

The Center for World Indigenous Studies is a non-profit research and education organization dedicated to wider understanding and appreciation of ideas and knowledge originating from Indigenous Peoples and from the reality of Indigenous Nations.

More than 9000 Indigenous Nations play a major role in the life of the natural world and in relations between more than 160 states. With rich cultures and a wealth of creativity, Indigenous nations have tenaciously held their ground despite centuries of colonization and repression.

Frequently misunderstood by the modern world, and often misrepresented by observers, the peoples of Indigenous Nations rarely have the opportunity to directly contribute to the world's better understanding of their spiritual, historical, political, economic, social and philosophical thinking. Fourth World Journal is one of several Center for World Indigenous Studies publications produced to elevate the visibility of Indigenous people's ideas and knowledge, and information about the circumstances of Indigenous Nations. _____

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Education in the Indian Way

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When a person starts the lifelong task of living, from being new born all the way to being an elder ready to return to the spirit world, there are certain things he must go through to get from one stage of growing to another. First he must learn the things he needs to do to feed and make his body grow and then he must be able to recognize and do what he needs for it to grow strong and keep it that way. Finally, he must find and fulfill his reason for being here in order to reach a final balance of health in the mind, body and spirit. This whole process, aimed at the final goal, which is happiness, is what education is. The traditional systems of our people follow closely the natural stages for growth and they produce people and communities which are happy with who they are and what they do.

LEARNING AND NATURAL GROWTH

How we learn as children is important in how we learn as adults. The natural way a baby learns is through getting what he needs to live from loved ones right from the time the baby is conceived to the time he is born. First, he needs food, warmth and shelter in

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order to live. He learns that mother provides those things. He learns that he is dependent on mother for those things. Without her he will die. He learns that she provides those things for no other reason that that she loves and cares for him. He learns everything from learning to talk and walk to all the social disciplines and habits from this fact of dependence upon loved ones, or "mother", for basic needs. So he learns from loving and caring parents at this stage. "Parents" are all relatives in extended family units; that is grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins. So caring and teaching by caring relatives is very important for the child to grow right in his body, mind and spirit at this stage, so that he will be strong, healthy, confident and happy. He will then have the tools he needs to move on to the next stage.

If these things are missing either by parents not living up to their responsibilities or by children missing out on love and care by parents because of time spent away at school, serious damage is done. He will not be equipped to deal with the next stage of growth.

When a child reaches puberty, his mind and body undergoes certain changes. He is then ready to learn new things in a new way to get him ready for adulthood. He learns that his body can now do things it couldn't do before. He learns that he can now use his body to do things for himself that he needed mother for. He learns that he can use his mind together with his body to make things easier. This is the stage of growth where he sharpens up all the physical skills he has play-trained his body to do. This is the stage where patterns that he will use in everyday life are set. Training at this stage is very important for the mind, the body and the spirit.

How he will be as an adult depends very much on the training he gets at this time. It is during this time

that elders work with children to help them get special skills for whatever work they are to do as adults. This is the time in many tribes when children are trained to get up early and swim or seat and exercise. This is also the time when they are sent into the mountains alone to find their inner power and strength. This is also the time when children turn inward and start questioning who they are and where they fit in. This is natural.

Guidance by elders of the community is important at this time to help a child through this hard time, for it is the time of change over from child to adult. It is the time when a child wants responsibility for himself, but sometimes doesn't know how to go about it. It is the time when love and caring and understanding by the whole community is needed.

If understanding and caring by people in the community is not there, the child can become bitter, confused and unwilling to do anything about himself. This when drugs or alcohol or crime—thrills become an answer to the hurt and confusion these children can go through. Serious damage to the child can happen at this time, damage that can remain the rest of his life as an adult.

As an adult, the person, if he has been properly guided through childhood and being a teen, he will now have all that he needs, mentally, physically and spiritually, to go through life choosing and throwing away things, continuing to learn in a good way while he takes his place as a parent and as a teacher of anything he has learned to that point. Everything he does as an adult is a part of the community he lives in, and it is in that way he shares his knowledge and wisdom. He shares his good feelings and his hard times are everyone's. Pity for one another, is respect for one another. That is what a strong community is based on.

That is what the government of our nation is all about. Each person interacting in a good way with others. This is where we get our power and strength as Indian people. So education from childhood to adulthood is at the centre of everything we are striving for. How we "educate" ourselves determines how we live in our communities. Therefore, education in the Indian way is everybody's business, not just teachers, committees or leaders.

But, we have had troubles in our communities which have blocked our education in the Indian way. Two things working together have created most of our educational problems. These two things are mistakes made by us, and planned actions by non-Indian governments.

MISTAKES AND OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Our mistake, where all problems being, is that we as parents, within families, clans, bands and tribes, gave over some of the education of our children to outside people. We can look back on our history that some families did successfully resist handing over responsibility for their children's education. But many simply gave up their children.

But, even has we made this mistake there were many outside our communities who planned actions which have worked against us. Outside influences worked to assimilate and manipulate our people. More specifically, their actions are:

Planned Assimilation — the kind of treatment in all areas of education of Indian people by an outside government that says, "We will do what's best for you because you are too stupid to know." This kind of treatment is aimed at eventually turning us

all into brown--colored whitemen.

Planned Manipulation — the kinds of ways things are taught in public school systems to all students which is a kind of brainwashing that makes you want to be only a certain kind of person. Because the outside government system of a country depends on people who will be greedy to make as much money as they can, they must have systems which will produce people who will think it's good and right to have more than those around them. In 1947, the Canadian government wrote the paper called **The Plan to Liquidate Canada's Indians in 25 years** and in 1969 Canada's government issued the **White Paper Policy** the plan to terminate Indian rights and status through transfer of all programs based on rights either to the Canadian government departments besides the Department of Indian Affairs or to provincial government departments. In these papers, "education" is only one, if not the most powerful way to assimilate Indian people into the non-Indian society.

If we put these things together and understand them, we can see why we are having problems. We at home teach our children to share and thing of one another, while at the same time they are being told through their non-Indian system that the only way they will be recognized as being successful, is if they are better at being selfish and using selfishly or disrespectfully everything around them. Now there are a lot of confused Indian people because of that; confusion because of a conflict of values and understanding. This has come to be known as an "identity crisis". These confusions and identity problems lead to high drop-out rates, high alcohol and drug abuse, high numbers of

family break-ups, marriage break-ups, high unemployment and high welfare leading to high numbers of people incarcerated in non-Indian jails; and sometimes leading to high suicide rates.

The plan which would serve us best in the long run, would be one which causes the outside government to simply give total recognition to the validity of education in the Indian way. We would once again control our own education and our communities. There is a long hard process that we have to go through before we get to that goal: From strengthening our own education and un-brainwashing ourselves as parents, trainers and leaders and putting together strong educational units at home and in our communities based on our own ways and only using what we need from outside.

Allen Systems of Education

In outside systems of education, in public schools and other ways, children are taught, many times parents and people of the community are not involved in any way with what their children are learning. First of all, the nine o'clock to four o'clock classroom routine, can take the interest out of anybody. Children's bodies cannot tolerate sitting in one place all day, this is unnatural. Being kept quiet without any reason other than that the teacher might go crazy is also unnatural.

Children learn through play and enjoyment of everything new. Public schools have taken that away. They learn best when doing things through experience. For example, you can make him put numbers down on paper, but they won't mean anything. Counting dogs, horses and cows and how many of each sure means something, especially if they are all in front of your house at one time. Public schools take away that kind of learning that sticks with you. Reading, writing, and

Education in the Indian Way

math may come in handy later on in the work you do as an adult, but they have little to do with growing up right in a good way, so that you can become a useful happy adult. These things are missing from education systems and are very important to our communities having strong, creative people.

Other ways a child is educated in outside systems is through what they read about, what they hear on radio and what they see on television and movies. All these things are designed to entertain white people, it isn't real about the real world. These things talk mostly about sex, crime and all kinds of sick living. Television is the worst because it is around the most. It shows kids how to be a rat in the big rat race for wealth. It

tells kids if they don't have flashy clothes, take drugs, and be in, as far as sleeping around, that they are nothing. It educates them in an unhealthy way to be dissatisfied with who they are. It confuses and brainwashes them into believing that being an Indian is shameful. Sometimes a child goes through life feeling that way through the education he gets at school and what he picks up from television, radio, magazines and movies. Also, a child may be spending time at home, but he is really spending it with a television and not with his parents, so between the time spent at the public school and spending time at television, the child can become a stranger to the parent. If the parents and the community do not restrict these things and do not offer him opportunities to learn that being an Indian is a special gift, that it is a good life and that we have many good things that are better than discos's and drugs, then we will continue to see our people live and die hard. The Indian way is our education.

Residential schools have done their damage by taking away the language, customs and beliefs of the past generations. Now public schools and television are

doing their part in making sure our kids become brown whitemen. We do have a gap that we will have to work together to bridge before it widens to the point of no return. The damage that has been and is being done to our people through outside systems of education is still at the root of all our problems in our communities.

BREAKING UP OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Our systems of education were in place for thousands of generations. Our people were strong, happy and wealthy. Each person knew what his job was and was good at it. We had leaders, trainers, healers, storytellers, musicians, artists, craftsmen, hunters, fishermen and food providers. We had good communications and relationships. Our communities were tied together through customs, language and beliefs, so that the education system was based on that for each one.

When the non-Indian came, he told us in many ways that his system was better than ours, that we had to change. We believed him for awhile because he seemed to have magic things like rifles and wagons and later on cars, television and jets. But we have found out that our people are not happy being whitemen. We like to be Indians, we like to share with each other, we like to practice our customs and our religions, it makes us strong inside. We understand that we can use things they have, like cars and typewriters, but we want to keep our ways. Some people have a hard time to come to that understanding because of the brainwashing they have been forced to go through. Some of our people still feel ashamed to practice Indian ways because of that. Some lost their language and hardly know what the customs of their people were.

The language is very important in the education of all the ways, customs and beliefs of the tribe. Without it some things don't make sense. If we talk about the retention of our ways it is not possible without language. Language is really important in how we value and understand things around us. It is a key to a way of understanding, important to a way of thinking that is ours. How can English talk about things like spirit songs and dances? How can English describe an attitude of respect, compassion and pity all together upon which our communities are built and kept?

The spiritual base or belief of a tribe is another important foundation where our strength comes from that has seriously been damaged through the non-Indian education of our people. We know that our people were capable of doing many things through their understanding and working together with nature in a good way instead of against it or ignoring it. This was a strong part of their education and their everyday life. This is the foundation of self-responsibility which is the basis of community life and our ability to govern ourselves.

The steps we must take to implement good education within our nations must begin with the correction of our mistakes. We must be able to face up to them and each one of us being to make those changes. We need *unbrainwashing* and the understanding of what education really is, and what it should do. This means that systems that are accepted have to be changed. This means that we need to change our ideas about outside systems first. How do we do that?

Because our education systems fell apart at the household or family level through loss of our language, customs and beliefs, this is where our first effort must be. As difficult as it may sound, it can be done through help in the re-education or strengthening of

parents. We can do this ourselves in many ways, but as long as we overlook this task, we will continue to fail in our efforts to change. Once this is done we will already have changed.

Next we need to group together as communities and work out what our education is going to be for. What tasks do we train people for in what way, using all avenues and resources, regardless of outside government rules and regulations. Once these things have been worked out, we will already have made lasting changes. After that we will have to work together throughout our territory to keep these things going and improving them so that we will have education systems in place for each tribe and nation that will be their own. That is how we will shape our own future and regain discipline and sharing.

RECLAIMING OUR FAMILIES

Because education starts at home and belongs there, we must look at steps to strengthen and maintain family units. Parents have the choice. Families strengthen the community.

Parents and families should gather to talk about what can be done; what each can contribute and how. This can be a good beginning for pulling ties together and bridging communications and lost relationships. This can become a regular enjoyable thing. Each family, with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, has people who are skilled in many areas. Ways can be figured out how to share those skills and the knowledge to the young ones and to each other. Discipline and customs can be shared at these gatherings.

Education in the Indian Way Sharing

Sharing is an important discipline in the keeping of the ways of our cultures alive. It is important that we get this back. One way of sharing that is traditional is inter-family visits. This must be brought back and strengthened so that knowledge and things between families can be shared. This is an old custom and belief of our people, we must take this responsibility and begin to practice it again. Sharing food and traditional medicines, songs, dances, games and sharing our good time as well as our work. Especially helping to provide for elders and disabled people.

Our children especially need constructive direction and training in learning to grow up naturally and this can be done through us giving that example by doing it ourselves as much as possible. It is important also that we give people the opportunity to be able to share. We should not let each other shut people out just because we use *programs*, we have to help each other allow everyone to contribute when they want to and can.

In Our Homes

We can strengthen ourselves to understand the use of our houses or our homes. Even though we live in single family houses, we can begin to use our homes in the way that our people did traditionally. For gathering to gather in, for special ceremonies, a place that we use to share our knowledge, our skills, our beliefs and values and a place that we can strengthen ourselves and each other. Every house has its own spirit. How we take care of that spirit is important. We can use our knowledge of special ceremonies for the spirit of the home for all reasons whether a family is

experiencing problems or a loved one has left the home.

The setting up of the home for uses is also one of the things that can be re-done to assist families in re-educating themselves. Common rooms or living rooms that are now simply being used for watching television can be used for talking, visiting and sharing. The television should be moved to a not so easily accessible room so that it is not sitting there in the middle of the room saying, "Turn me on!" or it can be removed completely from the house.

Attitudes Toward Each Other

We need to change our attitudes towards each other. We must all take the responsibility, young and old, to take the time to work with other people in the family in teaching all of the knowledge and skills to each other. This can be done through simple things first, spending time with one another, with each other's children, young people with old people, to learn from each other. We can do this on an everyday basis; sharing baby-sitting, visiting elders and having fun through various recreation and sports with each other.

Adults impose television on children because they don't do things with their children and at the same time, elders can be left alone with only television to visit. This can be changed if we take the responsibility to start doing things for and with each other. Children, especially, can be shown that the work that they do is appreciated, that they are important members of the family. Family members can help each other in many ways, with transportation, meals, and special gifts to each other and not to carry the negative attitudes while we are developing our re-education of ourselves.

Families must take the responsibility to strengthen the family in the knowledge of the spiritual ways of their people. This can be done in many ways where these things have not been practiced for a while, like talking together about the ways these things were done and then starting out with some of the simpler things. Elders or spiritual leaders, whether they be young or old, can be brought in to help with these things where most of the ways have been forgotten.

Indian power has been given to Indian people on this island for their help and well-being. We will all become stronger and better through practicing good ways. It need not be in conflict or against non-Indian religions, because all good things work together. Also where the family, the clan, or the nation has forgotten most of its ways, someone can be brought in from another nation, as long as the family likes, trusts and can work with that person. Because, no matter what tribe the good ways come from if it will strengthen you and your family and make you healthier, then it is yours. This is all important in the education of our people in the whole sense, right from the beginning.

Language is the Foundation

Our language is an important part of our learning and sharing in how we live with each other, how we do things, how we understand things. Without the language it is easy for us to think in the White-man's way because our language has our way of knowing.

Language should be spoken and taught to each other in the home and in the community. Not only for young ones, but for other members of the family. In that way we can also reinforce our trust and respect towards each other. We have to re-train our thinking

about learning and teaching one another — no one should laugh at another for trying to use the language.

We should always use as much as we know every day. One of the ways that teaching language can be done for a person to learn to speak is to use the "baby" method — what a baby goes through to learn a language. As you would do with a baby, give praise and encouragement to the person learning to speak and understand.

Strength Through Health

Re-educating ourselves as parents for proper health is important. Mental or emotional health is an important thing in our daily lives. Caring for one another in a positive sense and working together to overcome the negative things is important. Respect and pity for one another is the basis of emotional and mental health. The spiritual health of the family is another area that we must take the responsibility over. The physical health and well-being of the family includes eating good and proper foods whether they be bought or gathered traditionally. Physical activities to keep the body fit is also important in maintaining physical health as a prevention. It is important that we begin to take Indian medicines that our people used before more seriously and begin to use them to heal our sicknesses or our wound, because these medicines work with all three aspects of the mind, body and spirit. These are things that we must re-learn when all three things are tied together.

Doctorings for the individuals as well as the whole family should be used to bring health and good feelings so a person and the family can grow back together in a good way. Re-educating ourselves to accept and use the power and the strength that we have been given is

important in overcoming problems related to addiction of all forms. Other methods are there for our use, but we must use all that we have.

Parental Guidance

One of the important things that our families are based on is the fact that parents are the main influence for the young peoples' learning. Because of a lot of things that have happened during our past, and that are continuing to happen, the family unit is breaking down and some parents have a hard time being parents and a healthy influence to the family. Some parents themselves have been influenced in white foster homes, in white residential schools and in other situations, and don't have the strong Indian life skills that are necessary for parenting and making a strong home.

There are many things that we can do together to help with these situations, but most of it must be done by parents themselves. Husbands and wives in their treatment of one another; in their attitudes towards one another, can be helped by elders of the family or spiritual leaders if they begin to take the responsibility as they did in the past to offer advice and support to parents in how they make their home life. This was an important part of our traditions. Child care and home-making and the traditional roles of husband and wife can be a part of the education of the family. The family is at the centre of our communities and the strength and well-being of the family is the most important step in regaining our self-responsibility.

Our education about babies from the time that they are conceived onwards is important. We must care for mothers who are carrying babies as well as caring for young children. Our attitudes towards the unborn must change in that they are all our responsibility and we

must all help in the care for the unborn within families and within communities. Special help can be set up for single parents before and after birth of the baby. This can be done within the family by grandmothers, aunts, cousins, or can be done from outside of the family in the community.

All of those steps will depend on people doing things. Inter-tribal organizations, tribal leaders and the nation can help by assisting in organizing family gatherings and by putting together re-training sessions. A lot of it can be done by clans or families themselves. That in itself will be a big step ahead toward re-education, and self-reliance.

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