

DEVELOPING TRIBAL EDUCATION STRATEGIES IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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It is self-evident to anyone capable of seeing beyond the confines of the little spheres within which we spin out our lives, that the day is rapidly approaching when it will no longer be viable for the minority of the world's population who don't live in villages to make every major decision affecting the lives of the majority who do. So any program of village education which intends to be forerunner of a revised world order must, as its first priority, design a delivery system premised on local decision-making.

Bill Vaudrin, 1975

An Inupiat Education Strategy

The North Slope Borough, spanning the northern coastal area of Alaska, was created shortly after the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was passed in 1971, freeing up oil fields in the land of the Inupiat Eskimo on the north slope of the Alaska Range for development. Through the state-sanctioned governing structure of a borough, the Inupiat people, who were the original inhabitants of the land on which the oil had been discovered, would be able to exert a small measure of influence on and reap some economic benefits from the development that was taking place.

The issues they faced as they exercised control over their own local government were much broader than matters of regulation and taxation, however. They were also confronted with the question of the kind of communities and lifestyle they wished to maintain as a people. How would their continuing practice of traditional whaling, hunting, fishing and other subsistence activities be impacted by the large scale industrial development that was taking place around them? How could they best make use of the economic resources and employment opportunities that would be generated as a result of the oil development? How could they most effectively bring their voices to bear in shaping the many policy and development initiatives that would accompany the influx of outside interests?

Very early in their deliberations, the people of the North Slope Borough identified education as a critical concern -- in fact gaining control of their schools from the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs was one of the major incentives for establishing the Borough in the first place. Control over education was viewed as essential if Inupiat people were to have access to the kind of education they felt they needed to shape their own destiny. It soon became apparent, however, that gaining political control over the educational system was in itself not sufficient to meet their

needs. Eben Hopson, the first mayor of the Borough, made the following observation a couple of years after they had assumed responsibility for their schools:

Today, we have control over our educational system. We must now begin to assess whether or not our school system is truly becoming an Inupiat school system, reflecting Inupiat educational philosophies, or, are we in fact only theoretically exercising "political control" over an educational system that continues to transmit white urban culture? Political control over our schools must include "professional control" as well, if our academic institutions are to become an Inupiat school system able to transmit our Inupiat traditional values and ideals (1977).

Gaining "professional control" of the educational system meant staffing the schools with Inupiat teachers and administrators, though there were few Inupiat people with the credentials required by the state for such roles. At the same time there was an increasing demand for Inupiat biologists, accountants, planners, lawyers, etc., who could bring an Inupiat perspective to bear in the many new policy-making and regulatory positions that had emerged in the region. Having had little success in getting the University of Alaska to respond to their urgent higher education needs except for a limited teacher education program, the Inupiat people decided to establish their own post-secondary institution -- the Inupiat University of the Arctic. They had concluded that if they were to exercise any professional control over the institutions that impact their lives, they would first have to exercise some control over the preparation of the professionals who staffed those institutions, and that meant an "Inupiat" university based on Inupiat educational perspectives, philosophies, principles and practices.

This was easier said than done, however. How could an Inupiat educational philosophy be made to fit the Western notion of a school or university, or should it be the other way around? What kind of credentials would be required of the staff? Where would the Inupiat expertise and perspective come from? How would Inupiat elders and language be reflected in the programs? What would be "Inupiat" about the Inupiat University of the Arctic? These and many other issues presented enormous challenges and difficulties the first few years, all of which were compounded by considerable staff turnover, funding uncertainties, and political turmoil.

Not the least of the difficulties was finding leadership that was capable of understanding their concerns and translating what they wanted into reality. Under Bill Vaudrin's early leadership and articulation of cultural purpose, the Inupiat University of the Arctic began to take on a distinctly Inupiat character and orientation. This included the incorporation of local Inupiat expertise as instructors, the use of the Inupiat language for instruction, the recognition of traditional teaching practices outside of classroom settings, and the integration of Inupiat knowledge, skills and cultural traditions in the curriculum. Unfortunately, his influence was cut short by a tragic car accident which led to a succession of conventionally oriented non-Native managers and fund raisers who were unable or disinclined to harness the Inupiat character of the institution. Even though the Inupiat University of the Arctic was eventually granted candidacy status for accreditation purposes, the compromises to Inupiat features that this necessitated produced considerable dissension in the ranks of the IUA supporters. These concerns, along with growing political and financial conflicts and the increasingly obvious discrepancies between philosophical rhetoric and operational reality, undermined the credibility of the initiative in the

eyes of the community, to the point where it was finally shut down by action of the Borough Assembly in 1980.

The idea of an Inupiat post-secondary institution did not die, however, nor did Eben Hopson's dream of an Inupiat educational system. In 1986, the North Slope Borough established the North Slope Higher Education Center, administered locally on an affiliated arrangement with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, which provides an accreditation umbrella under which the institution can operate until it is able to obtain independent accreditation. It has since evolved into the Arctic Sivunmun Iisagvik College and is gradually building a reputation as a significant contributor to the educational well-being of the Inupiat people in the North Slope Borough. In the meantime, Eben Hopson's dream of an Inupiat school system is also taking shape as the number of Inupiat teachers and administrators continues to grow, and in 1990 Patsy Aamodt became the first Inupiat Superintendent for the North Slope Borough School District.

An Education Strategy for Tainui Maaori

The Tainui Education Strategy developed from a context of Maaori political and cultural revitalization that began in New Zealand in the early years of the 20th century. The revitalization gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s as Maaori activism increased, in part as a reflection of the American Civil Rights movement during those same years. Maaori education has been a central theme in the revitalization for several decades.

During the 1980s, events in tribal and national politics contributed to the momentum for change in education in the Tainui Maaori tribal region as well as in other areas of New Zealand. In 1983, the Centre for Maaori Studies and Research, University of Waikato, published the Tainui Report which outlined the tribe's underdevelopment in employment and health as well as in education and which proposed a modern organizational structure for the tribe so that questions of underdevelopment could be addressed (Egan and Mahuta 1983). Between 1983 when the Tainui Report was issued and the end of the decade, nine regional Management Committees were established under the auspices of the Tainui Maaori Trust Board for the purpose of operating programs to address the problems resulting from underdevelopment.

In the early 1980s, pre-school Maaori "language nests" (Te Kohanga Reo) were being developed around the country, and a few predominantly Maaori primary schools were lobbying for the right to provide Maaori immersion schooling. Establishment of bilingual units and schools had begun, and primary schools with an holistic approach to schooling in the Maaori language and culture (Kura Kaupapa Maaori) evolved toward the end of the decade of the 1980s (Smith 1990).

In 1984, a Labour Government was voted into power on a platform of devolution of central government power to local authorities and to tribal authorities. In the late 1980s, the philosophy of devolution was extended into education with the restructuring of the national school system. Authority to hire staff and manage each school's operating budget was transferred from the national Department of Education to boards of trustees in each primary and secondary school. At about the same time, Maaori community training providers were granted authority to design and operate locally based vocational training courses for the unemployed under the General ACCESS and Maaori ACCESS programs, and government sponsored loan programs provided

opportunities for tribal members to institute and gain experience in the operation of small business enterprises.

By the end of the 1980s, the corps of professional Tainui educators was expanding in number. These educators had gained substantial experience not only in teaching but in planning and managing the educational process for Tainui children and youth through Te Kohanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Maaori, and the training programs.

By 1990, Maaori educators recognised that most Maaori children were attending school in urban classrooms where they were in the minority and where their teachers were of European descent. These educators were seeking methods to improve the mainstream educational system so that Maaori children in that system could hope for educational achievement leading to improved employment opportunities and standard of living. The Tainui Education Strategy published in 1991 was an effort to expand upon the earlier developments in Kaupapa Maaori primary schooling by asserting Maaori control over a comprehensive system of education from pre-school through the post-secondary level.

The development of a tribal strategy began in 1986 when the Centre for Maaori Studies and Research issued a paper entitled, Report to the Tainui Maaori Trust Board: A Tainui Education Strategy 1987-1997. This paper recommended support for bilingual education, the establishment of Maaori operated training programs for unemployed youth, and an Endowed College at Waikato and Auckland universities. Two Maaori language primary schools were already operating within the region, but, within a few months, new training programs were underway operated by the Management Committees of the Tainui Maaori Trust Board. The proposal for Endowed Colleges was approved in principle throughout the University system. Although funding for Endowed Colleges has not yet been obtained, the proposal continues to have a high priority among the Tainui tribal leadership, and implementation of the proposal is considered to be a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future.

By 1989, there was growing awareness amongst Tainui educators that a more comprehensive educational strategy was needed. Children with pre-school backgrounds in Kohanga Reo could not be sent into Maaori language primary schools because there were too few of these schools, and children who completed Kaupapa Maaori primary school began to fail almost as soon as they entered non-Maaori controlled secondary schools. The secondary school failure and drop-out rates were not improving for Maaori students as well as they should have been, and, although the number of Maaori entering post-secondary education was increasing, the university completion rate was low.

In late 1989, a hui (meeting or gathering) of Tainui government workers was held at Waahi Marae in Huntly, New Zealand. The purpose of the hui was to establish networks among workers in different agencies thereby strengthening the effectiveness of the Maaori perspective in each agency. During this hui, Tainui educators joined in a workshop where they were asked to address questions about Tainui education. The educators' response was to draft a mission statement for Tainui education.

There was no follow-up to this hui for several months. In the meantime, the Tainui Health Task Force worked with an experienced American community psychologist, Paul Florin (University of Rhode Island), to develop a tribal health plan. The Tainui interest in establishing

strategies for the improvement of the health of tribal members dates back to the early years of the 20th century when Princess Te Puea set about caring for victims of the 1918 influenza epidemic (King 1977). Te Puea's efforts led to the establishment of health care facilities at Turangawaewae Marae in the 1920s, and the Tainui Health Task Force, formed in the 1980s, acknowledges the work of Te Puea as the foundation of its own efforts.

Paul met with members of the Center for Maaori Studies and Research staff and visited the health representatives of each of the Tainui Maaori Trust Board's Management Committees. Discussion of the plan took place at a series of Maaori health hui. The health plan that evolved utilized a community development approach which built upon the on-going health activities and plans of the local Management Committees, but incorporated systems which were already being tried in the United States. The plan was published in June 1990, presented to local health authorities the following month, and funding for initial implementation was allocated at the beginning of 1991. All and all, the research, development and planning process was considered to be a resounding success, and that success spurred the Education Subcommittee of the Trust Board to return to the mission statement formulated at the hui some months earlier.

In July 1990, the Education Subcommittee decided to continue the process of formulating a mission statement, goals, and objectives for a comprehensive Tainui Education Strategy. The Committee planned a hui for October 1990, again at Waahi, and drafted a mission statement and goals for presentation and discussion at the hui. For three days, educators, youth, and parents discussed the mission statement, goals, and problems in education for Tainui children and youth. Notes were taken on the discussions, and, by the time school opened in 1991, a very rough draft of a plan had been produced. A working party of about 15 Tainui educators (all of whom were parents and grandparents of children in the system) began a series of reviews. During each review, a new draft of the plan was presented, discussed, and then revised for presentation at the next review hui. A final draft was approved by the Tainui Maaori Trust Board in June 1991. The report has been sent to Members of Parliament, Ministers of the Crown, educators, and tribal leaders from other areas of the nation.

This report contains objectives for reform in organisational structures from the pre-school level through the post-secondary level. Maaori educators nationally have been debating whether to try to change the existing system or to set up separate schools and authority systems for Maaori children. The Tainui working party chose to do both. The report recommends that some institutions -- such as a residential or day secondary school -- be established under the direction of the tribal Trust Board, but it also recommends changes which will benefit Maaori students in existing secondary schools. The strategy continues to evolve in response to emerging conditions and opportunities.

INDIGENOUS FORMS IN TRIBAL EDUCATION INITIATIVES

The evolution of Inupiat education initiatives on the North Slope of Alaska and of Tainui Maaori initiatives in New Zealand over the past decades are not isolated occurrences. Similar stories could be told for just about any group of indigenous people situated in historically subordinated circumstances in the context of the world's industrialized nations. In an effort to get out from under the yoke of Fourth World neo-colonial status, indigenous/Native/Indian/First

Nations/Aboriginal people in the United States (American Indian/Alaska Native), Canada (First Nations/Native Indian/Inuit), New Zealand (Maaori), Australia (Aborigine), Greenland (Inuit), Scandanavia (Saami) and elsewhere have all been seeking to establish and control their own educational institutions (Barnhardt, 1991). In many ways, the educational initiatives of indigenous people in Fourth World situations have originated from the same conditions and are confronting the same struggles for legitimacy that have faced Third World countries following independence (D'Oyley and Blunt, 1993). In some cases, these initiatives are associated with a broader self-determination and community development agenda (Vaudrin, 1975; Egan and Mahuta, 1983): in other cases, they are a response to new opportunities created by changes in government policy or funding sources (McConnochie and Tucker, 1990; Langgaard, 1990): and in still other cases, the initiatives originate from an educational perspective built around a sense of cultural integrity and hegemony (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Lipka, 1990; Harris, 1988).

This paper will attempt to capture some of the attributes and qualities, the character and intent, and the innovations and frustrations that have distinguished these indigenous education initiatives from their mainstream counterparts. The observations reported here are drawn from a review of documents from over one hundred initiatives, as well as first-hand contact with over fifty institutions spread across nine countries, each reflecting similar concerns to those of the Inupiat of Alaska and the Tainui Maaori of New Zealand.

Given the range of approaches that are reflected in the many indigenous education initiatives that have been implemented in various Fourth World settings, the following analysis will focus on the ways in which the mission, organizational structure, modus operandi, curricular emphasis, etc., of these educational initiatives have been adapted to reflect the cultural patterns, practices and predispositions of the people they serve. The qualities that will be addressed in this analysis are those which tend to distinguish indigenous educational strategies and initiatives in general from their mainstream counterparts, though the specific manifestations of these qualities are likely to vary from one indigenous setting to the next in accordance with the local culture. To the extent that certain indigenous educational initiatives seek to emulate and replicate mainstream forms, their operational qualities are not likely to differ markedly from the parent model and thus are not reflected in this analysis.

Commitment to Community

One of the most salient and significant characteristics of indigenous education initiatives is their over-arching sense of commitment to the collective interests of the indigenous community with which they are associated. This may not seem surprising, since their sponsorship and identity are usually closely tied to the surrounding tribal community, but the priority given to communal development places the indigenous institution in a very different posture in relation to its clientele than that of institutions whose primary concern is development of the individual. When indigenous people speak of education as a vehicle for "empowerment", they are usually referring to their aspirations as a people rather than just as individuals. Quite often, tribal education initiatives are at odds with government authorities because of their insistence on responding to community imperatives first, and only secondarily concerning themselves with

state requirements, even to the point of forgoing funding if it has too many external strings attached.

Students who come to a tribal school or college are often pursuing objectives that go beyond getting a better job, and include improving their ability to be of service to their tribal community. These are not to be construed as competing or conflicting objectives -- they are not mutually exclusive, but are integrally connected in the sense that the individual is dependent on a healthy community for social, emotional and spiritual sustenance, and the community is dependent on healthy, informed individuals for its well-being.

The extent to which indigenous education initiatives are able to transcend conventional institutional concerns and demonstrate in culturally appropriate ways an unequivocal commitment to the community they serve, determines more than anything else their success and ultimate survival. For most such initiatives, this is their reason for being, so a large part of their efforts are devoted to making it a reality, and it is from this commitment that most other forms of cultural adaptation emanate. Increasingly, indigenous people are pursuing education on their own terms as a means of maintaining their cultural integrity and securing a full measure of communal self-determination and self-sufficiency.

Integration of Functions

A second quality that tends to distinguish indigenous education initiatives from their mainstream counterparts is a high degree of structural and functional integration within the initiatives and between the initiatives and the communities they serve. Community members are often active participants in the educational initiative, and students, faculty and administrators are often actively involved in the community. The relationship between academic studies and the real world is treated as an interactive process, each contributing to the other in a cumulative fashion. Knowledge, rather than being fragmented into academic subject areas, is usually viewed in a holistic framework and is acquired through a mutually constructive process drawing as much from experience as from books. The institutional structure generally reflects minimal hierarchy, and the boundaries between the various elements are often quite fluid with students, teacher, administrators and community members moving back and forth across multiple roles. Very often it is through such holistic integration of structure and function that cultural congruency is achieved, as the initiative and all of its participants enter into the natural flow of life in the community. Students balance their classroom learning by becoming actively engaged in real-world tasks and experiences in their community, thus contributing to the well-being of their people as they gain access and exposure to local social networks, communication patterns, current political issues and other aspects of the inner workings of their community. While efforts at structural and functional integration are not restricted to indigenous education initiatives, it is through such synergistic and integrative processes that indigenous educational initiatives are able to achieve so much with so few resources and at the same time merge their cultural mandate with their educational mission.

Sustained Local Leadership

Inherent in the successful functioning of indigenous education initiatives is the need for strong, sustained, visionary leadership that is well grounded in the community being served. This has been clearly evident in the experiences of the many such initiatives that have survived their formative years and is the basis for most of the successful cultural adaptations that reflect significant divergence from conventional practices in mainstream educational institutions. It takes a high degree of patience, persistence and political savvy to bring a new initiative or institution into being, and the person or persons responsible for the initiative must have an unwavering commitment to the idea along with strong backing from the community to survive the many obstacles that are likely to be encountered. The chances of such an initiative being sustained over the long term are greatly enhanced if the leadership originates from the local community and is able to effectively represent the interests of the community in the day-to-day milieu of the initiative's development and operation.

Continuity and stability are critical factors in the survival of a new initiative and, while locally-derived leadership is no guarantee of a constructive and cumulative building process, its absence greatly diminishes the chances of long term survival. For indigenous educational development and strategy purposes, the credibility and stature of the leaders in the eyes of the host community is probably more important than their credibility and stature in the eyes of the educational community. The latter can be built over time if there is demonstrated support and interest in the community, but the reverse is much harder to achieve. The qualities that identify a person as a leader (e.g., wisdom or charisma) may be viewed quite differently within the community than they are outside, so it is not uncommon for different people to assume leadership roles in different contexts. Increasingly, indigenous leaders are emerging with credibility in both arenas and, where that is the case, the fledgling educational initiatives are usually able to move ahead at a much quicker pace.

Participation of Elders

One of the most consistent features of indigenous education initiatives is the active role that local elders play in many aspects of the life of the initiative. For example, elders are usually involved in some consultative role in shaping the priorities and ethos of the initiative and are generally regarded as the culture-bearers with regard to the practice and transmission of traditional values, beliefs, knowledge, skills and customs. In some cases, resident elders play a more active role in the daily life of the initiative, serving as guides and counselors who help students in the integration of the traditional and academic aspects of their educational experiences. Elders are a critical link between the indigenous initiatives and the culture and community with which they are associated, and they serve as an important alternative to books as a source of valuable knowledge and expertise. For most such initiatives, their educational mission and cultural mandate could not be accomplished without significant participation by the elders.

Spiritual Harmony

Along with the prominent role of Elders, another dimension that plays an important part in the cultural strength of indigenous education initiatives is that of spirituality, not in the sense of

promoting a formal religious dogma, but in the sense of attending to the development and well-being of the whole person and the integration and balancing of all aspects of people's lives including the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Since spiritual beliefs and practices vary from culture to culture and from person to person, students are usually encouraged to participate in whatever manner they consider appropriate and to recognize the need to attend to their spiritual development as an integral and essential part of their overall development as human beings in harmony with the world around them. For some, this may take the form of Christian religious practices while for others it may mean rekindled interest in traditional beliefs and practices and for still others it may mean a combination of both or neither. From the indigenous communities' perspective, however, it is an indication that an education is not viewed as complete if it doesn't nurture the spirit along with the mind and the body.

Use of Local Language

For many of the indigenous communities that have entered into a local education initiative, the survival and use of the indigenous language has been a major issue of concern. In one form or another, the local language is usually incorporated into the fabric of the initiative. Where the language is alive and well and in everyday use, it will most likely be reflected as a subject in the curriculum, to be taught for conversational and/or literate purposes to persons for whom it may be a first or second language. Those learning the language may include, along with students, other interested local residents as well as outsiders who are living and working in the community. Where the language is sufficiently strong that locally produced instructional materials are available, it may also be used as the language of instruction for other subjects. In those situations where the local language is no longer in everyday use, indigenous institutions are often expected to play a major role in protecting, preserving and even revitalizing the language through research, documentation and course offerings where fluent speakers are still available to serve as instructors. In some cases, this has led to the establishment of full immersion programs as a vehicle for reviving a language that has been lying dormant. In so doing, the local educational institutions often serve as a vehicle for broader cultural renewal leading to increased sense of pride and dignity as the contemporary significance of historical events and experiences are recognized, recounted and documented. Language can serve as an important focal point for rekindling a sense of cultural identity and distinctiveness, and indigenous education initiatives are often the vehicle through which the spark is ignited.

Traditional Ways of Knowing

Less tangible than the role of language but of equal and growing importance to indigenous education efforts are the traditional ways of constructing, organizing and using knowledge -- indigenous epistemologies or ways of knowing. While this has been a largely neglected area in the past, it has received growing attention as indigenous institutions, and personnel have sought to move beyond mainstream categories and perceptions of knowledge and how it is put to use in everyday and institutional life. Indigenous scholars have taken an increasingly active role in articulating the basis of traditional structures and uses of knowledge and have found a ready audience in indigenous communities and institutions for the incorporation of those alternative

ways of knowing into educational practice. The most common consideration in this regard is the traditional emphasis on orality over literacy as the primary means for codifying and transmitting knowledge. Taking the issue one step further, Eber Hampton has attempted to outline an "Indian theory of education", including an alternative set of "standards" which can be used as a basis for judging the efficacy of educational programs designed to serve Indian people. These standards embody much of what indigenous educational initiatives are about including:

- * Spirituality -- an appreciation for spiritual relationships.
- * Service -- the purpose of education is to contribute to the people.
- * Diversity -- Indian education must meet the standards of diverse tribes and communities.
- * Culture -- the importance of culturally determined ways of thinking, communicating and living.
- * Tradition -- continuity with tradition.
- * Respect -- The relationship between the individual and the group recognized as mutually empowering.
- * History -- appreciation of the facts of Indian history, including the loss of the continent and continuing racial and political oppression.
- * Relentlessness -- commitment to the struggle for good schools for Indian children.
- * Vitality -- recognition of the strength of Indian people and culture.
- * Conflict -- understanding the dynamics and consequences of oppression.
- * Place -- the importance of sense of place, land and territory.
- * Transformation -- commitment to personal and societal change (Hampton 1988).

While there are variations in the details of knowledge use and ways of knowing from one indigenous community to another, the commonalities usually outweigh the differences, and it is those commonalities of experience that have brought indigenous people and institutions together to form organizations such as the American Indian Higher Education Consortium in the U.S. and Mokakit Indian Education Research Association in Canada as a way to strengthen their ability to devise an institutional framework capable of respecting, enhancing and perpetuating indigenous forms of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Traditional Teaching Practices

Coupled with traditional ways of knowing in indigenous educational initiatives is the incorporation of traditional teaching practices. Once again, the specifics vary from culture to culture, but most initiatives make some attempt to adapt their teaching routines to reflect traditional practices in one way or another. Most notable in this regard is a highly personalized relationship between teachers and students along with a strong emphasis on experiential forms of learning activities. In fact, "teaching" in its conventional mode as a one-way inculcation of knowledge from teacher to student is usually considered inappropriate in indigenous settings, with a preference instead for "creating opportunities for students to learn," where the "teacher" acts more in the role of tutor/facilitator than as a repository of knowledge to which the student is given access. In this way, teaching and learning are considered reciprocal and symbiotic processes in which knowledge and skills grow out of a mutual exchange and shared experience

in which all participants are teacher as well as learner. In addition to the symbiotic nature of teaching and learning, careful attention is given to the context as a significant factor in shaping a learning experience.

Students participating in an indigenous educational initiative are just as likely to find themselves actively engaged in a learning activity out in a community setting as they are to be listening to a lecture in a classroom. Learning is treated as a natural process that is best accomplished in a natural context, and very often that context is a setting in which the learning can be linked to real-life circumstances. This is especially true with regard to subject matter related to the local culture, which is more likely to retain its true meaning and authenticity if encountered in a natural context than if obtained from a book in the library. At the same time, however, many indigenous institutions have become the central repository for artifactual and historical information related to the local community and culture, and they make a concerted effort to incorporate that material into the curriculum in culturally congruent ways.

Congenial Environment

If context is important to the teaching/learning process, it is no less important to the physical environment of the initiative. Wherever possible, indigenous education initiatives have made an attempt to create an atmosphere and a physical environment that is as congenial and compatible with traditional cultural forms as possible. Architectural examples of this in indigenous higher education initiatives are the Navajo Community College facilities and the First Nations Longhouse at the University of British Columbia, both of which have sought to incorporate designs with which students could identify and feel at home. In addition to the physical environment, institutions have also sought to establish a congenial and supportive social environment to which indigenous students will be drawn to receive cultural sustenance and guidance while they learn to cope with and adjust to the surrounding mainstream institutional milieu. Many indigenous students attending higher education institutions are the first generation in their family and/or community to do so, and for them to cross the cultural boundaries to enter a university can be a very intimidating experience. To the extent that the institutions are able to offer a culturally compatible and congenial social and physical environment in which the indigenous culture is recognized and built upon, the students are that much more likely to find the rest of their experience sufficiently comfortable and rewarding to persevere.

Participatory Research

The last distinguishing quality of indigenous education initiatives to be addressed here, particularly at the higher education level, is the nature of the research that such initiatives tend to enter into -- namely, participatory, community-based research. Given the close link between the institutions and the communities in which they are situated, there is a strong inclination to be of service to those communities and, in the research arena, that usually means focusing on issues and using methodologies that draw upon and feed back into the community in substantive ways. Thus, community members are often active participants in research activities, and the data gathering and analyses are tied to issues of current concern to the community. In the case of the Centre for Maaori Studies and Research, for example, the environmental and cultural impact of

large-scale economic development initiatives has been the focus of intense community research activity. Through the use of participatory research approaches, a great deal of residual expertise accrues to the community, and the results of the research undertaking are seldom left to gather dust on a shelf. Indigenous education institutions are uniquely situated to contribute new knowledge, insights and perspectives on issues of concern to society in general, but to do so they must go beyond the conventional modes of research and knowledge production and enter into close collaboration with the communities they serve.

The characteristics listed above give an indication of the qualities and issues that set indigenous education initiatives and strategies apart from their mainstream counterparts and indicate the special nature and mission of these unique efforts. Their ability to move beyond convention and find ways to make education accessible and meaningful to students and communities that historically have been left out will continue to enlighten and enliven educational processes, not only in their own milieu, but in mainstream society as well.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to identify some of the distinguishing characteristics of the various kinds of indigenous education initiatives and strategies that have been implemented in many Fourth World settings. The unique cultural adaptations reflected in the initiatives put forth by indigenous people offer valuable lessons for anyone seeking to construct an educational alternative to the dominant, mainstream, Western-style institutional model. Embedded in many of these initiatives are common concerns revolving around issues such as center vs. periphery, local vs. global, rural vs. urban, subsistence vs. market-based, theoretical vs. applied, self-sufficiency vs. dependency, self-determination vs. neo-colonialism, outside vs. inside, traditional vs. modern, etc. In addressing issues such as these, indigenous education initiatives are contributing not only to the well-being of the immediate communities they serve, but to the well-being of all humanity.

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