



## Critical Pedagogies for Reappraising Indigenous Knowledge and Diversity in Rural Peru: The Voices of Two Rural Teachers

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### Abstract

Rural schools and communities in Peru are rich in cultural diversity in Indigenous languages and traditions, but rural areas remain the most disadvantaged regions. Peru's educational policies are neoliberal and have hindered opportunities for the rural population to receive a high quality education with a critical reappraisal of their cultural backgrounds. Within this scenario, critical perspectives in education have emerged from the voices of historically marginalised educational actors: rural teachers. Two rural teachers from small towns in Cusco and Ayacucho (in the southern highlands of Peru) participated in narrative research to explore their practices of social justice in education. The aim of this paper is to examine their practices through critical pedagogies. The findings reveal that a crucial role of the Indigenous language, Quechua, is in making an inclusive reappraisal of the local culture. The teachers sought to empower their pupils by applying Freirean concepts of critical consciousness and dialogue through creative activities. They acknowledged the role of parents and the community who value diversity and local culture and support their critical pedagogical practices in schools. In this case, social justice in education was addressed by valuing Indigenous culture and placing it in dialogue with Western knowledge.

**Keywords:** *critical pedagogies, Freire, Peruvian rural teachers, Quechua, social justice in education*

### Introduction

Diversity is one of the main characteristics of rural education in Peru. The country hosts 48 Indigenous languages across the Amazon and the highlands, with Quechua the most widely spoken. Although Quechua has been an official language beside Spanish since 1975, historical exclusion and discrimination against native cultures have been a constant throughout the 20th century. These issues have impacted rural education; children from rural areas live in poverty and do not achieve expected competencies in literacy and numeracy skills compared to students in urban areas.

In the Latin American context, neoliberalism has become hegemonic in the last 30 years, with Peru adopting this model in 1990. Within neoliberalism, the purpose of education is conceived in human capital terms and can be reduced to the economic production functions of investment, choice and results (Banya, 2010; Rizvi, 2009; Schultz, 1961). For Harvey (2007), neoliberalism implied a maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms which emphasise private property rights and individual liberty. However, neoliberalism has affected communities differently, creating further disparities between a minority who have benefitted from this model and more than one third of the population still living in poverty and exclusion.

Even though some policies have been approved since 1972 in favour of Indigenous populations and intercultural bilingual education in Peru, there are social issues related to racism and

historical exclusion that could be addressed by critical approaches in education. Critical pedagogies (Fischman & Haas, 2009; Giroux, 2010; Kincheloe, 2012) offer an approach for reappraising Indigenous knowledge and building fairer societies under a social justice paradigm where teachers have a key role. Critical pedagogy is rooted in principles which promote the construction of equitable power relations in different areas of human life through participation (Jara Holliday, 2018). Within critical pedagogy, teachers have a central role in maintaining or challenging educational systems. They need to engage in debates in order to promote spaces for taking critical stances and enacting social justice within their own and others' practices (Giroux, 2013).

Within this scenario marked by profound injustices under the hegemony of neoliberal policies, rural teachers in Peru remain severely affected by deep-rooted inequalities. Those who are engaged in the practice of critical pedagogies do not have a relevant position within official channels. To expand their voices, this paper explores social justice practices through critical pedagogies from the voices of two rural teachers. Through narratives (Jones & Walton, 2018), the paper explores their practices in their communities in Cusco and Ayacucho. Narratives are a tool for engaging with issues of diversity, inequality and injustice by fostering identification, facilitating reflexivity and historicity, and understanding context (Jones & Walton, 2018).

The first section of the paper contextualises rural education in Peru, highlighting the main features alongside key elements of the three periods of Peruvian rural education (Ames, 2010). A summary of the main social indicators illustrates the current situation of rural education. The section that follows focuses on the study's theoretical framework and gives an overview of the concepts of critical consciousness and dialogue within critical pedagogies. The next section introduces the methodology. The findings and discussion are integrated for analysing teachers' practices of social justice, and the conclusion offers a summary of the paper's key arguments.

### **Contextualising Rural Education in Peru**

Defining rurality in Peru is complex as there is no single definition. Based on official statistics, rurality can be linked to residence in one of the natural regions (coast, highlands, or the Amazon). The distribution of the total population among natural regions shows a pattern of urban concentration, due to migration from rural to urban areas since the 1940s (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017). Although the population in the highlands has decreased over the last 70 years, 28% of the Peruvian population still lives in these areas (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017; Montero & Uccelli, 2023).

Furthermore, rurality in Peru is closely linked to ethnic and linguistic diversity. According to official statistics, 25.8% of the total population identify as Indigenous peoples (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017). From this group, 16% declare a native language such as a mother tongue (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017). Among these Indigenous languages, Quechua, Aymara and Ashaninka are spoken by the majority of speakers.

Ames (2010) identified three distinct periods in modern Peruvian history, offering an overview of rural education from the mid-20th century until the present. A description of these follows.

#### **1950–1970: Modernisation Led by the State**

The first period between 1950 and 1970 was characterised by a process of modernisation led by the state. It included two important milestones: the agrarian reform of 1969 and the educational reform of 1974 during the military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado. The pedagogical critical movements led by popular organisations and social movements emerged during this period, inspired largely by Paulo Freire's work (Jara Holliday, 2018).

This period was characterised by the developmental state, an economic model of import substitution industrialisation which promoted a leading role for state apparatus through the

explosive growth of schooling rates and promoting access to free education. From this model in Latin America between 1960 and 1970, the growth rates of higher education and secondary education were 247.9% and 258.3% respectively (Torres, 2001). In Peru in 1960, 40.6% of children and youth between 6 and 23 years old were enrolled in the educational system (Degregori, 1991). Regarding enrolment, Schiefelbein (1997) pointed out that during these decades the expansion of educational provision allowed access for the majority of school-age children and, as a consequence, the years of schooling were thus extended.

In the same way, the provision of nutrition services was achieved, as well as the minimum resources necessary for educational tasks (Schiefelbein, 1997). Likewise, as part of this state model, there was a massive incorporation of women into basic education, thus contributing to the universalisation of education and including many of those who were not previously part of the school systems (Puiggrós, 1999).

Decades later, the military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–1975) undertook a set of reforms under the *Inca Plan* (Cuenca, 2013). One of the most important actions was the agrarian reform which was implemented in 1969 to dismantle the powerful landowning oligarchy in the country and thus end the subordination and exploitation of peasants and Indigenous communities (Eguren, 2006). The other significant reform was carried out in the educational field. For the government, education was one of the fundamental pillars of change in society. In this regard, the educational model sought to establish education for the transformation of the entire society, thereby contributing to the self-assertion and independence of the country. According to Oliart (2011),

*an important part of this process was to propose and disseminate a specific vision of the country and its history, not only within the educational system, but also throughout society and through all possible means. Each person and each medium then became a vehicle and an opportunity to raise awareness and educate ... to free people from cultural domination.*  
(p. 38)

Within this period, critical pedagogy emerged elsewhere in Latin America. According to Jara Holliday (2018), critical pedagogy refers to a sociocultural phenomenon linked to Latin American history and connected to multiple practices with a transformative purpose. It is based on a philosophy of educational praxis as a political-pedagogical process which conceives of the human being as a creative subject. In particular, critical pedagogy conceived the school as more than just a place where knowledge is disseminated. It had to be a place where students could interpret and process their own experiences as part of a whole society marked by poverty, gender disparities and discrimination (Moragues, 1996). Paulo Freire, a Brazilian teacher, is credited as the founder of critical pedagogy through his renowned book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1967.

This period is also important for diversity and for multilingual matters. In 1972, during the Velasco government, the Peruvian state approved the first *National Policy on Bilingual Education* (Trapnell & Neira, 2004). Although it did not mention the concept of interculturality, where Western knowledge is in dialogue with Indigenous culture for mutual enrichments, it was the first to recognise the multicultural reality and diversity of the country (Trapnell & Neira, 2004).

### **1980–1990: Civil War and its Impact on Education**

The second period, between 1980 and 1990, revealed a deep crisis, including the armed conflict when rural regions such as Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurímac were deeply affected by civil war. Education was impacted significantly by violence, conflict and authoritarianism.

This period was marked by the beginning of armed conflict through a civil war declared by the Peruvian Communist Party Sendero Luminoso (in English, Shining Path). Given the existing inequalities in the educational sector, Shining Path sought to normalise and instrumentalise

violence and ideological dogmatism, in order to gain an important foothold within the educational sector (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003). The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003) found veiled racism and discrimination in Peruvian society against peasants, rural communities and Indigenous peoples, with a particular indifference and tolerance towards acts considered clear human rights violations.

As a result, the instrumentalisation of an authoritarian pedagogical discourse within the educational sector was a key factor which subversive groups like the Shining Path took advantage of to attract and involve teachers and students in their fight against the Peruvian state (Sandoval, 2004). During this period, there was no office specifically dedicated to rural education. The general directorates by level (pre-school, primary and secondary) were in charge of all schools without distinction to type of residence (Montero & Uccelli, 2023). Even in this difficult period, the Peruvian state approved the *Intercultural Bilingual Education Policy* in 1989. This policy was the first to include the concept of intercultural education, but the approach limited the inclusion of the knowledge and culture of Indigenous speakers (Trapnell & Neira, 2004).

### **1990–Present: The Expansion of Neoliberalism**

The third period, from 1990 until the present, began with the expansion of neoliberalism imposed by the World Bank. It was characterised by liberalisation, privatisation and a diminishing role for the state within these reforms. This period marks the onset of neoliberal policies being enacted in Peru.

Following these principles, structural adjustment programs were imposed by the World Bank. Fujimori's government (1990–2000) applied neoliberal policies, ostensibly to recover Peru from the economic crisis inherited from the Garcia administration during the 1980s. The Peruvian state approved the *Intercultural and Bilingual Intercultural Education Policy* in 1991, where interculturality became a guiding principle of education, with the diversity of cultures and languages recognised (Trapnell & Neira, 2004). Subsequent governments have maintained the policy, but it has not received priority attention in terms of budget and the development of interculturality in education. Moreover, intercultural bilingual education in Peru is a declaratory policy that has not removed the historical structures of power and exclusion affecting Indigenous populations (Walsh, 2009).

Although rural education is not limited to intercultural bilingual education, interculturality has been important to make rural education visible. Having a comprehensive policy was made to seem urgent. Likewise, Peru ratified the *International Labour Organization Convention 169* in 1994 to recognise the cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous communities, alongside important policies like the *Intercultural and Bilingual Intercultural Education Policy* (Trapnell & Neira, 2004).

Years later, in 2016, the *Sectoral Policy on Intercultural Education and Intercultural Bilingual Education* (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2016) was approved. This policy aims to guarantee relevant and quality learning for young children through the reappraisal of their cultural and linguistic diversity, and includes general aspects of interculturality, implementation routes and complementary national policies. Another important milestone was the approval of the *Education Policy for the Population in Rural Areas* (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2018). This seeks to ensure quality education and the expansion of opportunities for children, adolescents, young people, adults and older adults living in rural areas. Despite these advances in policies for the rural sector and intercultural bilingual education, rural education continues to face serious problems, in terms of the quality of educational provision and a lack of pedagogical materials and teachers prepared to deal with diversity and complexity.

### **Key Social Indicators of Rural Education in Peru**

Regarding social indicators, rural areas of Peru have historically lagged behind their urban counterparts. Due to the historical abandonment by the Peruvian state and the lack of social services in these areas, statistics show a complex panorama. For instance, poverty in rural areas is higher (41.1%) than urban areas (24.1%). The rural highlands have 44.1% of their population living in poverty, the highest percentage when compared to the coast and the Amazon regions (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2022). Only 6.7% of the population with a native mother tongue is able to access university studies, compared to 22.8% of the population without a native mother tongue (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017).

Housing is another indicator that shows that 50.6% of those with an Indigenous mother tongue live in adobe or bamboo housing, compared to 23% of the population without an Indigenous mother tongue (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017). Similarly, 50.2% of the population with an Indigenous mother tongue uses firewood for cooking, compared to 23.1% of those without an Indigenous mother tongue (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017).

Regarding educational indicators, the illiteracy rate has reached 16.1% among those whose mother tongue is an Indigenous language, compared to just 3.6% of those whose mother tongue is not a native language (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017). National assessments on quality education reveal that 66.4% of children in Huancavelica do not achieve the expected level in literacy for Year 2 (primary level). The other rural regions in the country have similar statistics: Cajamarca (72.6%), Apurímac (62.5%), Ayacucho (65.7%), Cusco (59.3%). By contrast, urban regions show better results: Tacna (44.4%), Moquegua (47%). In numeracy the results are even lower. For instance, more than 80% of students do not reach the expected level for Year 2: Huancavelica (87.6%), Cajamarca (90.6%), Apurimac (85.1%), Ayacucho (89.2%), Cusco (86.4%) (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2022).

Although these challenges are historic, rural education in Peru has not been prioritised as an educational policy. Across decades, rural education has been overshadowed by investments in quality education, infrastructure and technology in urban areas. Moreover, rural education as a category for tracking public expenditure in Peru is one of the biggest absences in government policies. Initiatives and efforts in the rural field are disconnected and non-articulated in public policies (Montero & Uccelli, 2023). As Montero and Uccelli pointed out, the commitment to improve rural education has been fragile and belated in the neoliberal governance of the last 30 years, as rural spaces are considered to be historically backward with a tendency towards extinction, and therefore not worth investing in. Despite this difficult panorama, most rural teachers, parents, children and whole communities in the Andes of Peru have been trying to deal with these issues while implementing social justice practices through critical pedagogies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical pedagogies emerged from Paulo Freire's work in north-eastern Brazil during the 1960s. The approach combines "*liberation theology ethics and critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany*" (Kincheloe, 2012, p. 151). The publication of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1967 had a profound impact over pedagogical practice, teacher education and educational scholarship in Latin America and across the world (Kincheloe, 2012). Within this approach, schools are seen not only as spaces of instruction or socialisation, but also as cultural and political spaces which activate empowerment and the self-transformation of students and their communities.

In this sense, schools are spaces of both domination and liberation (McLaren, 2002). This critical view opposes the neoliberal model of education, where education is seen as an investment and schools are seen as the places where students need specific skills, attitudes and knowledges to succeed in the solely market-oriented workplace. In contrast, through a Freirean lens,

*pedagogy is not a method or an a priori technique to be imposed on all students but a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy. (Giroux, 2010, p. 716).*

This is pertinent in contexts which are marked by deep injustices, such as rural contexts within Peru, where “*there are many sides to a problem, and often these sides are linked to certain class, race, and gender interests*” (McLaren, 2002, p. 62). Critical educators struggle for a better life through a society based on social justice and non-exploitative social relations (McLaren, 2002). Hence, critical pedagogy emphasises the intrinsic relationship between educational and social transformation, in order to break all forms of oppression and injustice (Fischman & Haas, 2009).

In particular, Freirean concepts such as critical consciousness and dialogue are necessary for breaking social injustices. Critical consciousness is characterised “*by depth in the interpretation of problems, by the substitution of causal principles of magical explanations, by the testing of one’s ‘findings’ and by openness to revision ... by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics*” (Freire, 1974, p. 14). In particular, the concept of critical consciousness implies the relationship between consciousness, human action and the world that we are trying to change (Darder, 2015). For Freire, social circumstances were crucial to the formation of critical consciousness (Darder, 2015).

Dialogue refers to the encounters between women and men who name the world in an act of creation and re-creation. According to Freire (1970), this is only possible “*with love*” and without “*a relation of domination*” (p. 89). Furthermore, dialogue is expected between humans with cultural differences, in order to enrich their experiences and fight against oppression. To promote dialogue and critical consciousness, teachers have a central role. For Giroux (2013), educators must be “*transformative intellectuals,*” rather than being reduced to technicians who are engaged in formalistic tasks (p. 33). Giroux pointed out that teachers should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educators and active citizens. This implies a dynamic role with students, since education does not have the unique function of training students for a job; rather, it has “*to educate them to question critically the institutions, policies, and values that shape their lives, relationships to others, and myriad connections to the larger world*” (Giroux, 2013, p. 30).

Based on the review of the previous key concepts, I embrace critical pedagogy as a framework to challenge social structures and institutional contexts where injustices have occurred, like the Peruvian case. In this sense, critical pedagogy rails against the oppressive structures imposed by neoliberal governance as already discussed. Through the concepts of dialogue and critical consciousness, critical pedagogy highlights the importance of struggles for emancipation in the educational field.

## Methodology

To select the teachers as research participants, I established contact with the non-government organisation Tarea and the Fe y Alegría Jesuit network, which both have a long work history in rural education and in critical pedagogies in settings like Ayacucho and Cusco. The decision to focus on these regions was based on two reasons. Firstly, the Tarea and Fe y Alegría Jesuit networks had been working with teachers from these regions, so initial contact was established through these gatekeepers. Secondly, these are two of the poorest regions in Peru with a significant percentage of rural inhabitants (Ayacucho, 42%; Cusco, 39%). Cusco was the capital of the Inca empire before the Spanish colonisation and Ayacucho was one of the most affected regions after the armed conflict (1980–2000). In Ayacucho, more than 40% of its population live under the poverty line, while in Cusco this percentage is 30% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2022).

The teachers who took part in the whole study were seven rural teachers working in rural schools in Cusco and Ayacucho. They were selected using three criteria:

- at least five years of teaching experience working with critical pedagogies/social justice approaches in rural areas of Peru;
- identified themselves as critical educators;
- had trajectories not only as teachers, but also as activists, leaders or members of networks working in line with critical pedagogy, social justice education, or related areas within their communities.

For this paper, I have included the voices of two teachers: one male teacher from Cusco and one female teacher from Ayacucho.

The study followed a narrative approach, because people are inherently storytellers who tell about the plural ways they “*experience the world*” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative inquiry embraces narrative “*as both the method and phenomena of study*” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). Within the educational field, the experiences of and stories from teachers and learners may help to illuminate larger scale social narratives (Dwyer et al., 2017). As Clandinin (2013) pointed out, an exploration of what individuals constitute, express and enact can provide insights into social, cultural, familiar and institutional narratives.

Within my study, narrative inquiry provided a way of understanding how the voices of teachers in relation to their pedagogical practices of social justice were working in rural Peru. Narrative inquiry allows for the possibility of exploring multiple contexts, such as spatial, cultural, institutional and social contexts (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Riessman (2008) explained that

*individuals use these stories to mobilise others and to foster a sense of belonging. Narratives do political work. The social role of stories – how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world – is it an important facet of narrative theory. (p. 21)*

This political dimension is fundamental for Peruvian teachers working in rural areas because they have been historically marginalised from the official channels. In summary, following a qualitative perspective, the evidence was generated in contextual settings which are understood as value laden. In this sense, the use of narratives within a qualitative approach allowed me to gain deep immersion into teachers’ stories.

The narrative inquiry method uses in-depth interviews (also known as unstructured interviews). I used this tool to grasp the teachers’ stories about their experiences and meanings around social justice in education. From a qualitative approach, in depth-interviews are understood as a form of conversation (Burgess, 1982). Following Ritchie et al. (2014), the interviews used open questions to allow the participants to express their ideas without the restrictions of closed questions that require yes/no answers. In this sense, based on the model of Riessman (1993), the following broad questions were used in the interviews:

- How did you decide to become a teacher? Could you share about this experience?
- You said you had ... (Example: a very difficult experience teaching in rural schools). Can you tell me a bit more about this experience?
- How did you start your engagement with critical pedagogies? Could you tell me about this experience?
- How do you apply critical pedagogies in the classroom with children? Could you provide some examples?
- In your own words, what is social justice in education for you? Why?

From these broad questions, I held extensive dialogues with the two teachers in their local schools over a period of four months. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and I translated them into English. Given the narrative inquiry approach, the in-depth interviews were

conversations delving into the teachers' experiences and values of social justice in education. My role as a researcher was to be an effective listener and see the interviewee as a storyteller rather than a respondent (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

Following Polkinghorne (1995), I used paradigmatic analysis (analysis of narratives) for the teachers' stories. This type of analysis is focused on descriptions of themes across stories or in taxonomies of types of stories including characters and settings. I chose this analysis since I was interested in finding common elements from the teachers' stories. A paradigmatic analysis "looks for patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes across an individual's experience and within a social setting" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). Two common themes related to community work to reappraise Quechua and the practices of social justice are presented in this paper.

The study was given ethical clearance through the University of Bristol, UK.

## Findings

### ***Teachers' Voices from Rural Cusco Reappraising Indigenous Culture and Diversity***

Amaru and Urpi (pseudonyms) were two teachers from rural Cusco and Ayacucho. Amaru was an art teacher at both primary and secondary level and Urpi taught all subjects at primary level in an intercultural bilingual school (where studying Quechua was compulsory). Both were working with students and the community to reappraise native culture in the Andes through critical pedagogies. From here on, the teachers will be referred to with the title *Teacher*. In Peru, that title precedes the name of a person who teaches. It is used as a sign of respect and it gives prestige to the teacher.

Teacher Amaru was born in Tinta, Cusco. His hometown is an historical place; this was also the hometown of Tupac Amaru II, a cacique (hereditary chief) who led the largest uprising in Peruvian colonial history which raged across the Andes from 1780 to 1783. Teacher Amaru studied arts at the Bellas Artes School (School of Fine Arts). Critical thinking was integral to his conception about art and education. He held a critical view of Spanish colonisation and its influence. He started as a teacher influenced by pedagogies. He explained:

*Teaching is a job that I love. But the education system is where they have taken art out. They do it on purpose; we do not want someone to sow here; they get to primary school; it is also a "filler" course; they do not have a specialist art teacher. In high schools they do not train the teacher in initial training [about] what they are going to do with art with the children. They focus on mathematics, communication, but they don't focus on creativity.*

Teacher Amaru was making the argument for creativity in education by critiquing the focus in teacher training on numeracy and literacy, which are subjects included as part of national assessments led by the Ministry of Education.

Teacher Urpi was born in Ayacucho in the south highlands of Peru. She was a female rural teacher with 13 years' experience in rural schools in the Ayacucho region. Although she was not a Quechua native speaker, she decided to learn Quechua after her first engagement with children as a student teacher:

*I was not a Quechua speaker. When I went to school all the children spoke Quechua; I was desperate; it was a very helpless situation, because I could not understand what they wanted to say to me. That is when I said to myself: I have to speak Quechua. I said to the teachers at school, you have to speak to me in Quechua. It was difficult for me; I understood some of the language, but very little. So, I said to my parents at that time: You have to speak to me in Quechua, otherwise I won't answer you. The rural school where I started working was a very different reality from the city, very precarious, and I needed to do something for the children and the community.*



Urpi graduated as a primary school teacher and started as an intercultural educator in rural Ayacucho.

### **Showing the Value and Pride of Being Quechua Through Social Justice Practices**

Both teachers encouraged their students to reflect critically on their own heritage and history. For example, Teacher Amaru illustrated how he was working with his students to think about the local culture, their culture, and to think about it positively:

*Teacher Amaru: Let's see. What are your surnames?*

*The students' reply: Mamani, Romuaja, Ñaupá*

*Teacher Amaru: Now I tell them, why don't they put two surnames together and come up with a name? For example, Mamami is Aymara, it is not Quechua [Mamani means eagle]; in the case of the Romuaja it is linked to nobility; they are tied to the Incas, to their nobility. The Ñaupá are the most visionary. The Ñaupá is the one who moves forth, the one who instinctively knows the way. We always need a Ñaupá as a guide. We teachers are also Ñaupá. So, I give each one a mission [based on their surnames and meanings] and they work together. So, it is how to bring that cosmovision to put each one "in their spirit." It's not monetary value; it's spiritual value. It's emotion.*

This example demonstrated one practice used by Teacher Amaru, whereby he attempted to empower the students by making their culture visible and showing its positive side. Experiencing discrimination for having a Quechua surname is a manifestation of everyday racism in Peru (Galarza et al., 2011). Most rural people are not proud of their heritage or are not even aware of these social issues (Thorp & Paredes, 2010), and Teacher Amaru was facing the challenge through these pedagogical activities. In this sense, Teacher Amaru's work regarding the identification of a spiritual side in the Inca surnames was also a practice to empower children.

Dialogue with grandparents was another teaching practice under a social justice approach. From Teacher Amaru's perspective:

*We are in touch with grandparents. So we talked in a meeting of just grandparents, another one with parents. We discussed what kind of world we live in and what we would give their children. We are trying to encourage them to give children their culture, their pride, their cultural heritage of humanity, because we live in a cultural heritage of humanity.*

From critical pedagogies, dialogue is a key component in the process of both learning and knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Furthermore, through dialogue, Teacher Amaru was promoting not only the awareness of the families' cultural roots but also the possibility to imagine what kind of world they would like to give to their children. This was a way to approach "the world critically, recovering the power to transform our lives as historical subjects" (Darder, 2015, p. 19).

Teacher Urpi explained that she encouraged the children to reappraise local culture through using cultural experiences beyond the classroom:

*Now we are in the month of Chuño [a freeze-dried potato traditionally made by Quechua and Aymara communities in Peru and Bolivia.] I asked them who is going to do that. We also do Cintachicuy [a cattle dance from the region of Ayacucho], where they put ribbons on the alpacas to distinguish them. We take advantage of this as local knowledge to turn it into pedagogical tools. We also watch dances; we show videos. Maybe there are no festivities like this before, but they do it through storytellers; they share a meal; each teacher sees how the strategy shows them. Now we see the comparison of local knowledge with the knowledge of other peoples. For example, I have shown them the knowledge of Puno [a Peruvian region in the southern highlands of the country]. They watch the video and I ask them what they think: How do you do it in your community, in Quechua?*

From this example, a practice of social justice is shown through the revalorisation of local festivities such as Cintachicuy and Chuño. Teacher Urpi reminds the students about the importance of Indigenous culture by creating meaningful interactions that support children to realise the tensions of inequality associated with class, race, sexuality and other forms of difference (Darder & Cronin, 2018). Although Teacher Urpi did not emphasise the body as part of the dances, it is important to link this with the critical pedagogy of the body discussed by Darder and Cronin (2018). According to them, the significance of the body as a terrain of emancipatory struggle is essential to comprehend the impact of oppressive domestication, as discussed by Freire (1974), which can limit the life choices and emancipatory objectives of the oppressed groups. Without an explicit mention of the critical pedagogy of the body, Teacher Urpi promoted dance and festivities as tools for reinforcing cultural ties, while revalorising Indigenous knowledge.

### **Community Work to Reappraise Quechua**

Community is central to implementing social justice practices in education, as Freire (1998) encouraged teachers to promote collective empowerment “to unveil truths about the world” (p. 88). Teacher Urpi was working with parents and grandparents in rural Ayacucho to build the community calendar in Vinchos [a small village in rural Ayacucho]. They included the festivities and collective activities relevant for the community, and these also became part of the workbooks for children. This was a process of wide public consultation with members of the Vinchos community, including parents, grandparents, representatives of the educational sector, churches and non-government organisations.

Teacher Urpi created a collective project using the Quechua language. The children collected stories from their parents and grandparents. Along with these narratives, children included art:

*We collected all the stories; the children used their tablets; they recorded their parents and grandparents narrating the stories to them. I made them listen to how their parents narrated so that they could narrate as well. Then I told them: Now you are going to write it down. In the process of writing, we included grammar and coherence. Then they narrated, wrote and read in their mother tongue. It was like storytelling. We have digitalised this experience. We have also made the sequence of that story. They have drawn; that's where art comes in; we have taught them artistic techniques. And we submitted the project to the Ministry of Education as part of the Good Teaching Practices competition.*

This is an example of intercultural education, where the Quechua culture was reappraised. Moreover, Teacher Urpi was making strong connections between children and their parents and grandparents. In other words, the school and community were working together in favour of intercultural bilingual education. For some authors, storytelling is a means for making sense of everyday experience with an educative effect (Jarrett, 2019; Shank, 2006).

Within traditional societies, storytelling is an important process whereby customs and values are taught and shared (Shank, 2006). Teacher Urpi had encouraged the children to talk to their parents and grandparents about the Quechua language and their culture. After this, the children were encouraged to take notes about these stories and write them down. Additionally, she organised workshops with the parents and grandparents in the community and through dialogues helped them to contribute to the communal calendar. The inclusion of grandparents and parents as storytellers was a pedagogical tool, not only to make children aware of their culture and social world, but also as a mean by which social change was enacted (Coulter et al., 2007). In this way, the stories from historically oppressed people can counter the stories of the oppressor (Tate, 1997).

However, according to Teacher Urpi, most parents were reluctant to include Quechua as part of this project, due to the strong discrimination it often entailed. Teacher Urpi recalled:

*At the beginning most parents didn't want to write in Quechua. They were not convinced; they wanted Spanish. I told them: No, it is important that you write in Quechua. I told them that when I came here, I did not know how to speak or write Quechua. I was taught by the children at school. If I did not know how to speak you would not know, I told them. A teacher, a doctor, a lawyer in rural areas always must know Quechua; it's not bad, I told them. That's how I encouraged them.*

*As a result of her work, Teacher Urpi was awarded the first prize in a Good Teaching Practices competition organised by the Ministry of Education in 2021. This competition recognised and disseminated the pedagogical practices developed by teachers to improve student learning.*

Teacher Amaru led a project called Wawa Inti Raymi, named after a ceremony called The Feast of the Sun Child. This ceremony was created by the Inca Pachacutec in 1430, in honour of Inti the Sun God, and it takes place every winter solstice (June 24 each year). The Wawa Inti Raymi project involved around 500 students from different schools in rural Cusco. It involved playing Inca games, with the children dressed like Incas. To learn from these ancient costumes, Teacher Amaru worked with parents and grandparents in different communities:

*We organised meetings with parents and grandparents. We discussed what kind of world we live in and what we would give our children. We asked them to give them their culture, their pride; we want them to give them their cultural heritage of humanity, because we live in a cultural heritage of humanity [city of Cusco], so we are filling the little children's thoughts with pride, and it feels super good for the emotional state of the children to wear an uncu [Inca tunic worn by men] and an acsu [Inca tunic worn by women].*

Through creating these experiences for children, the two teachers were implementing social justice practices that included language, dance, art and storytelling. The development of the individual, alongside the construction of a democratic community, is central to critical pedagogies (Kincheloe, 2012). Through dialogue and critical consciousness, Indigenous culture was being taught in the teachers' classrooms, as well as beyond these spaces by including the voices of the community. Moreover, both teachers were promoting students' agency, by allowing them opportunities to learn and to recognise themselves as agents. This is a "way to move students away from instrumentalised forms of learning and replaces these with pedagogical activities that ignite both their passion for learning and their creative engagement with the world around them" (Darder, 2015, p. 64).

However, Teacher Amaru was aware of the hegemony of neoliberal policies and banking education (Freire, 1970) over critical pedagogies. He reflected:

*I see that teachers are not committed to social justice. But I am also sometimes like them. For example, I am thinking about how many young students are going to go to university, those who are preparing for university exams; even though I have a different approach, I should not be thinking about universities. I am thinking like them, and I have an intercultural approach, but the teachers who do not have an intercultural approach, can you imagine? They are thinking about cost-benefit, about the banking education. So, we talk about how much you are going to earn, where you are going to go shopping, to see what is your socioeconomical level, what your spending capacity is, to see if you are middle class, upper class or poor. I think that's what they're thinking about.*

Teacher Amaru was describing how banking education operated in his context with a focus on exam results and cost-benefit logic. As Freire (1970) pointed out, "the theory and practice of banking education use verbalistic lessons, reading requirements and methods for evaluating 'knowledge' ... everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking" (p. 76). In

other words, banking education reinforces “*the objectification of students as static vessels to be filled with knowledge*” (Darder, 2015, p. 55).

Similarly, Teacher Urpi mentioned that her colleagues were still following Western principles and she tried to show them the power of Indigenous knowledge:

*My colleagues are always looking for me to ask me questions. We must take advantage of this knowledge from here (native knowledge) but not just leave it there. The two forms of knowledge [native and Western] must be consolidated in the children. It is not because you are Western that you have the last word [that you are superior]. There is knowledge here that is very useful. Many people here in the rural areas heal themselves with native plants and that is not written in a scientific book.*

Thus, the experiences of Teacher Amaru and Teacher Urpi illustrated a pathway where the Quechua culture was reappraised within the model of intercultural bilingual education led by the Ministry of Education. And these two teachers were also promoting practices where critical consciousness and dialogue were key concepts to discuss issues of historical racism and discrimination against Indigenous populations in the country.

### Conclusion

As the paper showed, despite some important advances such as the *Sectoral Policy on Intercultural and Bilingual Education* (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2016), rural education has never been a prioritised policy, nor has it received the necessary funding to close the educational inequality gaps. Within this complex scenario, rural education in Peru requires practices and voices from critical approaches to address these issues. Critical pedagogies (Darder, 2015; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1995) emerge as an approach to embrace diversity and break traditional ways of teaching and learning within the complex scenarios of educational inequalities.

From the voices of two rural teachers, the practices of social justice in education showed different examples for promoting Freirean (1970) concepts such as critical consciousness and dialogue. These practices included arts, dance and storytelling for reappraising Indigenous culture. For instance, festivities and the communal calendar were being promoted by these teachers to develop a critical reflection of their own identities. The two teachers also showed critical views of neoliberal governance, by questioning banking education and the historical abandonment of Quechua in Peru (Thorp & Paredes, 2010). Furthermore, these two teachers valued the role of parents and community in supporting their work around the revalorisation of the native language. These practices were aligned with critical pedagogies foundations within communities to stimulate critical thinking and reassess their Indigenous identities.

This study has limitations, because it only included two rural voices from teachers in two specific regions of Peru. Further studies are needed for analysing issues of social justice in education in other regions of the country. The Peruvian Amazon area, for example, hosts more than 40 Indigenous languages with issues around inclusion and social justice in education. Furthermore, a comparative study including countries that host important Indigenous populations, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, should be invited to contribute, as a way of enriching the debate in this field.

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