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Theme 1, **Human Rights and Minority Language Education - (Original version)**

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## **How long have we known what should be done?**

Some of the main causes of the educational failure for Indigenous and minority students were correctly diagnosed centuries ago. Indigenous peoples knew the devastating results of **submersion** programmes where children were taught only through the medium of the dominant language, English. In the USA, Seneca Chief, Handsome Lake, knew this in the **mid-1700s**<sup>1</sup>, meaning **270 years ago**. ***Still these submersion programmes using the dominant language as the only or main teaching language continue all over the world.***

Churches and educational authorities in the USA knew and admitted in **1880** that teaching children for the first several years in their own languages before transferring to English medium gave them better English competence than teaching them in English from the start.<sup>2</sup> This was **140 years ago**. ***Still, the principles are not followed.***

A government resolution in India **1904**<sup>3</sup>, meaning **115 years ago**, described exactly how education should be organized. It recommended using the mother tongue as the main teaching language minimally up to age 13, with English taught as a second language. These 115-year old recommendations for mother-tongue based multilingual education, and the argumentation for them could have been written by the best researchers today, on the basis of hundreds of both small and very large-scale studies. ***Still, the recommendations are not being followed.***

UNESCO's **1953** book *The use of the vernacular languages in education* included firm recommendations, written by experts, on how multilingual education can best be organised – **over 65 years ago**. Likewise, UNESCO's Education position paper in **2003**, *Education in a multilingual world*. ***Still, most ITM<sup>4</sup> education is today organised against solid scientific evidence of how it should be organised.***

## **Is today's situation because of lack of knowledge?**

Many of us, including the panellist here, have talked with thousands of minority and Indigenous parents, and children and their teachers.

We have done research; we have written thousands of books and tens of thousands of articles about the theme.<sup>5</sup> The many solutions are complex, and multidisciplinary: there is no *one* solution that fits all; all good suggestions are context-dependent.

***Still, we KNOW in general terms what should be done. We have clarified the pedagogical principles that need to be followed. The remaining (fewer and fewer) counterarguments against strong models of mother-tongue-based MLE, are political/ideological; they are not scientific.***

***Are we getting anywhere? Are the principles being followed.***

I quote a few lines from various articles by the South African language planner, Neville Alexander. In a review of achievements in Africa Neville concludes (and I quote): '[W]e are not making any progress at all' (Alexander 2006: 9); 'most conference resolutions were no more than a recycling exercise' (Bamgbose 2001, quoted in Alexander 2006: 10); 'these propositions had been enunciated in one conference after another since the early 1980s' (2006: 11); 'since the adoption of the OAU [Organisation for African Unity] Charter in 1963, every major conference of African cultural experts and political leaders had solemnly intoned the commitment of the political leadership of the continent to the development and powerful use of the African languages without any serious attempt at implementing the relevant resolutions' (2006: 11). This has led to 'the palpable failure of virtually all post-colonial educational systems on the continent' (2006: 16)<sup>6</sup>.

What we need is large-scale **implementation** of the existing good laws and intentions and recommendations. But the political will for that is mostly lacking. Neville's analysis (2006: 16) stated: politicians are "not considering favourably a plan that amounts to no more than a wish list, even if it is based on the most accurate quantitative and qualitative research evidence". Politicians need an analysis of the costs. Some of the hard economic evidence was still lacking in 2006, but now much of it exists.

Firstly, researchers have shown how massive the economic costs of NOT doing what is needed are. Many minority children are being pushed out of school. They do **not drop** out; the way formal education is organised **pushes** them out. Most of those who still succeed, (and there are some) do not succeed **BECAUSE of** how their education is organised but **DESPITE of it**.

When minority children do not get any or get very little formal education, this means incredible wastage, economically and psychologically, because they are not allowed to develop the capabilities they have<sup>7</sup>.— Indigenous people and minorities, especially those whom the educational system has alienated, are often over-represented in several statistics on suicides, alcoholism, drugs use, unemployment, violence, crime. Some of the consequences of the miseducation (including an internalised neocolonial consciousness, wanting English-medium education<sup>8</sup>) continue through several generations. This also increases conflict potential in societies, including so called radicalisation of young men and a few young women.

More than 40 years ago some of us (e.g. Stephen Castles, 1973<sup>9</sup>) wrote, to no avail, about the **ticking time bomb** that badly organised minority education implied. We have told the power holders and politicians and educational authorities all this. **And still the miseducation continues**. Now the time bombs are exploding. Minorities have not had a choice. This would presuppose research-based knowledge of the long-term consequences of various choices, and the existence of good of good mother-tongue based MLE.

On the other hand, economists have now shown that even the initial direct costs of getting minority education right are minor<sup>10</sup>. The long-term economic and other gains and benefits of doing it right are huge. The result could be well-educated multilingual people, with drive, initiative, creativity, cognitive flexibility, high self-confidence, fewer identity challenges, economic mobility, and willingness and capacity to integrate and participate in public life.

Today's submersion education continues to participate in linguistic and cultural genocide pedagogically, psychologically, culturally, linguistically and sociologically<sup>11</sup> – see Articles 2b and 2e in the UN Genocide Convention for definitions

of genocide. But it is not only Indigenous peoples and numerically small minorities that suffer. Their languages and the world's linguistic and cultural diversity, suffer, and as a consequence, biodiversity<sup>12</sup> and climate. Some of the *big* minorities today continue to bear the brunt of all this, not only undergoing linguistic and cultural genocide in education but also being physically killed and tortured. I am thinking of the Uyghurs and Tibetans in China, and the Kurds especially in Turkey and Syria. The condemnation from the rest of the world is now forthcoming to some small extent, on paper, but as long as implementation is lacking, even here, it is toothless. Capital and trade trump human rights, as usual.

## **My recommendation**

My ONLY recommendation to the power holders is similar to what Greta Thunberg says: listen to research! And right she is.

**So, IMPLEMENT the good recommendations about mother-tongue-based multilingual education that come from researchers, and from Indigenous and minority children, parents, teachers, and the NGO's This also includes the recommendations on how to allow dominant group children to become high-level multilingual through education<sup>13</sup>.**

As you can hear, I am very pessimistic in my analysis of the state of Linguistic Human Rights in education today, and I have left out all the positive examples<sup>14</sup>. But I am still optimistic in my actions, hoping against today's realities. I finish with a short poem by a Māori friend, **Vaughan Rapatahana**.

**Only one word** (Original in Māori: Tahi kupu anake<sup>15</sup>, )

in a world of many mad politicians  
in a world of many destitute people  
in a world of global warming  
hope is the word.

in a world of many wars  
in a world of corruption and greed  
in a world of the extinction of animals  
hope is the word.

hope is the only word  
hope is the word  
hope.

What Fernand de Varennes, our Special Rapporteur, has done and is doing with these four Forums/Fora represents this hope<sup>16</sup>. Thank you, Fernand. Thank you everybody here!

**NOTES:**

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Jacob (Chief), with Terry Boyle (2001) [1994]. *Teachings from the Longhouse*. Toronto: Stoddart.

<sup>2</sup> The American Board of Indian Commissioners wrote in 1880: "...first teaching the children to read and write in their own language enables them to master English with more ease when they take up that study... a child beginning a four years' course with the study of Dakota would be further advanced in English at the end of the term than one who had not been instructed in Dakota. ... it is true that by beginning in the Indian tongue and then putting the students into English studies our missionaries say that after three or four years their English is better than it would have been if they had begun entirely with English" (quoted from Francis, Norbert & Reyhner, Jon (2002). *Language and Literacy Teaching for Indigenous Education. A Bilingual Approach*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 45-46, 77, 98). In Canada, "for most of the school system's life, though the truth was known to it", the Department of Indian Affairs, "after nearly a century of contrary evidence in its own files", still "maintained the fiction of care" and "contended that the schools were 'operated for the welfare and education of Indian children'" (Milloy 1999: xiii-xiv). These schools represented "a system of persistent neglect and debilitating abuse", "violent in its intention to 'kill the Indian' in the child for the sake of Christian civilization" (ibid.: xiv; xv). Finally closed down in 1986, the Department and the churches were "fully aware of the fact" that the schools "unfitted many children, abused or not, for life in either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal communities. The schools produced thousands of individuals incapable of leading healthy lives or contributing positively to their communities" (ibid.: xvii) (From p. 66 in Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove & Dunbar, Robert (2010). *Indigenous Children's Education as Linguistic Genocide and a Crime Against Humanity? A Global View. Gáldu Čála. Journal of Indigenous Peoples' Rights* No 1, 2010. Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino: Galdu, Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Download at [http://www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/en/most\\_recent\\_books.html](http://www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/en/most_recent_books.html)). See Milloy, John S. (1999). *"A National Crime": The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: The University of Manitoba Press.

<sup>3</sup> A government resolution ("Curzon resolution") was formulated in 1904 expressing serious dissatisfaction with the organisation of education in India, and blaming Macaulay for the neglect of Indian languages (Evans 2002, 277). This extract shows its present-day relevance, and perhaps suggests that postcolonial education and most minority education has failed to learn from earlier experience:

"It has never been part of the policy of the Government to substitute the ... [line missing on photocopy] ... commercial value which a knowledge of English commands, and the fact that the final examinations of the high schools are conducted in English, because the secondary schools to be subjected to a certain pressure to introduce prematurely both the teaching of English and its use as a medium of instruction; while for the same reasons the study of the vernacular in these schools is liable to be thrust into the background. This tendency however requires to be corrected in the interest of sound education. As a general rule the child should not be allowed to learn English as a language until he has made some progress in the primary stages of instruction and has received a thorough grounding in his mother-tongue.

It is equally important that when the teaching of English has begun, it should not be prematurely employed as the medium of instruction in other subjects. Much of the practice, too prevalent in Indian schools, of committing to memory ill-understood phrases and extracts from text-books or notes, may be traced to the scholars' having received instruction through the medium of English before their knowledge of the language was sufficient for them to understand what they were taught. The line of division between the use of the vernacular and of English as a medium of instruction should, broadly speaking, be drawn at a minimum age of 13. No scholar in a secondary school should, even then, be allowed to abandon the study of his vernacular, which should be kept up until the end of the school course. If the educated classes neglect cultivation of their own languages, these will surely sink to the level of mere colloquial dialects possessing no literature worthy of the name, and no progress will be possible in giving effect to the principle, affirmed in the Despatch of 1854, that European knowledge should gradually be brought, by means of Indian vernaculars, within the reach of all classes of the people (as cited in Nurullah and Naik 1951 by Evans 2002, 277-278", quoted on p. 42 in Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2009). MLE for Global Justice: Issues, Approaches, Opportunities. In Mohanty, Ajit, Panda, Minati, Phillipson, Robert, Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (eds). *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the Local*). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 36-59. 42., Evans, Stephen (2002). Macaulay's Minute revisited: Colonial language policy in nineteenth-century India. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 23/4, 260-281; Nurullah, S. and J.P.Naik, J. P. (1951). *A history of education in India*. Bombay: Macmillan.

<sup>4</sup> ITM = Indigenous/Tribal/Minority/Minoritised.

<sup>5</sup> See my Big Bibliography, over 7,000 entries, 442 pages, downloadable at <http://www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/en/Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas-Bibliography.html>

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, Neville (2006). Introduction. In *Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa. Harare, Zimbabwe, 17-21 March 1997. Final Report*. Paris: UNESCO, Intangible Heritage Section, 9-16. *The Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures* from 2000) (<http://www.outreach.psu.edu/programs/allodds/declaration.html>) is one example of the impressive African declarations of intent. Even more optimistic plans are contained in *The Language Plan of Action for Africa* (<http://www.acalan.org/eng/textesreferenciels/pala.php>), one of the results from ACALAN's (The African Academy of Languages, [www.acalan.org](http://www.acalan.org)) conference in Bamako, Mali, January 2009. Similar pronouncements exist on other continents but are less impressive.

<sup>7</sup> On Economics Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's concept "capability" and its application for Indigenous and minority education, see Mohanty, Ajit K. & Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2013). MLE as an economic equaliser in India and Nepal: mother tongue based multilingual education fights poverty through capability development and identity support. In Henrard, Kristin (ed.). *Socioeconomic participation of minorities in relation to their right to (respect for) identity*. Studies in International Minority and Group Rights, Volume 2. Leiden and Boston: Brill/ Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 159-187.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. Mohanty, Ajit K. (2019). *The Multilingual Reality: Living with Languages*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Series Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights on this and on his concept "double divide" (the hierarchy between on the one hand a tribal language and a national language, on the other hand the national language and English).

<sup>9</sup> What do we need immigrant and asylum minorities for in Western Europe? Will they still be "... segregated, still doing the shitwork (Castles & Kosack 1973), with the school non-educating or miseducating their children and grandchildren to continue doing the shitwork, i.e. a permanent dual labour market (Wadensjö 1981) in a two-thirds society?" Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove & Phillipson, Robert (1996). Minority workers or minority human beings? A European dilemma. *International Review of Education*, Special issue, 'The Education of

Minorities', eds. Normand Labrie and Stacy Churchill, 291-307. Castles, Stephen (1980). The social time-bomb: education of an underclass in West Germany. *Race and Class* XXI:4, 369-387. Castles, Stephen & Godula Kosack (1973). *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*. London: Oxford University Press. Wadensjö, Eskil (1981). Arbetsmarknad, invandring och ekonomi (Labour market, immigration and economics). In: Hamberg, E. and T. Hammar, eds. *Invandringen och framtiden* (Immigration and future). Stockholm: Liber Förlag, Publica, 86-119.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. François Grin's publications in my BigBib (Note 4 above). See also Walter, Stephen and Benson, Carol (2012). Language policy and medium of instruction in formal education. In Spolsky, Bernard (ed.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 278-300 and other publications by Walter and by Benson; likewise many by Kathleen Heugh, and by Ajit Mohanty, e.g. his 2019, in my BigBib.

<sup>11</sup> See the definitions of genocide 2b and 2e in the 1948 *United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (the 'Genocide Convention') (<http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>) and the argumentation in Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010 (in Note 2 above) and in Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove, Phillipson, Robert & Dunbar, Robert (2019). *Is Nunavut education criminally inadequate? An analysis of current policies for Inuktitut and English in education, international and national law, linguistic and cultural genocide and crimes against humanity*. Nunavut, 25 April 2019. 83 pages. Download from <https://www.tunngavik.com/files/2019/04/NuLinguicideReportFINAL.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. Phillipson, Robert & Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2018). Linguistic imperialism and the consequences for language ecology. In Penz, Hermine & Fill, Alwin (eds). *Handbook of Ecolinguistics*. New York: Routledge, 121-134; Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove & Harmon, David (2018). Biological diversity and language diversity: parallels and differences. In Penz, Hermine & Fill, Alwin (eds). *Handbook of Ecolinguistics*. New York: Routledge, 11-25.

<sup>13</sup> Immersion programmes and dual-language programmes succeed well in supporting dominant language children's bilingualism. They have grown very fast during the last three decades and the literature on them is huge – google them!

<sup>14</sup> See the *2015 Government of Odisha Recommendations of the MLE Policy & Implementation Guidelines, India, Extracts, Update, summary*. In Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove & Phillipson, Robert (eds) (2018). *Language Rights*, New York: Routledge, 4 volumes, 1668 pp. In Volume 4. The latest developments in **Odisha, India**: "Odisha MLE is now revised as **a late-exit programme** in which MT is used as MoI for 5 years of primary education with provision for subsequent use of tribal MTs as language subjects. The programme is now extended to **21 tribal languages and implemented in 1485 schools with over 140,000 tribal MT children in grades 1 to 5 and 3533 MLE teachers from the target language communities**. A number of NGOs have also started MLE programmes in tribal areas of the state and with continuing expansion of the Government programme and **recruitment of additional teachers** the number of MLE teachers, both in the Government and non-Government sectors, is estimated to rise to **over 7000 during the next five years**". (From Ajit Mohanty's Project plan for Bellagio, unpublished, 21 November 2019; not for quotation).

"In British Columbia, youth suicide rates are more than six times lower in Indigenous communities where at least 50 percent of the population speaks the native language. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia, young people who speak an Indigenous language have lower rates of binge drinking and illegal drug use compared to non-speakers, as well as a decreased chance of becoming victims of violence." From <https://www.sapiens.org/language/angered->

[languages/?fbclid=IwAR33KCi2Vl1XaZjJvWETfiW3A80mEKQPjH\\_8ATc6BifYL5MTnUZsLSZJzMk](#). Thanks, Carol Benson for the quote!

<sup>15</sup> First published in *takahē* literary journal, Aotearoa New Zealand. Thanks, Vaughan for sending it!

<sup>16</sup> Fernand was also probably the first *lawyer* who explicitly accepted that linguistic rights in education are linguistic HUMAN rights. See de Varennes, Fernand (2000). *Tolerance and Inclusion: The Convergence of Human Rights and the Work of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas*. In Phillipson, Robert (ed.) (2000). *Rights to language. Equity, power and education*. Mahwah, NJ & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 67- 71.