

Multilingual Education for Indigenous Communities

MAHENDRA KUMAR MISHRA, State Tribal Education Coordinator,
Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority, India

Folklore as a body of community knowledge and a mode of communication contributes much towards creating a culturally responsive curriculum for children in different socio-cultural contexts. Local knowledge as a socio-cultural system offers the schools with the verities of pre-school knowledge which the school is unable to explore due to its monoculture curriculum.

Folklore is a stock of knowledge created by the community for their children's learning in context. Children's folklore like stories, games, songs, riddles, arts and crafts, music and dance, play songs and play materials contribute substantially to the cognitive and social development of children. This improves their verbal and non-verbal skills.

The guiding principles of National Curriculum Framework 2005 are to connect local knowledge with the school curriculum. For oral tradition, NCF 2005 envisages,

The oral lore and traditions of craft are a unique intellectual property, varied and sophisticated, preserved by innumerable groups in our society, including women, marginalised, and communities, and tribal people. By including these in the curriculum for all children, we could provide them with windows of understanding and kernels of ideas, skills and capabilities that could be worked into forms and inventions that could enrich their own lives and society. School privileges the literate, but cannot afford to continue to ignore the oral. Sustaining oral skills of all kinds is important. (p. 27 of NCF 2005)¹

The NCF 2005 further elaborates the local knowledge tradition:

Many communities and individuals in India are a rich storehouse of knowledge about many aspects of India's environment, acquired over generations and handed down as traditional knowledge, as well as through an individual's practical experience. Such knowledge may pertain to: naming and categorising plants, or ways of harvesting and storing water, or of practising sustainable agriculture. Sometimes these may be different from the ways in which school knowledge approaches the subject. At other times, it may not be recognised as something that is important. In these situations, teachers could help children develop projects of study based on local traditions and people's practical ecological knowledge;

this may also involve comparing these with the school approach. In some cases, as in the case of classifying plants, the two traditions may be simply parallel and be based on different criteria considered significant. In other cases, for example the classification and diagnosis of illnesses, it may also challenge and contradict local belief systems. However, all forms of local knowledge must be mediated through Constitutional values and principles. (p. 32 of NCF 2005: www.ncert.nic.in)

Regarding the use of home language or the first language of the children in the school where the gap of home language and school language is high, the Position Paper of National Focus Group on Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes envisages for the inclusion of home or first language of the children in schools as the medium of instruction at least up to the end of the primary stage. Ignoring the cultural and linguistic diversities in school system is a part of the 'history of sanctioned injustice'.

Looking at tribal education in the Indian context, it is evident that not much effort has been made for the education of tribal children, except providing them inappropriate education. Fortunately, folklore as a community system has become gradually acknowledged at the national level as curricular framework and the language of the children as the pre-requisite for child-centred education. More dialogue is necessary to explore the Indian knowledge system in the school system where children can get their experiential life reflected in the school curriculum.

This newsletter contains articles contributed by practitioners and policy makers on indigenous education and multilingual education across the globe. Tove Skutnabb Kangas is a well known advocate of Multilingual Education and Linguistic Human Rights. David A. Hough is a Liberatory Pedagogist and his focus is on Nepal Multilingual Education Project to promote tribal education through bottom up approach, empowering the indigenous community. Iina Nurmela's paper is based on the experiential part of David's work in Nepal. Susanne Perez's article explores the indigenous education system of Peru. Dhir Jhingran has suggested appropriate educational strategies for implementation arrangements referring some feasible models drawing from the successful models from different countries where indigenous education has been made successful.

By bringing out this volume, NFSC has posed a question to folklorists about the role they play for the non-literate society they work with. A.K. Ramanujan has aspired to connect folklorists with educationists to explore the process of cognition system in folklore. That is still ignored in our educational domain. I am grateful to the authors for their kind contribution to the Indian Folklife. I am thankful to Mr. M.D. Muthukumarswamy for kindly offering me this opportunity to choose

a topic like multilingual education for indigenous communities for the NFSC newsletter to strengthen the efforts of policymakers, theoreticians and practitioners of indigenous education in India and outside India.

Endnotes

¹ National Curriculum Framework 2005, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, 2005 ❁

Linguistic Genocide : Tribal Education in India

TOVE SKUTNABB-KANGAS,

SkutnabbKangas@gmail.com Under construction: www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org

Most tribal education in India teaches tribal children through the medium of a language that is not their own language. This prevents access to education. It can also be seen as language genocide.

Robert Dunbar, human rights lawyer, and I wrote, with support from Indigenous colleagues, an Expert paper for UNPFII (*United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*) (Magga et al., 2005). It contains sociological, educational and legal argumentation where we show that to educate Indigenous/tribal and minority (ITM) children (including immigrant minorities), through the medium of a dominant language in a **submersion** or even early-exit transitional programme prevents access to education because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates. Thus it violates the human right to education.

This right is expressed in many international human rights documents, also in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Art. 29). The Convention has been ratified by all other UN member states except two: Somalia and the USA.

In submersion education, an ITM child learns something of a dominant language **subtractively**, at the cost of developing her own language. Often the dominant language replaces the child's own language. Submersion education often curtails the development of the children's capabilities and perpetuates poverty (see economics Nobel laureate Amartya Sen). It is organized against solid research evidence of how best to reach high levels of bilingualism or multilingualism and how to enable these children to achieve academically in school. Instead the children should have **additive** education, in a **mother-tongue-based multilingual (MLE)** programme where the child's own language is the main medium of education atleast during the first 6 years, preferably longer, and where other languages are taught as subjects by well-qualified bilingual or

multilingual teachers who know the child's mother tongue.

Our recent Expert paper (Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2008) shows that subtractive dominant-language medium education for ITM children can have harmful consequences socially, psychologically, economically and politically. It can cause very serious mental harm: social dislocation, psychological, cognitive, linguistic and educational harm, and, partially through this, also economic, social and political marginalisation. It can also often result in serious physical harm, e.g. in residential schools, and as a long-term result of marginalisation - e.g. alcoholism, suicides and violence.

When States, including India, persist in implementing these subtractive policies, in the full knowledge of their devastating effects, the education can thus sociologically and educationally be termed genocide, according to two of the definitions in United Nations' 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (the "Genocide Convention").

Article II(e): '*forcibly transferring children of the group to another group*'; and Article II(b): '*causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group*'; (emphasis added).

Legally, this education can be labeled a crime against humanity. Our conclusion states that subtractive education

... is now at odds with and in clear violation of a range of human rights standards, and in our view amount to ongoing violations of fundamental rights. It is at odds with contemporary standards of minority protection. ... In our view, the concept of "crime against humanity" is less restrictive [than genocide], and can also be applied to these forms of education. ... In our view, the destructive consequences of subtractive education, not only for indigenous languages and cultures but also in terms

