LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research, 8(3), 213-229, 2011
ISSN: 1813-2227

An Overview of Indigenous Peoples in Education Systems Worldwide: Challenges, Barriers and Successes

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ABSTRACT

The key to the future of any society lies in the transmission of its culture and worldview to succeeding generations. The socialization of children, through education, shapes all aspects of identity, instilling knowledge of the group's language, history, traditions, behavior, and spiritual beliefs (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986, p. 150). Indigenous peoples are not a homogenous group: there are cultural, historic and economic differences among them (Aikman 1995, McAlphine, et al. 1996; Semali, 1999). However, there are commonalities that they share, such as their intimate relationship with the land, environment and the cosmological world. In addition, they share the pain of loosing their ancestral lands to the colonizers as this is the major thing that connects them to their inner being, the spirit world and Mother Earth. Hence, "when they loose their land, they loose their languages, culture, social and political systems" (Reyhner 1996: 7). Hayden Burgess of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples says: "Next to shooting indigenous peoples, the surest way to kill us is to separate us from our part of the Earth. Once separated, we will either perish in body and soul and our minds and spirits will be altered so that we end up mimicking foreign ways…" (Burger 1990: 122). To the West, land belongs to the people, but, according to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, people belong to the land (Almeida, 1998).

INTRODUCTION

Who are the indigenous?

The indigenous are groups of people whose interests are not represented by the core polity of society (Tsang, 1994, as cited in Le Roux, 1999). Because of their inferior or disadvantaged position with respect to the socioeconomic, political or cultural power structure of society, "they lack influence on government policies on national development and they are the last groups to benefit from the fruits of national development" (p. 13). For example, in Botswana there has never been a San Member of Parliament. I concur with

Molteno (1997, as cited in Le Roux, 1999) who posits that the indigenous are always almost the very poor and powerless in society and they also face a vicious circle of socioeconomic, political and educational problems that they find difficult to get out of. According to the United Nations (UN) (http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/indigenous/locate.asp) the indigenous have a profoundly deep connection to the natural habitat and look to the land for food, shelter, health, healing, identity and spiritual upliftment. The term 'indigenous' is a contested one and "has had a troubled and contentious history" (Crossman & Bevisch, 2002, p. 98). Given the diverse cultures and experiences of indigenous peoples, a black and white definition is not possible and for purposes of this paper, I have adopted the definition put forward by Sausegad (1993): (1) *pre-existence*: people who are descendants of those inhabiting an area prior to the arrival of another people: (2) *non-dominance*: people who are a numerical minority and/or who do not control the national government: (3) *cultural difference*: people who see themselves-and are seen by others-as different from the incoming peoples: (4) *self-definition*: people who identify themselves as indigenous and (5) *differences in land and resource use*: people who usually also practice adaptive systems that differ from that of the majority in terms of land and resource use (1993: 6). This broad definition is also in agreement with the indigene themselves and the (UN) who accept the term *indigenous* and use it widely in research and scholarship (Almeida, 1998). The World Council of Indigenous Peoples uses the term Fourth World to distinguish indigenous nations from those of the First, Second and Third Worlds (Almeida, 1998).

The Human Development Report: Cultural liberty in today's diverse world (2004), states that there are around 300 million people belonging to the world's indigenous groups, representing some 4,000 languages in more than 70 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, U.S. and Oceania. I invite the reader to note that indigenous peoples are not always in the minority, for example, in Bolivia and Guatemala indigenous peoples make up more than half the population (p. 29). As I have already pointed out, indigenous peoples are faced with many challenges today such as extreme poverty, educational disenfranchisement and insurmountable health problems. Many have lost their ancestral lands, for example, the Aborigines in Australia, the Innuits in Canada, San in Namibia and Botswana and the Native Americans in the U.S. In addition, they are forced to assimilate to the culture and ways of knowing and doing of their oppressors: former colonizes and some Western countries. Hence, it is then not surprising that indigenous knowledge is at risk of extinction (Abdullah & Stringer, 1999: Au, 2006: Semali & Kincheloe, 1999: Smith, 1999).

Interest in Indigenous peoples

Recently, there has been a paradigm shift and gradual progress in addressing indigenous concerns and issues. Lobbying for indigenous rights worldwide has been the aim of bodies such as the World Bank, the United Nations (UN)

and numerous Non Government Organizations in many countries. Globally, there are over 1,000 Indigenous Organizations (Ameida, 1998). History was made in December, 10th of 1992, when twenty indigenous leaders addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations on topics such as indigenous education, land and human rights issues (Ewen, 1993 as cited in Almeida, 1998). According to Ewen, the year 1993 was extended from the International Year of the World's Indigenous People to the Decade of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, it was agreed by member states of the UN that a permanent forum for indigenous peoples be set up at the UN.

OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS WORLDWIDE

Background

Indigenous peoples all over the world share certain experiences in literacy initiatives ranging from: overall poor performance in formal educational systems, accompanied by high dropout rates (Hemandez, 1997: Lippitt & Romero, 1992: Semali & Kincheloe & 1999, UNESCO). For example, in the U.S. the African and Native American families are faced with educational, social and political hardships. White-Kaulaity (2007) says that "people in minority communities, such as Native Americans, have other ways of language learning and other literacy events and practices that mainstream Americans often overlooks" (p. 560).

Literacy practices different from mainstream groups have been blamed for poverty and misunderstanding. Shujaa (1996) calls all African Americans and African peoples to take responsibility for their literacy by adopting a pedagogy that incorporates African peoples' unique culture and norms. Research suggests high mobility, coupled with these hardships, results in lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and other school-related problems, including cultural misunderstandings (Au, 2006: Hamel, 1994: Hernandez, 1979: Schuler, 1990, as cited in Lopez, 2001: Shujaa, 1996: Smith, 1999).

Through formal education, the colonizers were ruthless in silencing indigenous peoples in many places in the world. I concur with Foucault (1977, as cited in Smith, 1999) that the West in the eighteenth century had a "formula of domination" (p.68). This domination extended to schools, hospitals and all spheres of life. In schools, gendering played a big role with male and female students in the curriculum but, the greatest evil, in my opinion, was stealing indigenous children and sending them to boarding schools far away from home. Native American, Native Canadians, Aboriginal, Indonesian and other indigenous children had to endure the horror of separation with their families, which was a completely new experience for them. This was done deliberately to 'remove the indigenous from them' and immerse them in Western culture. Although boarding schools

are a thing of the past in the many countries, in countries like Botswana and Namibia they are still in existence.

Foreign systems of knowledge / indigenous ways of knowing

Modern science is seen as the only "correct path to knowledge acquisition in popular Western culture" (Jegede, 1999, p. 123). This relegates indigenous knowledge to the status of "superstition, myths and stories" (Semali, 1999, p. 2). Indigenous peoples all over the world have been forced to learn in knowledge systems that are foreign to them in every way, thus, ignoring indigenous knowledge systems which have been in existence for centuries. "For Africans indigenous knowledge is about what local people know and can do and what they have known and done for generations-practices that development through trial and error and proved flexible enough to cope with change" (Semali, 1999, p. 95). For example, in Africa, initiation schools for boys and girls (Tlou & Campbell, 1997) and African music were very much discouraged by missionaries who referred to African music as "barbaric and pagan" (Abrokwaa, 1999, p. 199). What is happening today in Africa is that young people have turned away from African music and adopted the music of foreign cultures, totally disregarding the fact that African music and dance are not only for entertainment, but, they are a spiritual and a cultural heritage not to be ignored (Abrokwa).

In countries such as Australia, Brazil, Peru and India, indigenous ways of knowing are seriously threatened by knowledge's of mainstream peoples. For example, in Australia, the Aboriginal unique ways of knowing has been shunned for centuries and this frustrates the Aboriginal communities who have a unique way of teaching their children (Miller & Davey, 1988). For example, in the primary and secondary schools, there exists a "two way" education process, as children struggle with two cultures: the Aboriginal one and the Western (Harris, 1988). Harris goes on to say that although attempts are made to include Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogy into mainstream education, this is not effective at the primary and secondary levels, as Aboriginal people do not play a leading role in the decision-making process. I found this statement to be very similar to Smith (1997) preferred pedagogical practices for Maori peoples in New Zealand (Smith) and other indigenous peoples in the world, for example, indigenous Peruans (Arakmbut) as mainstream Peruans regard indigenous knowledge as an "obstacle to rationale progress" (Hobart, 1996, p. 2).

In its flagrant endeavor of destroying indigenous knowledge and bringing about a 'new order' that would silence the voice of the indigenous person forever, the West disregarded the pain and torture that this 'mission' brings to indigenous peoples. Walker (2000) assumes the role of an ambassador for all indigenous peoples when he says that due to the fact that formal education structures are based on foreign cultures and identities, indigenous peoples in formal schools find schooling a "painful journey" (p. 68) as they are denied a voice. It is then not surprising that many indigenous

children find formal schooling meaningless and continue to dropout of school in high numbers. Below are the sentiments of an Appalachian boy who described his emergent literacy experiences as: "Those failed early literacy efforts flattened my self-esteem and acted as a punishment, and left me feeling dumb, stupid, and illiterate" (Kirk, 2001, p. 420).

I concur with Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1994) that formal schools "has been and still is the key instrument, on all continents, for imposing assimilation (forced inclusion) into both the dominant language and the dominant culture" (p. 71). The implication of this has been two-fold: the imposition of one culture on another (Western over indigenous) and a lot of confusion among indigenous peoples who are torn between two very diverse worlds. In addition, indigenous children are socialized to believe that their traditional literacy practices are inferior and archaic (Bray et al, 1986). They no longer look to the elderly for wisdom. It is the elders who test knowledge and their word is law. In Africa, for example, the elders are very much respected and old age is appreciated, welcomed and revered. There is no fear of getting old and it is actually an honor to be old. It is believed that when an old person dies, it is akin to a library burning down (Ntuli, 2002). Among the Native Americans, the elderly are also a source of knowledge (Cajete, 2004) and major decisions are approved by them.

It is then not surprising that parents and elders complain that due to foreign knowledge systems, their children no longer respect the land, Mother Earth and everything that they hold dear. This is also the concern of African prominent figures such as former Presidents of Tanzania and South Africa, Julius Nyerere and Nelson Rohlihlahla Mandela, respectively. Hence, in Tanzania, President Julius Nyerere started rural schools as a way of reinforcing indigenous knowledge and counteracting the ills of formal schooling. In Columbia, the government has come up with rural schools with a "rural-oriented" curriculum (p. 104). Teachers are to "adapt the national curriculum to regional and local needs and encourage the practical application of what is learned in the school to community life" (Psacharopoulos, Rojas & Velez, 1993, p. 264, as cited in Le Roux, 1999). In South Africa, indigineity is closely linked to identity reconstruction, innovation, human rights, democratization and others in the new South Africa (Odora-Hoppers, 2000). It is as a direct result of the Southern African concept of *Ubuntu / Botho* (respect and humane behavior towards the next person) that the different races in South Africa forgave one another under the sterling leadership of Nelson Mandela.

Formal education, according to the indigenous, does not produce a holistically educated child: morally, physically and intellectually upright. To many indigenous peoples of the world, goodness of character is viewed to be fundamentally important (Mosha, 1999: Reagan, 2000: Smith, 1999). For example, among the indigenous Chagga peoples (Africa), an educated person is one who is morally and traditionally smart, a university degree does not qualify one to be educated, according to Chagga beliefs (Mosha). Hence,

they distinguish between the *'mpunde'* (educated person according to local traditions) and the 'book-educated' person who has a lot of classroom education, but, lacks spiritual and moral education (Mosha). This concurs with Reagan's (2000) writing about the indigenous Rom peoples (Gypsy) who are found mostly in Europe. The Rom peoples value ritual purity or *wuzho* (purity of a physical and moral nature). Some Rom children on entering school complain of lack of *wuzho* among non-Rom students and hence, fail to relate to them (Reagan).

From the various readings, it is also clear that high school dropout by indigenous students is also caused by the way schools view knowledge. Whereas 'knowledge' to the indigenous is one holistic entity, schools divide knowledge according to 'history, science, mathematics and so on (George, 1999). In school, each entity stands on its own and *within its own parameters* (own emphasis). In Australia and Papua New Guinea, Harris (1977, as cited in Grenoble & Whaley, 2006) says that repetition, observations and imitations play a very important role in learning how to dance. They learn by watching the elders and imitating them repeatedly until they have perfected their dance moves, with onlookers cheering them on and encouraging them. This is also true for the San peoples of Botswana.

Clearly, a school / home connection is missing in the formal education of indigenous children and this is worrisome. As I have posited throughout the paper, indigenous literacy is very much integrated with community values and the cosmological world which plays a very important role. An indigenous child from the Amazon Basin first learns that nature is alive. When such a child learns an activity like pottery for example, she has to ask for permission from the spirits who are the givers of everything (Murial, 1999). An African child from the Hadzabe tribe in Tanzania is taught that she cannot produce a good crop of bananas without asking for guidance from the spirits. It is the spirits which will ensure a good harvest and plenty of bananas for the whole community (Mosha, 1999). When they go to school, they find this spiritual element missing and this can create alienation and confusion (Coolongotta Statement, 1996). For the Dagara indigenous peoples in West Africa, spirituality is important for future success not only at school, but, life in general (McGovern, 1999).

Unfortunately, schools ignore community knowledge (Brock-Utne, 1995) and very few attempts are done to bridge the home-school connections worldwide. It is even more unfortunate that indigenous parents complain that they are not actively included in the education of their children and they reason that this is so because they do not know the school language, for example, English. Latino or Latina peoples in the U.S. feel that their culture and ways of knowing are not taught in schools, hence, their children, like many other indigenous children in the world, are loosing their ways of knowing, according to the sentiments expressed in my reading of the book *'Con Respeto' (1996)* . This resonates with African traditional beliefs that it takes a whole village to educate a child (Semali, 1999). From the various readings, knowledge to the indigenous is not confined to the four walls of the

classroom, but, it is deeply embedded in the homes, communities and the environment.

Foreign instruction and discipline styles

On entering school, students face many challenges. Indigenous knowledge is not planned but, occurs spontaneously and naturally. At school, children are forced to get used to a set routine such as a school timetable (George, 1999). It is then not surprising that Evenski (Russian) indigenous children dropped out of school in large numbers and hence, parents resorted to 'targa schools' or home schooling. Children are placed in boarding schools for a short time then go back to their families and herds where teachers visit them from time to time (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

In the classroom, children are treated as 'tabula rasa's': empty vessels who come to school with no knowledge at all. The Constructivist Theory stresses the importance of bringing each student's prior knowledge and experience to the classroom (Semali, 1999). This is also true for indigenous children as they are taught through experimentation, observations and repetitions (Kirk, 2001). Through the beliefs of the constructivist methodology, students can relate to the subject matter and consequently "generate an interest and ownership in the subject matter…" (p. 106). According to Semali, this creates a connection between what is learnt in the classroom and what is already known. Freire (1970) and Shiva (1993) are right in saying that allowing students to bring their indigenous knowledge empowers them greatly and this helps in preserving such knowledge's. I concur with Semali (1999) when he says that "when learning is matched with local needs, education, whether indigenous or formal, can have a galvanizing effect on the lives of the learners" (p. 108).

However, few attempts are made at indigenizing the curriculum among the indigenous (Brock-Utne, 1995). Unfortunately, this has the dire effect of indigenous children loosing their culture. One Navajo boy relates his school experiences by saying, "school was a totally different environment…I had to change everything, from my eating habits to my clothing, values, religion and other expected ways of doing things" (2004, p. 72). Failure to change resulted in beatings, harassment and detention as in the case of the Kurds in Turkey (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994). One boy had to endure horrific abuse at the hands of teachers who "washed his mouth with yellow soap" (p. 73) as a result of speaking a native language. Schools need a more holistic approach in the education of the indigenous: the community, homes, families and governments need to work closely together. Semali (1999) says a 'marriage' of schools and the community is almost impossible as schools do not take community knowledge seriously.

In Africa, school is generally a microcosm of the larger society. Children (and adults) believe that everything from the West is the best and everything African is second class or *fongkong* (a Chinese word referring to

cheap and fake Chinese goods in Africa). Western comics, novels and magazines are more interesting to students in Botswana than traditional folklore (Arua & Lederer, 2003). The study of Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth II and Bartholomew Diaz are given more status in the curriculum than stories of Sir Ketumile Masire, Jomo Kenyatta and Nelson Mandela. It is not uncommon for children to recite long passages from foreign literature such as Shakespeare during class competitions without understanding anything they are saying. Children are socialized to look outside their communities for the answers of life and no longer to the community and the cosmological world. This is further reinforced by a curriculum that is heavily depended on Western ways of knowing. Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania speaks for all indigenous peoples when he says that the problems in African schools are largely caused by the competition between western ways of knowing and indigenous ones.

In addition, schools, through the encouragement of competition, encourage regurgitation of knowledge, especially during examination times. Children give back to the teachers what they have 'learnt' at school and there is very little practical application to the community. This does not cultivate a 'holistic' child and one who can think critically and 'beyond the box'. Fitzgerald (1995) review summarized the findings of literacy instruction among English language learners (ELLs) in the US. From the study, it emerged that instruction for ELLs focused on mundane skills such as oral reading and word identification and not on critical thinking skills such as inference. I completely agree as the ability to retrieve and make connections from a source depends on a thorough understanding of the subject matter. (An indigenous reader shares how he mimicked the teacher's reading without understanding (Kirk, 2001). I agree completely with Semali & Kincheloe (1999) that continuing to ignore local knowledge resources "only perpetuates postcolonial legacies and maintains oppressive knowledge systems" (p. 113). In addition, such experiences can create enormous problems for students, as one teacher Nancy Sharp (1994, as cited in Le Roux, 1999) says in sharing her experiences as a student in Alaska. She says it was "like climbing a mountain…" (p. 6).

Schools need to be flexible enough to accommodate diversity for the benefit of all students. In my view, the voice of the indigenous should be heard loud and clear. Illiteracy should not be used as a weapon to silence the indigenous as oral stories and narrations are just as good and have similar impact as the written word. I concur with Chilisa and Preece (2005) that indigenous peoples and their supporters need to go to the drawing board and challenge 'knowledge'. Who is making this 'knowledge?' for whom and in what epistemological context is this so called knowledge being made? Gordon (1995 as cited in Fatnowa & Pickett, 2002) says rightly that "Fanon wants to find Man, but he keeps bumping into White man" (p. 11). This calls for "de-centering the White man as a designator of human reality" (p. 103).

Teacher frustrations

Research points to the fact that teachers add to the indigenous formal educational frustrations. In many indigenous communities in the world, the children are taught by teachers from mainstream societies who know very little about the culture of the indigene, according to Brock-Utne, (1995). Most of these teachers and administrators have lost touch with indigenous ways of knowing and have fast adopted the ways of the west and I concur with Rains (1999) who says that they suffer from "historical amnesia" (p. 326). She speaks for all indigenous peoples when relating her experiences of school as a Native American student "for Indian children like me growing up, it means having your culture assaulted by teachers so ignorant of your culture, history, and the indigenous knowledge…" (p. 324).

Among the Hmong peoples in the U.S. Timm (1994) says some teachers are ignorant of the Hmong culture that boys and girls cannot sit next to each other in class, especially if they belong to the same clan. As a result, children feel uncomfortable in class and find it difficult to participate in classroom discourse. It is then not surprising that teachers are blamed for making the already bad problem in indigenous schooling worse by not caring enough (Gay, 2000). She adds that teachers need to "demonstrate caring for children as students and as people" (p. 45). If this is done, students will excel academically, morally and culturally and suspicions and hatreds between teachers and diverse students will be drastically minimized.

African governments are partly to be blamed for Africa's formal education problems. There is real fear of imbalance between integrating the indigenous to Western forms of education as indigenous education is seen as a threat to peace in the post-independence era (Odora-Hoppers, 2000). The fear is that critics in post-colonial Africa do not believe in integration and the belief is that traditional educators and indigenous teachers have little to contribute to formal education. The same is true in Peru, where western curriculum is seen as superior to indigenous knowledge.

Language: tool or weapon?

Language is the number one weapon used by mainstream societies to subjugate the indigenous (Almeida, 1998: Mendelsonhn et al. 1998). I concur with Mule (1999) that language is not only important for communication, it is also a carrier of a peoples' culture. Many indigenous peoples are prohibited in today's 'democratic' world to speak the necessary mother-tongue language(s) at school. For example, in Tanzania, it is illegal for the Hadzabe peoples to speak any other language than Swahili at school (Kaare, 1994). In Kenya, what surprised me is that indigenous peoples are not allowed to converse in their mother-tongue in school, although it is similar to Swahili (Commeyras & Inyenga, 2007). A similar situation is also true for other minorities in the world such as the Norwich and the Finns in Sweden,

according to Leporanta-Morley, (1988). A Hualapi boy (Native American) captures well the negative impact of language repression
By saying (Watahomigie & McCarty, 1997, p. 101):

> I don't feel complete…Sometimes I feel apart from my peers, the ones that are my age that *do* speak, and they all know that I don't speak…Coming to terms with my identity and seeing my deficiencies, I could tell the kids today that if you don't know your language, you will feel (as I do).

Clearly, learning in foreign languages is one long battle for indigenous children the world over. In addition, research shows that students instructed in their mother tongue did much better than if they are instructed first in a foreign language (Le Roux, 1999: Fordham, 1998) and this is also good for their second and third language acquisitions. Hawaii indigenous people perform much better in school as a result of the total immersion followed in schools. This is in direct opposition to many African states which inherited a foreign language policy, disregarding the cultural and political problems resulting (Mateene, 1980, as cited in Mule, 1999). This tells of a cultural and mental subjugation by a power that is still very much in control today in the world in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, it is the indigenous peoples who are suffering more as in a lot of cases, English is a third language for them, for example, the San of Namibia, the Tuareg of the Sahara and the Chagga of Tanzania. These children face insurmountable problems in schools, such as high school dropout. Research points to the fact that many school dropouts cannot read in their mother-tongue, nor in an International language, such as English (Muthwii, 2004). I concur with Muthwii (2002 as cited in Muthwii, 2004) that there is a misconception that English comes "naturally" (p. 4) for children from multilingual backgrounds.

However, research continues to point to the fact that cognitive development occurs effectively only through a language that the learner knows very well, for example, a mother tongue or a first language (I understand this to mean full understanding of a language in all socio-linguistic and cultural domains) as explained by the Father of sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes (1964). In addition, for the learner to understand, organize and select information, it is crucial that they are proficient in the first language (Cummins, 1984). I concur with Kembo (2000), Mule (1999) and Stroud (2003) that Africa needs to radically rethink the place of indigenous languages of education for a successful future in all spheres of life. It is worrying that the clamored language of prestige (English) is not being used effectively in professional and administrative settings. In Nigeria, for example, out of the 33 percent of Nigerians who are reported to be literate in English (Muthwii, 2004) reports that only 15 percent of those can use English effectively.

Indigenous peoples need to refuse the lie that their languages are expensive to develop and impossible to use for technological and economic

development. It is time they emulated the Asian countries such as Japan and China, whose economies are doing exceptionally well without foreign languages (Bakomba, 1995, as cited in Mule, 1999).

Success Stories

In order for the indigenous people to be heard and taken with the seriousness and respect they deserve, alternative/intervention programs are a must. Some indigenous peoples have made impressive progress in indigenizing the curriculum and making it more 'indigenous friendly' by hiring indigenous teachers to teach their children. This is deemed necessary (Aikman, 1995) as they will also transfer the culture to the children. On the other hand, some indigenous peoples feel that outsiders are better placed to teach their children as they are in a better position to transfer the culture of the dominant group (Aikman) and provide a balance between indigenous culture and Western culture. The reader is invited to note that it is impossible to discuss all the programs I encountered in my readings. For the purposes of this present paper, I will shed light on the ones I deemed most successful and which I strongly feel other indigenous peoples will benefit greatly by emulating. The presentation of the programs is not in any specific order.

Hawaii

Papahana Kaiapuni (Hawaiin language immersion program) was established in 1987 as a way to address the fast disappearance of Hawaiin languages and it is said to be among the best in the world (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). What makes the program work is the selfless devotion of individuals to Hawaiin revitalization. In addition, the community invests time and money and Hawaiin language is used inside and outside schools, for example, during ball games (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). Setting up this immersion programs is the initiation of parents, community leaders and teachers who felt a need to salvage their languages which were fast being replaced by English. Children from kindergarten to grade k are fully immersed in the native language and English is introduced from sixth grade. The native language is not abandoned, but, continues to be studied.

Punana Leo Preschools: Completely modeled along the ones in New Zealand. A total immersion program with parents paying tuition for the running of the school and teaching on a rotational basis at the school, which is administered by Aha Punana Leo, a non-profit organization (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). The goal of the preschools is to raise children's self esteem and identities at an early age. The Mohawk peoples follow a similar kind of immersion program as the Hawaiians and they too have been successful. At present, there is a standard orthography in Mohawk and it is currently widely spoken.

Peru

The Arakmbut of Peru follow a dual system (Aikman, 1995). They have relented to learning in Spanish so that they can fight for their rights, for example, land. At the same time they educate their children in their indigenous ways. According to Aikman, the dual system serves them very well as they enrich their knowledge and also have the ability to survive in either culture.

Ecuador

The Shuar Indians of Ecuador have resorted to technology to improve access of indigenous minorities to education. Television programs transmitted in indigenous languages bring education and culture into the comfort of their homes. This came as a result of their children performing poorly in formal schools and the subsequent high dropout rates at school. Books are written by indigenous authors and offer lessons in Shuar history and culture. According to Almeida (1998), this has greatly improved their academic performance and strengthened their cultural identity.

Australia

According to Abdulla and Stringer (1999), the failure of educational systems to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal people in Australia has become a national disgrace at the primary and secondary school levels. However, he points out that universities have made impressive strides in assimilating indigenous knowledge into mainstream programs. An example is the Centre of Aboriginal Studies: An Organizational Context for Indigenous Research. The aim of the centre is to cater to the specific needs of Aboriginal people: educational, social and cultural. Secondly, the importance of Aboriginal knowledge shall be acknowledged, their identities and self-determination re-enforced. Most importantly, Aboriginal peoples are encouraged to look inward and not outward for solutions to their literacy and educational problems.

Operation: All courses and programs are controlled by Aboriginal peoples who are the ‘watch dogs’ of the centre. The centre is headed by an Aboriginal person and Aboriginality is the deciding factor for key positions than university degree(s). The focus of the centre is on Aboriginal ways of knowing and the students work closely with Aboriginal mentors in the centre and the community. In this way, the students and the community have a sense of ownership of the curriculum, connect with true Aboriginal indigenous literacy and networking relationships are formed.

Indigenous peoples need to play a leading role in indigenizing the academia: they need to be ‘academic gatekeepers’ in their communities. This will reduce the continued devaluation of indigenous knowledge by the West. I concur with Orr (1992) that there is a need to revalue indigenous education

in schooling and non-schooling settings. In my opinion, there is no 'best' approach. What is important is what will work for a given indigenous group.

CONCLUSION

Without doubt, indigenous peoples in the world face many challenges in their children's education more than ever. In today's competitive world, it is very important that indigenous children also acquire quality education to compete favorably with mainstream children. However, barriers such as foreign languages, foreign teaching styles, poverty and home-school disconnection hinder their success at school. Forced instruction in a foreign language(s), especially, is the number one barrier that stands in the path of these children's education as is evidenced from the many apt examples in the present paper.

Indigenous peoples are proud of who they are and what they stand for. In my opinion, these should be encouraged and not used as a weapon to strip them of everything they believe in. Indigenous visibility, in all sections of life, in my opinion, will get rid of the stereotypes surrounding the indigene. Formal education is an important avenue for indigenous peoples to prove that they are not "primitive and wild" (Semali, 1999, p.3) and that they are a people who can think, produce and invent things and their unique ways of knowing and reading the world should be respected and given a place in the school curriculum.

Formal education provides indigenous peoples with a broad set of options to shape the future and opportunities to tell their unique stories to the world (Brady, 1997). The challenge they face is to balance what they learn in formal education with their ways of knowing. This is indeed a challenge, though not an impossible one as some indigenous peoples, such as the Maori and Aborigines have made huge strides in indigenizing the curriculum resulting in having ownership on what and how it is taught. Importantly, indigenous peoples should be committed and united in their endeavor to preserve and revitalize their languages and culture, what Grenoble and Whaley (2006) refer to as a 'bottom-to-top' movement in order to influence governments and language policies in their member countries.

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