingual Education) guidelines to develop oral ability and critical thinking in children.
- Andean communities contribute their knowledge, cultural reasoning and values to strengthen their children's IBE.

Previously we focused on twenty-three rural schools and communities in the southern Andes: ten communities in the Chinchaypuya district of the Anta province, five communities located in various provinces (Paruro, Paucartambo, Calca, Quispicanchis), and eight in the Lares en Calca district. Geographically, these communities are situated on three Andean altitudinal levels.

As a radio experiment, programs employed two regional commercial radio stations that cover close to ten provinces in the state of Cusco (including Cusco) and six other community stations to broadcast the show.

The project centers on the development of two core concepts: advocacy and interculturalism. The two cross the various programs strategies used to:

- A.- Concurrently produce radio shows from schools and communities themselves along with those from our Communication Center.
- B.- Implement a system of pedagogical support for participating teachers that encourages reflection, uses intercultural radio material and strengthens basic ideas for intercultural exchange in relation to language and culture.
- C.- Monitor and follow the instructor's and the children's learning process.
- D.- Produce complementary printed material that incorporate local themes.

In the following I will attempt to explain how these two main ideas gain meaning and feeling when put into practice. I will also speculate about this project's potential, as well as discuss the program flaws and shortcomings.

Our Strengths: The Daily Insertion of Radio into Public Schools

1. Community and School Radio Programs

We involved participating schools and gave them a mic to produce their own shows. Each school commits to a specific date and prepares their show called Sisichakunaq Pukllaynin (The Ant Game) that will be heard at the agreed upon time (930 A.M.).

Everyone connects through the radio during class time. They use the broadcast to foster intercultural exchange and learning in the classroom. Hearing the voices validates their messages and ideas as it lifts the children's self esteem.

These handmade programs come from group interaction in the classroom. They describe events, interests and hopes in no more than fifteen minutes. The show's content (community places, people, plants, and agricultural activities) all come from children's cultural context. They open up new space to encourage learning outside the four walls of the classroom. It is really moving in this sense to see a group of children overcome their fear of the mic and record greetings to loved ones or tell stories from their communities in fluent Quechua.

In the words of the children:

“First we practice and then start recording songs. Some people make up riddles, others tell stories. In this one I was the potato worm. In that one the potato worm and the straw worm were arguing.”

“At first my knees shook. I was scared of what the microphone could do to me. Not any more, now I am happy.”

“I like what they sing. They do...The show is pretty, they send songs, greetings, recite poetry and give advice.”

Children from the Paro community

After three years of broadcasting the Sisichakunaq Pukllaynin, shows have become a part of these children’s lives. They anticipate their recording time and show a lot of interest not only in the school’s programs but in the broadcast of other programs as well. Recording visits are met with a lot of anticipation and enthusiasm on behalf of the children and instructors.

The children use jingles, voices, onomatopoeic sounds and sound effects creatively. Their reactions go from fear to personal affirmation knowing their ideas and messages are respected and confirmed in their own language and broadcast to not only their friends and family, but to other parts of the region. This way, Sisichakunaq Pukllaynin also holds a daily timeslot in the classroom and it is the children who ask to listen to, comment on and even critique each show.

In other radio shows, children are not the only ones who record. Parents, drawn in by the children’s shows, are there as well. The community reaffirms their identity when they record their religious rituals for the Q’uni Q’unicha program. For example offerings to the Earth are done in a certain way. Scenes, sound effects and feelings are incorporated with the understanding that these programs will be heard by their children and their instructors. The level of organization, self-confidence as well as personal and group affirmation is extremely high in these types of situations.

An important aspect to highlight, perhaps, is that absolutely all of the program topics prepared by the community are automatically given in Quechua and cover current local events and the up-to-date happenings of cosmopolitan yet provincial Cusco. Still, perhaps most noteworthy is the audience these radio programs reach. According to commercial radio listener polls both remote and metropolitan communities cannot pull themselves away from the radio, as they see themselves in these shows.

“Sisichas learn from what hear on the radio, and absorb that knowledge. This makes us happy.”

A mother from the Sunchumarca community

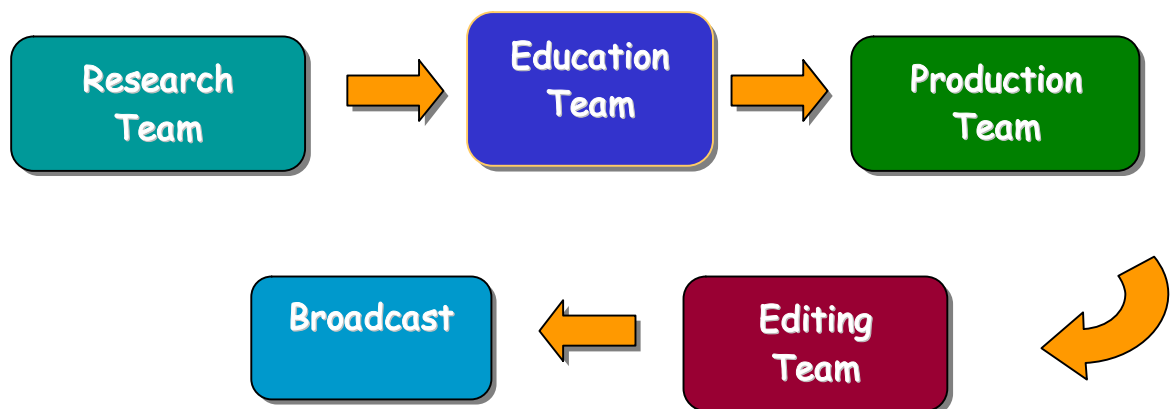
Sisichakuna Pukllaynin has given the children more oral ability to reach their full potential. They are not ashamed of expressing themselves or sharing their customs. They are proud of what they have and practice ayni, minka, meal rituals etc...They are no longer even afraid to greet or speak to visitors.

Pablo Paucar, Parqotika teacher

Our communities recognize their common origin; they feel like they belong to something bigger. There is no need for sermons nor discourse on intercultural exchange or about what works and what does not. The Cuscan collective shares their position through their validation and appreciation of these programs.

2.- Shows Produced by our Communication Headquarters

Building an intercultural experiment requires a team review of the internal communication system in order to find the best way to guarantee dialogue between sometimes very different professional ways of thinking. Therefore, we decided that our Communication Center (as described by ALER-2004 in one of their pieces entitled “Practice Inspires”) should include a production line that ensures interaction between all of the professionals working on the project. Each step of the process, therefore, becomes important. It is a chain that allows progression in the development educational material for radio.



The process begins with the work of the research team. The research team, after prior analysis and teacher conferences, outlines a guide to studying a specific aspect of life or piece of community knowledge the team would like to highlight. Armed with this information, the team sets out for the field and reports their findings. With classroom conditions and each program’s objectives in mind, this report is given to the education team who writes a review that focuses and measures the guide’s concepts. This critical review is subsequently given to the production team who is then in charge of developing a written guide. Finally the product goes through editing and phrasing to prepare it for broadcast. This process is repeated week after week for the four children’s programs produced in house. The fifth is produced by the individual schools.

Each step, in addition to being analyzed and evaluated for content, gets feedback. It is hard work, hard on activism and instrumentalization of some acts, but it encourages deep reflection on the intercultural aspects of the thoughts and ideas addressed.

Group dynamics teach us a lesson in patience and professional growth. They help us understand the different ways of thinking that drives

each professional's approach to social expression and complex cultures. For example, relating the multiple meanings dreams have for Andean families to our own understanding of dreams allows for true interdisciplinary discussion.

Daily programming covers many educational topics in hopes of maximizing the use of cultural information to nurture educational work in the classrooms of participating schools. Program topics are organized weekly. Each week covers a specific community's topic. This topic has many meanings depending on the day's objectives. I will now break down the educational objectives by day using our proposal on language and culture in schools as a guide.

Monday: Rural School Shows

These shows aim to strengthen oral culture as well as the self esteem of children in participating schools. Teachers design shows to encourage student participation, ensuring that thought organization and themes are built by the children. Each school prepares their show in advance according to these conditions. Individual schools record on an agreed upon date with the help of the project's traveling team. These shows are later edited and broadcast by radio stations hired for this purpose.

Tuesday: Stories, Myths and Legends

This time is set aside to encourage understanding of new ideas. Myths and legends support oral tradition and help maintain the transmission of ideas or communal knowledge. Stories and tales are one way knowledge is communicated because they share advice and thoughts about specific cultural values. Many adults agree that stories told by their parents or grandparents during their childhood deeply influence them. Contributing ethnographic research that recognizes local narrative register is vital to obtaining this kind of information.

Wednesday: Curriculum

A school that faces this intercultural educational challenge needs to think about how it thoughtfully approaches curriculum. For us, a specific concept can have many meanings. In order to find meaning in their work, teachers need to understand the significance these ideas have in their communities, tackle them, and build other intercultural concepts from them.

Wednesday's show shares (as always in Quechua) an idea from an Andean point of view to later counter from a western perspective. This is possible because research highlights precisely how children and the community feel about a chosen topic. Examples illustrate how the two coexist daily. The show is fun and entertaining. Shows approach topics using everyday examples, stressing their significance in a given context.

Thursday: Communication Issues in Spanish

Once academic issues have been addressed Spanish is used in conversation with the children and subsequent field observations are recorded. Names, places, sounds, everyday words and situations all facilitate understanding an idea. It is not just about translating the meaning of a word, but about communicating. To avoid only reinforcing comprehension, acquisition of a second language is approached from the most functional aspects of the language and is positioned within a communal context through experiences the children recognize.

Friday: Local Knowledge

Community is the central theme of the day. This show can incorporate a thought, a significant organization or productive experience and/or address an important historical figure from the community. The program describes the ideas central of the research project in a dramatic and fun way while concurrently describing a like or similar cultural activity from another part of the country or world.

Once these broadcasts have grabbed the children's attention, teachers develop complementary educational activities. These activities encourage the children to analyze or examine proposed ideas, to apply their ideas, to recognize differentiating cultural characteristics, and to think differently. Local knowledge is not, not just complementary of intercultural curriculum, it is the center of educational work.

Challenges and Dangers

Professional Dialogue: A Challenge

To truly further professional dialogue in rural schools we need to delve deeper in our understanding of the culture involved in this exchange. As educational intermediaries, teachers have the task of promoting teaching methods, implementing them and critically analyzing innovations in the classroom. I would like now to share some observations and questions concerning on the analytical process applied to the project, that have come out of our work.

1. The Danger of Translation

After listening to one of our shows a child asked:

“Right? I know which hand is right, Ms. This one is right and this one is left.”

Many asked what type of program they heard. The show was about a quaint little town's experience with women's rights. Clearly, the show's focus was on human rights. That's what we thought. This show, though engaging, had unintentionally oversimplified an abstract western or “modern” concept. Despite being broadcast in Quechua, it spoke in western terms.

Another telling example happened when we covered “dreams” in the Sunchumarka community. Teachers revealed that this intercultural educational endeavor involved more than just finding a fun and exciting way to explain in Quechua what happened inside the minds of children when they dreamed. How do you explain to a child, even in their native language, what is happening in their head when this same child believes there are three types of spirits and that dreams are one of them?

Professional dialogue does not stop with the use of language. It is crucial that the beliefs of the community be understood, valued, and that they propel learning. Understanding of ideas that do not exist in Andean culture require closer points of reference so children can reinvent ideas and images while enriching their communities' cultural identity.

The last, just as illustrative example, involves an activity one teacher developed from a show. The show's topic was water and sure enough it involved a trip to the river for an experiment. The teacher was extremely surprised to find a student off to the side of the river, refusing to participate in this thought-provoking exercise. As the teacher drew closer, she realized the student was thanking the earth and the water. This child could not think of doing anything before asking permission of those beings that for her, had life. It is clear we need to incorporate those who agree to culture redevelopment along with our linguistic concerns.

2. Advocacy vs. Radio Formats

Promoting the appropriation of media on behalf of the participants means reconsidering the way they are allowed to access it. Often children or peasant shows are organized using formats and script development styles we are unfamiliar with, esthetically inconsistencies abound. For example, what is more important, a pretty voice, or that a shy child dares to stutter during the show? Who says a show broadcast by peasants is boring if they are sharing themselves as simply and ceremoniously as they would during a town gathering? What does this show mean to the thousands of peasants who hear it?

For peasants, show organization is linear and lacks narration. Hosts respond to the communities' hierarchical social organization. To them, this experience involves presenting the ideas and sound effects they feel are necessary in a creative way.

It is interesting to note that prefabricated sound effects do not have the same meaning to them. In the Wankankalla community, peasants recorded a show on offerings to the Earth where they included the use of coca leaves during a highpoint of the ceremony. To us it was obvious that the sound of the leaves rustlings, one against the other, should be included in the recording. Yet they felt that sound did not infer the use of that specific plant. They used the sound of a plastic bag. This community no longer carries coca leave in a cloth bag or *chuspa*, but in a plastic bag. This sound is a clear sign of the presence of coca.

It was difficult for these peasants to comprehend that this program was going to be heard by others who have not had this cultural experience. Ritualistic offering to the Earth cannot be altered for the sake of radio. It would not be believable.

The same happens to peasants and children during recording. They forget about the mic and perform trying to not make a mistake the entire show. Avoiding mistakes is a mark of success, preparation and organization.

How does that point where the process becomes almost ceremonial affect advocacy? What is the role of a show's producer who has a professional mindset? Also please note that the shows produced by individual schools and communities attract a large audience and are preferred by the listening public as a whole.

3. Mental Representations of Sound Effects

Often we use sound patterns considered universal to describe time and space. Yet, what pictures do children of oral cultures see when they hear these sounds? In monitoring our programs we have seen how difficult it can be for these children to imagine two sequential scenes that occur in two totally separate physical spaces. For children in the city, time and space arise from the use certain melodies or musical interludes. The children we work with, conversely, do not necessarily establish that relationship. This means more research into the sound elements that facilitate understanding. Research that does not just involve understanding sounds that belong to the community, but the meaning they hold in the overall mental design of our indigenous population.

Once a peasant had a hard laugh over the bell sound used to announce town gatherings. The sound comes from their respective community but does not mean the same thing we were presenting in the show. On the other hand, we know from shows made by communities themselves, that the people gather in the same space at one specific time and from there narrate all their experiences. Travel from one space to another, from one time to another, does not exist. Everything occurs in the immediate present.

Perhaps one the most intense experiences has been to learn that even today, in communities no more than three hours outside of Cusco where radio has played an important role for years, children are afraid of the microphone. They are afraid of what it can do, afraid of the idea that something might happen. This fear marks the children's immediate reaction and it takes time to earn their trust, keep them calm and help them understand that it is there to serve them. Also, understand that this fear will never be put into words, but displayed in shy and tentative behavior.

4. The Perceived "Other"

It is very difficult for children of these communities, who in many cases have never been to Cusco, to image other countries or events that take place in other parts of the world that are often the object of our shows. The balance between local and global, in knowing and valuing the other while affirming oneself is sometimes extremely difficult. It is very hard for our shows to capture "the outside" not as something to be jealous of, but as something that shares in the wealth of knowledge. In this way this initiative is based on allowing voices, tones, sounds, music and noises to come close and help us imagine something different than what we know.

It is interesting to note that when these programs are rebroadcast in the city at night, the "others" become the Andean communities, so close yet so far from the city. Feeling their presence offers these new generations in Cusco the opportunity to identify with their complex yet rich reality, see possibility and discover what they share.

5. The Impact of Indigenous Languages

As an educational initiative operating within intercultural framework, it is challenging for us to develop radio material that fosters the bilingual process in the children. We turn to Fernando Garcia's⁴ perspective theories and groundbreaking research on language in our culture to help us accomplish this task.

Here we are examining the various **communicative situations** and **forms of discourse** children develop in daily interactions with family and friends while also looking at spheres of language use in order to discuss children's rich vocabulary (Bajtin 1999: 248).

In a 2004 report Garcia says the following:

From very early on children in our communities look to their parents for guidance, follow their elders and instinctively learn from their own experiences; through the explanatory discourse that surrounds them.

As we followed children of Pilco Chacon family in Sunchumarca we witnessed all the knowledge the children had about different elements within their natural surroundings that are in used in shepherding. To shepherd, the children travel over many different lands rich with flora, fauna and local myths.

*[...] In shepherding, children engage in **explicative discussions** of their natural surroundings, **manners of speaking in games** they use to practice daily adult practices such as taming horses and bulls, soil preparation for the growing season, different social representations in playing "hacendado" (cattle rancher) or with their cars. At the same time they **speak a certain way when reaching agreements** about their roles in the animal city or talking about avoiding the dangers that come with shepherding in places where there is no one to be found except for a few other children shepherding off somewhere in the distance. The children demonstrate the **pragmatic knowledge** they have of fruits, roots and animals as they **discuss** names of resources and property. They do not just mention their names but explain how they have tasted certain fruits and edible roots. The richness of the knowledge these children contain does not just demonstrate their different **ways of speaking** during shepherding but also discloses the rich **vocabulary** concerning flora, fauna and ecological space that are not generally mentioned in Quechua dictionaries from Cusco for fear of being to regional.*

If we have witnessed such rich linguistic discourse in just one day of observation, imagine the potential knowledge of discourse, cogniscience, and practices of children participating in local activities we are missing. Bajtin says we have just as many

⁴ Linguist Fernando Garcia is a researcher who studied the use of language for the Radio Project.

areas of discussion as the number of various social activities of the local population.

If we approach this rich knowledge with the same appreciation and freedom as the teachers, who acknowledge indigenous children as quiet, timid and unaware, we could understand what it would take to breakdown the walls of the school and allow all aspects of our children's experience to enter in.

Spanish and Quechua radio programs follow this principle. They share the communicative and cognitive ability of the children in familiar and common contexts. These shows do not push assimilation; instead they aspire to encourage intellectual growth, first in one language, then in the other.

According to Fernando code variation and language barrowing are "communication strategies for bilinguals in intercommunicative situations." This idea gives dimension to the learning ability of children and consequently gives it a strong foundation free from prejudice or discrimination.

All of these radio programs come from the communicative situations of children and employ the type of discourse they use. At the same time they try to intentionally demonstrate the variety or particularities of the language in relation to terms, forms of discourse and ideas from other unfamiliar parts of the region. Language standards then become a part of daily group discussion.

On the other hand, as a language initiative, empowering the development of oral culture in our communities is essential, and it understands that this is a thoughtful learning process meant to apply a little more information to the context of each community.

We acknowledge that it makes no sense to approach something written in class without previously exploring the linguistic wealth of our culture's oral expression. From here discussions, messages and styles of written expression find meaning. Those who follow NLS (new literacy studies) believe that this is possible because no "right" or "correct" way of reading and writing exists. They feel ways of writing and meanings are a product of culture, history and dialogue (Kapitzke 1995).

Finally, I would like to say that taking on an innovative challenge such as this, means professionally and personally absorbing new of ways thinking and of living. This discovery is probably has no rational explanation, but it enhances our profession as well as out soul.

Our job will never be done if cultural rediscovery is unilateral. This means two ways of thinking need to change as people meet and agree to value each other equally.

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