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Càtedra UNESCO
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AN ETHNOEDUCATIONAL PROJECT AMONG WICHI COMMUNITIES IN ARGENTINA: ACQUIRING LANGUAGE-AND- CULTURE KNOWLEDGE OUT OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Joan A. Argenter

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Institut d'Estudis Catalans

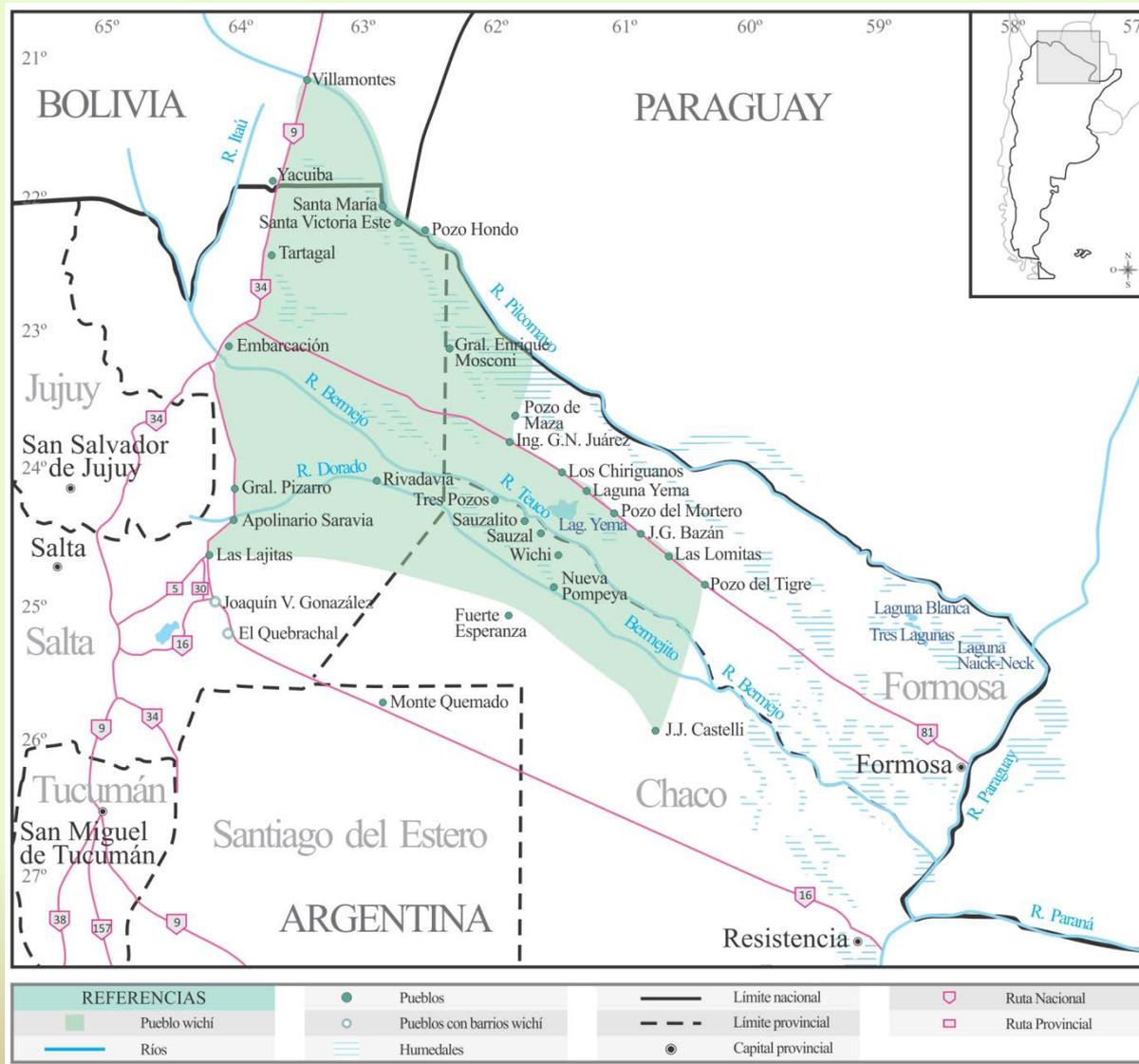
Virginia Unamuno

CONICET Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas - Instituto de
Lingüística, Universidad de Buenos Aires

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The Wichi communities in the Argentinian Chaco Map



The Wichi communities in the Argentinian Chaco

- The region of **Gran Chaco** extends across Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil.
- The **Wichi** are an indigenous people inhabiting Argentina (provinces of Chaco, Formosa and Salta). They totalize **ca. 50.000**.
- The Wichi language belongs to the **Matacoan** family.

- **School failure – abandonment – retake – illiteracy → Marginalisation**
- **Language and culture into school → Efficient and gratifying schooling**
- **Constitutional reform (1994) → Education Act (2006) → Intercultural bilingual education**
- **Lack of a clear national or provincial policy addressed to this end**



The educational linguist

Working **with** the community (elder/adult natives, Wichi teachers – “intercultural, bilingual education” –, native children):

- **culturally-embedded learning**
- **co-producing knowledge**

Teachers, native adults and children experiencing together – Joint workshops with adults / elders – Educational material



A transversal, non-formal, naturally-sited, community-bound learning experience

Teachers and children involved in this project carried out a non-formal naturally-sited, **community-bound activity** of both **cultural and socioeconomic relevance** in local terms. This project is ultimately intended to elaborate scholar **community-bound material**. Its premise is that this material must be elaborated by **indigenous teachers** who day after day afford the challenge to try to use their languages in order to improve the education of indigenous children and that way to grant them a better future.



OLETSAJ-CHITSAJ project:

Educational experience, with a view to an **integrated learning of the heritage language as well as the natural and social sciences** by the children of Children's Garden (primary education). The aftermath of this experience was to develop educational materials that cover the process of local textile crafts, focused on preparation of *chaguar*.



Operations and skills developed

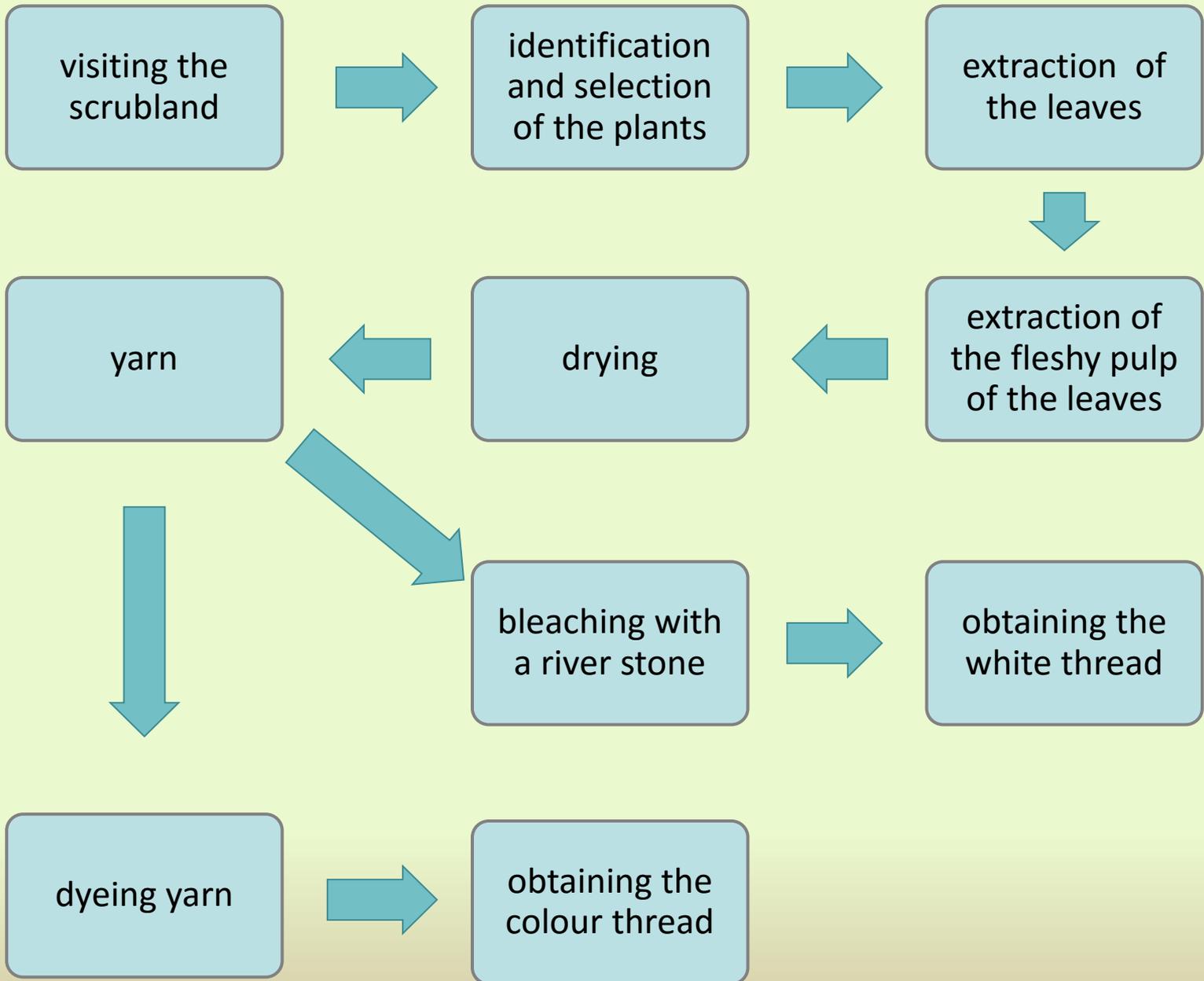
1. Operations:

- a. **Searching, identifying and collecting** the chaguar plant (*Bromelia hieronymi*, *Deinacanthon urbanianum*) –it reminds of an agave– to be used in dressmaking. Chaguar: invested with a symbolic value that confers meanings.
- b. **Preparing** the plant for the elaboration process: **scraping** and **drying** the fibre
- c. **Dyeing** of thread
- d. **Winding**
- e. **Weaving**
- f. **Handling** and care of the **environment**
- g. Output → **Handcraft** products: dresses, nets, handbags, baby-carriers...

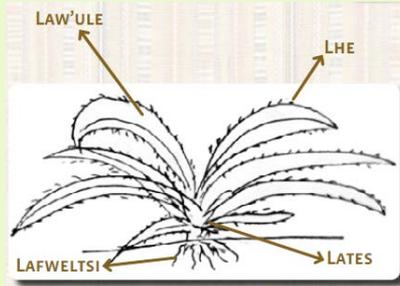
2. Skills:

- a. **Observing**: classification, measure, geometric shapes
- b. **Making**
- c. **Communicating**: conversing, reporting
- d. **Language**: vocabulary and narrative skills

3. The **book**: narrative, dialogue, illustration



Searching, identifying and collecting



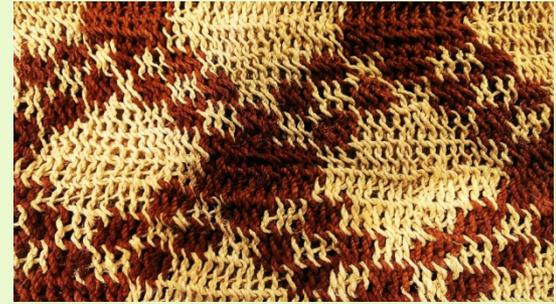
Preparing the plant



Dyeing of thread, Winding

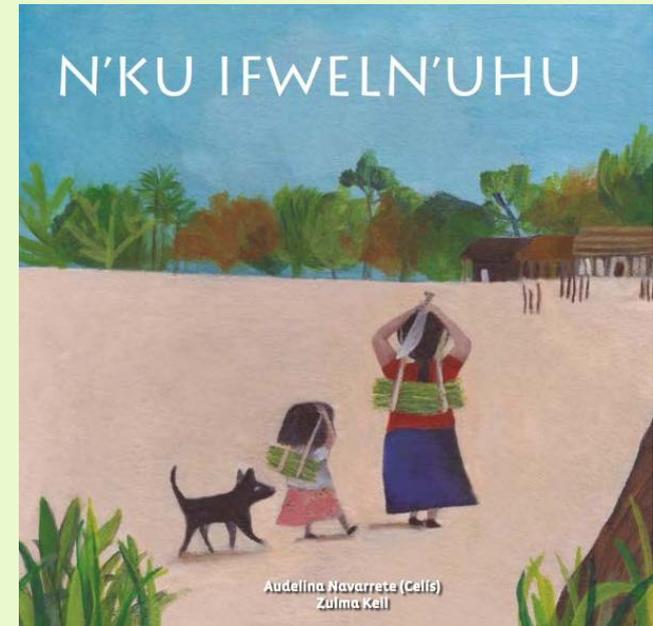


Weaving and Handcraft products



The natives' control over illustrations:

Visual representation from outside / inside the community
The drawer's proposal vs. the natives' amendments



DRAWING 1



THE DRAWING fails to include any means of carrying the chaguar. It looks like they are going for a stroll to the square rather than to harvest the chaguar. When they go to harvest it, the women have a **rope on their heads** and they **carry a machete** and **wear a big bag** slung across their bodies. The little girl should also wear a **small bag**.

NEW DRAWING 2



While they are walking across the scrubland, the mother highlights **different types of chaguar** on the ground: there are **two types of plants or species** used to make knitting yarns: a **thicker** and a **thinner** one. It is important to be able **to differentiate** between them.

DRAWING 3



The chaguar plants in the foreground need to be a bit **bigger**. Note, in the photos that I attach, the scale in relation to the size of the protagonists. Perhaps some bigger plants could be added at the back or sides. You could also add some **touches of red**, since this is **the colour of the flowers**. See the photos. If possible, the position of the mother should be altered, because it is very uncomfortable looking. The correct position is **cross-legged**, even though a person might momentarily be in the position that you have drawn here.

DRAWING 4



The chaguar is not carried in a bucket but **on the person's back or under their arm, supported by a rope that they tie round their forehead**. The little girl should also carry the chaguar like that.

DRAWING 5



You need to change the position in which the woman is sitting. She should be sitting **cross-legged**. Create a background setting like the outer yard of a house, adding typical features such as a fence. **Eliminate the sharp colour contrast between the ground and the wall**, since communities would never have this. Dwellings **do not** tend to have **smooth walls** and **the walls and floor are similar in colour**, since the houses are made of **adobe or clay**.

DRAWING 6



Add a **washbowl**, which the women use **to moisten the spoon before passing it along the fibre to remove the sap**. The position of the woman needs to be changed here too. The women go **barefoot and they lift their left foot and place it on top of the right one**. Then **they scrape the chaguar on the arch of their foot**. The drawing is too empty. The woman seems to be floating. If you could you emphasize the shadow underneath her a bit more and add some indication of the dog or little girl watching how she does it, it would be more credible. Although her clothes show that she is the mother, she looks like a girl from the size of her forehead. It would help to identify her better if the girl were drawn beside her, looking over her mother's shoulder.

DRAWING 7



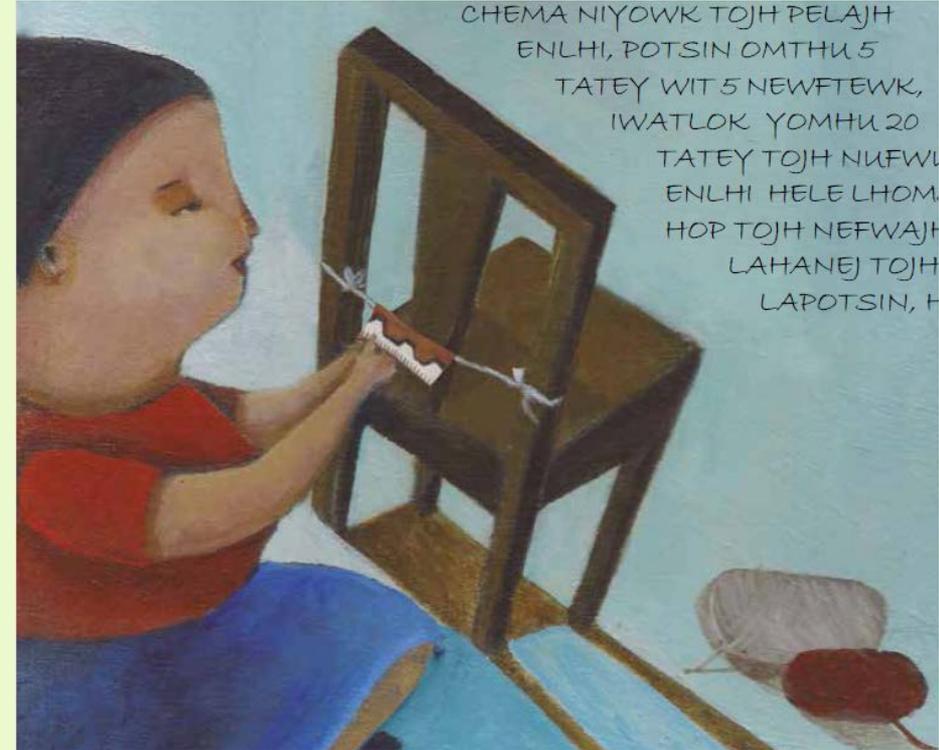
There is a problem with the design of the house. The Wichi **do not** build houses with **gabled roofs** and **their walls are not plastered**. I attach some images of houses with palisades, hanging pieces of cloth that act as walls, or bundles of boiled straw in a row. The **roof** should be **mono pitched**. The fact that the focus of attention are the hanging fibres detracts a bit from the end result. The mother could be taking down some fibres. The **fibres hang from a rope** which should be **in the front of the house**, rather than the side, because the front part of the house is **low and easily accessible**, while **the side gets gradually higher**.

DRAWING 8



The little girl scraping the fibres should rest them **on the skin of her leg** – the skin should be visible, because she does this directly on her leg, not on any fabric or on her skirt. She should have a **white stone** close by, which she crumbles with her fingers to **impregnate** the fibres with **chalk** and **remove the sap**.

DRAWING 9



The yarn runs **horizontally** between the two legs of the chair and **not in a V shape**. Add some woven fabric; that is, it should be as if she were beginning to weave something.

Learning from older people in natural contexts

Children's learning in natural context overcomes formal language teaching in classroom, since the latter does not link patrimonial language and culture knowledge. Classroom is not the best place to learn and develop natives' cultural and socioeconomic practices.

Successful pedagogical materials involve a practice-emerging dialogue between common and communitarian curricula.



Credits

- ✓ **Text:** Audelina Navarrete (Celis)
- ✓ **Teaching materials:** Audelina Navarrete & Zulma Keil
- ✓ **Illustrations:** Agustina Suárez
- ✓ **Technical adviser:** Virginia Unamuno
- ✓ **Collaborator:** Maria de los Angeles Merino (piti)
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