The Secretary of the Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Inquiry into learning in Indigenous communities

Atsia.reps@aph.gov.au

In looking at the Terms of Reference we would like to note the following:-

. The Bark Petition (1963) hanging in Parliament House was made possible because linguist Beulah Lowe enabled the Yolngu people to write their language and to have a good understanding of it and the English language. They were therefore able to send this petition in their own language, Gumatji.
"In the long term the voice of Yolngu in their own togue brought to the consciousness of the White Australian public, issues of Aboriginal Land Rights that have repercussions to this day" (p278) 'Beulah Lowe and the Yolngu People' by Betsy Wearing
should be taught their language first to avoid the rift, which so often occurs between young educated folk and the older ones" She also pointed out that "One of the biggest barriers between races is the language barrier" (notes 1964)
. 'When you lose your land, at least you can fight to get it back. But when you lose your language, a whole way of being, a whole cultural universe is lost' "Avoiding a silent future," Land Rights News, June 2002
. In the Koori Mail 10/8/2011 it is noted on p8 that the Gurindji want to 'speak our own language and end the Northern Territory Intervention.
On p15 it is further noted that Mick Gooda (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) at the Gama Festival that "international research has proven that children allowed to learn within a bilingual environment achieved greater results than those that didn't have that opportunity."

Aboriginal tongues deserve to be revived for historical, humanistic and social justice reasons thus addressing inequality. (cf. Thieberger 1990)

"If you talk to a man in language he understands, that goes to his head. I f you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart" Nelson Mandela

.Besides significant scholarly impact and intellectual benefits, the results of the endeavours in language revitalization will also improve substantially the future of Australia's Indigenous communities, promoting and maintaining their physical, spiritual and cultural good health through:-
(1) Transformation of disturbed individuals;
(2) Capacity building: Some Aboriginal people will undertake training only because they are interested in language(s) However, what they will learn in the process are useful

generic skills such as literacy, computer literacy, conducting research and giving speeches in public;

(3) Improved sense of being well being in the local Aboriginal community.

(4) Reconciliation and potential decrease in racism towards Aboriginal people in some country centres;

(5) promoting cultural tourism to Aboriginal areas in order to learn about cultures and languages.

Regaining language is a life-changing experience for many Aboriginal people. A small investment into language revitalization can make an enormous difference in society. Public health can benefit from language intervention.

. We need to aim at a better informed Indigenous language policy at the national level, as well as in particular institutional context.

As cellist Yo Yo Ma said on 28th Nov 2000 at the White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy. "A Senegalese poet said 'In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught' We must learn about other cultures in order to love, and in order to preserve our common world heritage"

"Saying Sorry" is the beginning not an end in itself. What next???

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous Languages:-

. builds a foundation from which all of Australians can learn Indigenous languages in primary school and the pursuant culture and environmental consciousness.

. Observe the success of the New Zealand example of teaching Maori on a nation wide basis.

. The example of adult literacy proves the case that being literate in ones first language enables a superior learning of a second language.

From Lisbeth Arctander,[redacted]

For the Understanding Indigenous Issues Group of the Uniting Church in Australia, St David's Congregation Dee Why NSW, Davis Harrison, Convenor

Please find an attachment which in addition to the points made above it has been suggested that my personal story maybe an example of how consciousness can be raised and an individual can change and grow. This came up as a result of the Sydney Alliance "Listening Campaign".

'On Becoming Aboriginal' by Lis Arctander

On Becoming Aboriginal

Many years ago I listened to a song by Buffy St Marie where she sang of the American iconic symbol, the bald eagle as 'carrion crow'. It impacted me a lot and I had an awakening to the Red Indian plight.. Then the thought came 'what about Australia's Aborigines?' I had made a vital connection. I had learnt absolutely nothing, no contact and just a vague knowledge of there existence especially in relation to problems. I went to Sydney University and did a short course in Pitrjinjinjara where a woman from 'the stolen generation' introduced the course. She was ecstatic, after all these years of Aboriginal people having to assimilate with white culture, here was a group from the dominant white culture assimilating the other way, towards the black culture. This perception was news to me but it has stayed with me. I only learnt a very little language but it struck a chord that stayed with me.

A few years ago I was helping at an accommodation service for Aboriginal women and children from remote communities who had to come to Alice Springs for medical appointments etc. As circumstances would have it I was adopted into a relationship with Aboriginal people from country NW of Alice Springs. I have an Aboriginal name but unfortunately my knowledge is very limited.

However, a couple of years ago I met an Aboriginal woman at a conference. She was on her own and I thought this was unusual. I introduced myself and it turned out that I was her sister-in-law. She was very ill and had a need for transportation including a lift to the airport which required my making an extra trip etc. I struggled with this but finally broke through with the thought that if it was a member of my family from Norway, I wouldn't hesitate. Was my relationship real or not. I decided it was and haven't looked back.

Having read Germaine Greers essay "On Rage" I believed the Aboriginal 'situation' was hopeless but then the realization that the revitalization of Aboriginal languages would change the focus onto the positive case instead of the overwhelming negative situation. Change the ball park.

Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative

Not to say we don't look at the problems but more importantly we need to look at a solution. One that is useful for Aboriginal people but even more so for the wider community.

Sorry, what next?

Let's go beyond symbolism, which can become lip service without action. Help break down white culture's and white peoples innate sense of superiority.

Let's integrate, assimilate with the First Australians by introducing Aboriginal languages in all Australian Primary Schools. It may difficult to do at one level but practical problems are easily overcome in comparison to the mire we have at this time.

Hoping my story maybe helpful to your work.

Kind regards

Lisbeth Arctander