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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Sixth Session

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Agenda Item 8 ongoing priorities and themes and follow-up: "Data collection and disaggregation (2004)"

Collective Recommendation submitted by the: Ethiopian World Federation, International Indigenous Historical Society, The Longhouse 1, Taitu Betul International University, Arts International School, Genealogy and Reciprocity Reclamation.

Resisting Soul Assimilation

A sustainable education for the Afro-Indigenous children.

Madam Chairperson, members of the Permanent Forum, Panelist, Indigenous sisters and brother, ladies and gentlemen, **I am Eulene Inniss** - a perfect example know as an **Melinin Indigenous Woman** from the **Western Hemisphere** within **Indigenous Peoples** know to be – **Washita...**

In the past decade there has arisen a body of writings by American Educators which can be credited for their considerable artistic merit, but however they mercilessly exposes the direction in which the "unassimilated" indigenous cultures appear to be moving. What is at stake is the future course of American education; for unless there is a great alignment of views between all facets, there is bound to be more degeneration of the total system. The courage to "tell it the way it is" is the prime requisite of artistic integrity. Human revelation is the business of the artist; one must write about what one knows to be true and the first truths one must know are about ones-self.

Many authors symbolize in their life and work themes which would concern a whole generation of educators, such as:

1. What subject is most worthy?
2. What knowledge is basic?
3. What values and beliefs should be taught?
4. How shall we deal with individual differences?

5. How should teachers be selected, educated and rewarded?
6. Why do these problems persist?

What shall we teach? Why are schools failing?

To most parents or laymen, education is viewed as a means to finding a better paid, more pleasant and more secure job. However until we realize that the proper goals of education are the pursuit for wisdom, the development for human potential and the search for understanding the nature within human beings and their world, no government sponsored education act or mandate will guarantee that Indigenous Children are being taught.

Much emphasis must be placed on content and method in the delivering of education. The present curricula are not being geared to provide the necessary fundamentals or basics. We need a liberal education the goals of which are: to free individuals from the limitations of ignorance, prejudice and provincialism; to enable them to see the world clearly and in perspective; to develop their intellectual capacities; increase their sensitivity; and prepare them to make wise independent judgments.

The acquisition of the 3R's is of fundamental importance. Reading, both oral and written as subjects should gain much attention since there in lies the future of one's ability to relate to the world as a whole.

Many writers have presented dissenting views on the theory of education. Even Aristotle wrote that all men do not honor the same virtue, so they naturally hold different opinions in regard to training in virtue. The elite believe that the function of the school is to inculcate the right values. The teacher is one of the propagandizing agents through which the elite in power effectively organize and secure their control of the social system. Therefore, those who look to the school for them to impart ideas neutrally are as naïve as those who believe that the school can reconstruct the social order. The schools can only follow the will of the dominant elite. The function of the school as a tool of the dominant elite is to indoctrinate the young with the right values. Those who have the power to enforce them always determine right values.

Thorndike, as a middle class conservative represents what American education largely became: a large system of schooling which specially rewards children of white, protestant middle class backgrounds. Although the American school historically has had it exponents of the Liberal tradition, it seems more realistic to describe it as serving a conservative function. Many educators have skillfully verbalized

If we want to understand why schools are failing, then we must state the criteria of success. The conservative elite views on education have coexisted with the Liberal's view of educational thought. It must be remembered that the schools achieved their reputation when their success was not measured, when they were educational alternatives: the farm, the shop, and the apprenticeship, and when there were other routes to economic and social advancement.

Today, we want the schools to teach order, discipline and democracy, the virtues for thrift, cleanliness and hard work, the evils in tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sex and AIDS. We want them to acculturate the immigrants, to provide vocational skills, to foster patriotism and tolerance, and above all to produce a high standard of literacy throughout the population.

The impossible demands are enshrined in the mythology of the American Dream itself, that the school constitutes the ultimate promise of equality and opportunity. The school system has failed. The statistical evidence on dropout rates, figures on Indigenous Melanin children who go to college or finish high school (especially males), the percentage of Indigenous Melanin who are incarcerated, comparisons of academic success between rich and poor children, all support the evidence that the school system has failed. But then what constitutes success? Does failure to complete high school qualify one as failure? Self-educated men used to be considered heroes; now, they are prejudged as unfit. However, the question remains – why have the schools failed?

When one takes a microcosmic view into the state of the educational system many other questions remain in the periphery.

1. Why were there boycotts and strikes?
2. Why are the police in the corridors and drugs and weapons in the gym lockers?
3. Why do most students panic when they are invited to do independent work?
4. Why are more students interested in what is going to be on the test than in understanding subject matter?
5. Why do students learn how to cheat long before they learn how to learn?
6. Is equality measured in terms of resources provided, and efforts made or by achievement?

One reason why we have been unable to find answers to these questions is probably because we have been looking in the wrong places for both the causes of failure and the needed solutions. Preconceptions about education and the organization of schools prohibit us from seeing why schools fail to teach many students and why they obstruct successful learning.

Recent discussions in education have revolved around the question of whether the school or the home is the cause of failure. In 1966 James Coleman carried out a Congressional mandate to explore the lack of availability of equal educational opportunity in American public schools. He collected data on the home backgrounds and school achievement of 645,000 public school children across the United States. The report confirmed what everyone knew; poor Indigenous melanin children generally do poorly in school. The research also found that the kinds of "school factors" they measured, such as age of the building and percentage of teachers with Master's Degrees seemed to make little difference in school achievement.

Although Coleman's study was conducted more than forty years ago, this study has been cited to support policy assumptions, i.e. schools can make little difference in education, schools failure is caused by factors outside the school, and family background is the prime cause of school failure. Although scholars have repeatedly warned that such conclusion are neither statistically nor scientifically legitimate the Coleman report has become Holy Writ.

School officials find comfort in believing that they are doing all that can be done and that society must change home life and families if it wants to implore school achievement.

There are individuals who advocate fundamental reform. In the spring of 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report, A Nation At Risk which was soon followed by dozens of other reports including the Carnegie Report, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century and The Revolution That Is Overdue: A Report Of The AFT Task Force On The Future Of Education. Although the reports differ in some respects, they are kindred spirits. They say that the time is past for marginal reforms that upholding the status quo.

The many mandates on reform including the 21st century's No Child Left Behind Act all help to substantiate the belief that no longer is it sufficient merely to teach children to read and to guide them along established paths, but teachers must introduce children to a complex world in which many of the paths are not clearly defined and prepare them to live in a future world whose boundaries are yet unknown.

How do we create an education system for Indigenous Melanin Peoples that remains sustainable?

Woodring and other modern day educators do a good job in diagnosing the disease of the educational system. They examined the patient, outlined the symptoms and some possible causes, but they superficially applied a treatment strategy to cure the disease.

Many political reforms are in disagreement over educational goals, from the uncoordinated nature of our educational establishment, the cultural and religious diversity of our people, the demand for more and more years of schooling and the fact that parents have come to expect more than the schools are providing. All these problems are intensified by the lack of understanding of the purpose of education and the job of the school.

For problems of such vast complexity Woodring advocates a Liberal education, which incorporates the Paideia Proposal, but until Indigenous Melanin Peoples carve out a curriculum that address and respects their rich culture and the truths that lie therein, our children will continue to fail. So, let the dialogue begin.

Submitted By:

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