Chapter 17

ICTs in Schools and Their Relationship with Indigenous Communities of Patagonia

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ABSTRACT

UNESCO indicates that one of the biggest problems we face in the early twenty-first century is the abolition of differences between individuals and cultures. Intercultural education is therefore paramount. With their potential for allowing members of different countries and cultures to meet and interact, ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) offer an interesting array of tools for tackling this matter. Argentina acknowledges the right of indigenous people to access bilingual and intercultural education, and seeks to improve teachers’ skills to achieve a better quality of education that allows equal opportunities. However, the reality is that schools in the Patagonian province of Neuquén are still far from achieving this target. This article presents data on the use of ICTs in Patagonian schools, based on the opinion of students from both aboriginal and urban backgrounds. It also analyzes the relationship between students’ performance and the use of technological tools.

INTRODUCTION

Since the reform of the Argentinean Constitution in 1994, the government has always acknowledged the ethnic and cultural pre-existence of aboriginal people. This implies the recognition of the multicultural and multiethnic nature of our country, at the same time demanding its respect and appraisal. Argentina addressed this issue at the 169th convention of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on Indigenous and Tribal People which was implemented from 2001 onwards, in this way promoting the “respect and appraisal of cultural diversity and constitutionally acknowledging the rights of the indigenous population”.

From that reform onwards the right of these aboriginal people to a bilingual and intercultural education was also granted. This right has not been
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fully implemented yet, although partial improvements have been made towards this national goal.

Taking the new National Education Law of 2006 as a starting point, the need to provide schooling for all Argentineans, disregarding their race, creed, location, age, etc., has been stated, aiming for an education system that grants opportunities to all its participants in order to obtain a quality education (Hernández & Calcagno, 2003). We understand that the educational system cannot waste this opportunity to amend its mistakes and inequalities, or at least, to attempt that change.

The new didactic and technological tools, above all those known as ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), have become an integral part of everyday life, but have had little effect on the aboriginal students of the Neuquén province. Some students feel comfortable with the arrival of these tools because they see advertisements on the Internet, on television, at the cinema, or hear them on the radio (Bautista, 2004; Mominó, Sigalés & Meneses, 2008), whereas others may feel a certain sense of rejection. Outside of school, for these youths ICTs represent something close to amusement, while for adults they mean the possibility of further integration into the labor market. For both groups, ICTs represent the attractive possibility of communicating and feeling part of a group.

The reality is that new technologies are spreading worldwide due to globalization and openly becoming the transmitters of a neoliberal consumerist model around the planet by means of the so-called Information Society (Murillo García, 2010; Ferrer, 2010; Ferrán et al., 2010). By undertaking a comparison between the appearance of print and public schooling, we can infer that we are on the brink of a great change in the traditional educational model, in which all the education providers are daily participants and should have full responsibility in the aforementioned change.

The National Education Law is clear in its meaning, and in Chapter 1, Article 11, it promotes two essential topics for education in the Patagonian region: “To develop the required competencies for the use of the new languages triggered by the information and communication technologies. To ensure respect for these indigenous peoples’ language and cultural identity, promoting the value of multiculturalism in the students’ education”.

Figure 1. “Conectar Igualdad” portal

![Conectar Igualdad portal](image_url)
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