Worldview as Basis for Indigenous Education System in the Philippines

Carole Raymundo Diamante

Assumption College San Lorenzo Makati Philippines

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Introduction

For the early Filipino peoples, storytelling was a fundamental mode of knowledge transmission. This is still being done in Indigenous Peoples communities today, particularly those who still have storytelling venues – bedtime talks, evening gatherings of community members, or community meetings. Such is the basis for a particular world view of a people; inasmuch as a worldview is a mental model of reality – a framework of ideas and attitudes about the world, a people's comprehensive system of beliefs.

This paper hopes to capture the essence of storytelling by narrating of what is being done at the community level within the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous People's (ECIP) network to articulate, practice and nurture the community's indigenous education system. How these translate into concrete practices being done in addressing basic literacy needs of the community is also described.

Before the Schools . . .

People always ask,

"So where do you get your knowledge?

and I say, "From the ancestors, from the time of creation."

Hopi elder, 1993 (Survival 1994)

Eversince, human beings have become conscious of transmitting knowledge to the next generations (Kalish 2007). This effort is kept alive by indigenous communities in different parts of the world. These knowledge and ways of knowing are nurtured and acquired through centuries of living in the ancestral domain. The fact that IP communities still practice their culture through the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programs (IKSP), (though in very difficult circumstances) is evidence enough that indeed, our ancestors had a system of education even before the concept of 'school' came to our shores.

Yes, each tribe in the country had a system of educating its youth into personhood – the Latin word educare from which education was derived, meaning 'bringing up or rearing' (Frankena 2003). Unfortunately, over 400 plus years of colonial education (from Spaniards and Americans and Japanese) convinced us that IPs are ignorant, backward and illiterate because we do not have school buildings, a system of writing and numbers, curricula, books, teachers, exams, diplomas, and whatever trappings come along with the present notion of 'education'.

Today, we IPs are reexamining these colonial assumptions and are trying to articulate what our system of education is. If the formal school system is today's dominant mode of bringing up and rearing the next generation, what is it for IPs? And how can our system of education continue to flourish given the realities of the present times?

Let us start with the common notion today that to be educated means 'going to school', the place of learning. Where did our ancestors 'go to learn'? Where did learning happen? Elders interviewed in various workshops and discussions consistently say that learning was anywhere – the home, the fields, the rivers, during walks, when hunting, planting, etc. **Learning was everywhere and every moment**. There was no designated separate time or place for learning. If we are to push for a definite learning space in the IP system of education, it would be the ancestral domain. But then again, it did not mean that learning stopped when no one went out of the ancestral domain, for as the elders stress, learning as a process was anywhere, anytime. This reminds me of the present phrase being popularized in education circles, 'lifelong learning.' Our

ancestors knew this by heart; today, after centuries of forgetting, we are being forced to remember.

In some tribes, learning venues or institutions were also present like the dap-ay (for males) and ulog (for females). These were venues for youth to gather and with the presence of elders, they learned about community dynamics and practices as they interacted with the elders (Fiag-oy 2005; Alangui 1997; Guquib 2013).

So if our school was the ancestral domain, who was our teacher? Who taught our ancestors? The elders share that anyone was a possible source of knowledge and companion in the learning process – parents, grandparents, recognized elders, even peers and younger children. What is passed on from one generation to the next is usually called traditional knowledge (Castellano 2000 as cited by Steinhauer 2002). Perhaps if there is one teacher that is unique to us IPs, it would be the ancestral domain or creation. Elders speak of particular creatures 'telling us' or 'teaching us' something (example, the presence of a particular bird as sign that was 'learned' through the years and 'taught' by creation and now passed on as knowledge. It is unfortunate that today, these type of knowledge has been labeled as superstition. Another unique 'teacher' would be dreams, with some tribes learning their weaving designs, medicinal plants and other knowledge through dreams (Fiag-oy 2005). In some literature, dreams as a kind of 'teacher' is also called revealed knowledge (Steinhauer 2002).

If by curriculum, we mean the overall sequence of content and competencies that need to be learned by a learner, further probing would reveal that IKSPs do have a curriculum, and this varies depending on the life situation of the tribe. Definitely there is a sequence of content and competencies and this is based on the tribe's understanding of the growth stages of a person. Each tribe has terms for these stages and these are parallel to the ones we learn in educational psychology. Aside from growth stages that everyone goes through, tribes also have growth stages for particular vocations like the healer or shaman. Elders have a sense of who of the young ones are gifted for that particular behaviors or stages of growth that are signs that the person is gifted for that particular vocation. Educating the potential shaman or healer also has its own curriculum but it is a curriculum not shared to all.

What were our books? How was the knowledge stored? The elders answer that the repository of knowledge would be the older generations, particularly the elders and their memories; they were our libraries. They add that knowledge is also being stored in the songs, chants, dances, rituals and day to day activities of the tribe. These were not only for entertainment as they are viewed today. One elder stressed that day to day living and the cycle of the life of the community was the ultimate repository of knowledge, for it was in living the knowledge that the knowledge was sure to be 'remembered and stored'.

Related to what this elder said is another repository of knowledge that is called cellular memory (Steinhauer 2002). This is difficult for non-IPs to understand, for non-IPs have been robbed of the experience of inheriting knowledge that has been passed on from one generation to the next to the point that one's bio-psycho-emotional being is permeated by this knowledge. One example would be the competency of Cordillerans to work with rocks, mountains and soil which evolved in making terraces through the centuries. This has become a natural competency among us (though dying out) that no Master's or PhD course in any part of the world can teach. It can only be learned by being part of the Cordillera ancestry (blood) and living in and working in the ancestral domain so that this competency (which includes psycho-emotional components) is nurtured and practiced.

Did we have exams? How did our ancestors know if a person already knew what was being taught? Did our education system have a system of honors as we have now? Elders answer that applying the knowledge gained was the test in itself, with the outcome being the indicator of one's degree of knowledge. For example, hunting was the test in itself and being able to catch something after learning a technique in hunting served as an indicator that one has learned the technique. Depending on the tribe, there were indicators of mastery. What part of the body was hit by the trap, for example showed how skillful a Mangyan hunter is in making the trap. Another indicator of learning was the capacity to teach others. Other tribes even have terms equivalent to today's Master's and PhD for particular tasks, and those who were considered such were held as experts of the community.

Guiding the whole process of learning the IKSPs of the community was the tribe's worldview. A worldview is "(…) a unified vision rather than an individual idea (…)" (Redfield 1982, as cited by Steinhauer 2002). Below are the words of Macli-ing Dulag, a Kalinga tribal elder killed in the early 80's as he led his community in their opposition of the building of Chico Dam. The poetic lines may be few but they articulate the deep meanings of his tribe's reason for being.

Afo Kafunian, Lord of us all, gave us life

and placed us in the world to live human lives.

And where shall we obtain life? From the land.

To work the land is an obligation, not merely a right.

In tilling the land, you possess it.

And so, land is a grace that must be nurtured.

To enrich it is the eternal exhortation of Afo Kafunian to all Kafunian's children

Land is sacred. Land is beloved.

From its womb springs our Kalinga life.

(as cited by Ferdinand Ammang Anno, CFC Bulletin)

That land is life and sacred is fundamental to our worldview, and this permeates our IKSPs where the ancestral domain is school and teacher at the same time, and nurturing and protecting the ancestral domain is a fundamental tenet in molding the young.

Of course we also had our teaching-learning strategies, and while there may be variations among tribes, some commonalities have emerged like demonstration, actual activity, apprenticeship (for specialized roles like healers and shamans), and direct instruction. So before the formal school came we had our system of education, and therefore, we were never ignorant or uneducated. Our system was just different.

When the schools came …

Fast forward into the 1900s when the Americans paved the way for the setting up of the public school system, the most extensive network of the formal school system. This was implemented with the intention to civilize the inhabitants of the archipelago, with what they called education (in this case, going to school) as the main civilizing process (McCoy 2003).

What were the experiences of the remaining IP communities that time with this system of education?

It was inevitable that most elders rebuffed or ignored the school concept since it was foreign to them, and learning and education were alive and well in the communities. It was only when the economic and social system of the colonizers became more and more entrenched in the life of our nation that the need for schooling entered the picture.

The common reasons cited for going to school or seeking educational interventions (like trainings) are: (1) the need to understand the calculations in the marketplace (which was different from IP communities' system of economic calculations and barter), with experiences of being cheated become rampant; (2) the need to read street signs, to vote, to participate in events outside the community (read newspapers, legal documents, etc.); (3) with the encroachment of outsiders into the ancestral domain, more and more communities were finding their livelihood and economic base threatened, thus the need for training in additional livelihood activities that slowly pushed them to interact with the enlarging national economy; others found schooling necessary to be able to find employment; (4) continued marginalization was bringing about the deterioration of our own health systems with communities becoming more vulnerable to diseases, leading to the need for training in health; (5) as the years passed, going to school has become equated with being educated, with education promising upliftment from 'poverty' (but not marginalization, as will be noted later).

Today, as our indigenous system of education is deteriorating, many IP communities seek education in the mainstream education system, usually the formal school system, with many IP youths becoming assimilated into mainstream culture.

Before the 90s, many dioceses and congregations included mainstream education as one of their interventions, with these interventions requested by the community or introduced by the diocese or congregations.

In summary:

Spectrum of needs	Usual support
Basic literacy	Teach basic literacy-numeracy based on mainstream approaches and methods (children and adults)
Periodic trainings (livelihood, health, etc.)	Provide adult-based trainings based on mainstream approaches
Support to enter formal school	School supplies, scholarships, tutorials
Schools	Infrastructure, personnel (usually lowlander), curriculum based on mainstream, evaluation tools based on mainstream, usual calendar (June to March), mainstream textbooks

These kind of education interventions went on for decades and are still being carried out by some dioceses and congregations today. It was only in the late 90s that some IP communities started to articulate misgivings about their experiences with the mainstream education system. In summary, their observations are as follows:

- IPs find lessons difficult to understand since lessons are so foreign to their community/ daily experience;
- what is learned is not applied or is seen as irrelevant;
- dropouts due to the following:

→   Experiences of discrimination

→   Adjustment difficulties due to sudden change in environment (especially for students who move from their communities and stay in dorms in the town proper)

→   Low grades (due to comprehension difficulties)

→   Marriage during teenage years

→   Participation in work cycle (planting, harvesting, etc.)

•   IPs develop a deep sense of shame and rejection of their heritage; and

•   IPs who have gone to school become one of the sources/ causes of community disintegration.

Elders and community leaders have also raised their concerns about the deterioration of their Cultural heritage given the sense of shame that is imbibed especially by those who go to school. This has moved communities and their partners to re-examine the kind of education provided by mainstream society. The following observations about mainstream education have been identified as the major reasons for the fragmenting sense of identity and devaluation of ancestry and heritage among many IP youth:

•   IPs are misrepresented in history, some statements bordering to discrimination; (pagan, uncivilized, etc.)

•   stress that indigenous life and culture is backward and implies that it should be 'left behind'; (superstitions, unscientific, etc.)

•   discussion limited to surface culture (songs, clothes, etc.) leading to a shallow understanding of **Indigenous Peoples as a people** and **culture as a process.**

Culture is a process. It's continually evolving. Culture is not static. Culture is interaction, innovation, culture comes to life by being used and developed.

•   instills views and values that are contradictory to IP culture;

•   **not in touch with the local situation so content is not context-based and relevant;**

- most teachers who are non-IP discriminate against IPs and are not sensitive to particular needs of IPs; and

- teaching approaches and methods, curriculum, evaluation tools and school management are not responsive to IP particularities (e. community cycle, etc.)

In response to these experiences, some IP communities have tried to articulate what kind of education is appropriate for them. During the first ECIP-IP National Convention on Indigenous Peoples Education held in May 2006, IP community representatives identified some qualities of the education they envision for their communities:

➢ rooted in IP history and culture;

➢ from the community/ managed by the community and for the community;

➢ strengthens formation towards self-reliance and assertion of human rights;

➢ enables youth to defend and develop the ancestral domains;

➢ equips the youth to be active participants in mainstream society without being dominated by globalization; and

➢ deeply values creation

Given the above articulations that have been gleaned from consultations convened in the various regional networks of ECIP (Northern Luzon, South Central Luzon, Western Visayas and Mindanao) and other venues for discussion like the national convention, the following points are clearly emerging:

▪ IPs are interested in learning mainstream competencies since these are also necessary for the growth of the tribe and its peoples as we interact and engage the realities of the times;

▪ Mainstream education devaluates IP identity and IKSPs, a situation that mirrors the larger society's view about IPs;

▪ Majority of education interventions in IP communities focus on instilling or honing mainstream competencies that will prepare the learner to 'enter' mainstream society;

▪   Only recently is it being recognized that for IPs, the focus should not only be the acquisition of mainstream competencies but the nurturing of our identity (which includes our worldview, culture, heritage and history) and our IKSPs (including indigenous competencies and learning processes).

In summary, the following are fundamental if we, the indigenous peoples with our culture and identity are to survive into the future:

→   there is a need to reaffirm the identity and culture of indigenous peoples;

→   fundamental to this is the revival and strengthening of IKSPs or the education system of IP communities, complemented with the learning of competencies needed to navigate in the present times;

→   inherent in these efforts is the movement for self-determination, particularly the struggle for our ancestral domains and other fundamental rights, so that we are participants in shaping the common future of the Earth.

Reclaiming and Enriching our IP Education System …..
Given these reflections and articulations, some IP communities in partnership with Indigenous Peoples Assemblies (IPAs) and/or congregations have started to respond by reshaping the nature and approach of education interventions being undertaken. These are being done with the understanding that IPs as a people with their cultures could flourish only if rooted in the processes of their IKSPs as expressed in their education system.

Key differences of present efforts with previous efforts are the following:

•   community-based. In the past, efforts were focused on sending students to formal schools away from the community or setting up schools in the community but managed exclusively by outsiders. In emerging efforts, community-based is more than just the school or intervention being in the physical space of the community; rather, it is the participation of the community in setting-up and managing the school/intervention in all aspects. Thus, we revive our indigenous learning process wherein learning is a community act. Also, education activities

also flow with the rhythm of community life instead of an artificial time frame imposed on the learners.

• seeks rootedness in the IKSPs that have been nurtured but which unfortunately have become stunted/are dying due to colonization and marginalization. Previous efforts focused largely on inculcating content, skills and learning processes determined by the mainstream. Present efforts start with the content, skills and learning processes of the community and from there, complementation with the mainstream content, skills and learning processes follow.

• stresses identity, heritage and self-determination. Previous efforts glossed over the context of the community since what was viewed as important was for the 'educated' to effectively be assimilated into mainstream society. Today, more and more efforts recognize that the education programs/ interventions should be anchored on and responsive to the context of IP communities and thus, the focus on valuing heritage and identity, and asserting self-determination. Concretely, this kind of education helps the learner understand what it means to be an indigenous person, why we are marginalized, the impact of historical circumstances on the tribe, and what needs to be done to bring about meaningful change.

• focuses not only on cultural manifestations (songs, dances, stories, etc.) but also on culture as living process. While there have been efforts to include cultural products like songs, dances, stories, artifacts, etc. in the curriculum, these only touch the surface of what culture is. What is needed is the appreciation of culture as process – how the cultural products came about, why they are changing, discussions on the impact of cultural change on communities and identity, the maintenance to intergenerational ties, etc. It is the understanding of cultural processes that will help IP youth to better understand why their community is what it is today and how to concretely maintain their community and culture as **a living entity.**

• Seeks to be based on IP worldview (philosophy, psychology, spirituality, etc.) Again, previous efforts were based on mainstream educational philosophies, psychology, etc. The aim now is to have educational programs/interventions that flow from the IP community's worldview. Creation as teacher, for example, emanates from an indigenous worldview. Including

IP spirituality (eg. the sacredness of life and of creation) in our education is also another example.

- responsive to present needs and situation (complementation with DepEd competencies). Equally important as being rooted in their culture and heritage is the IP youth's being able to face today's world and dynamics. Thus, the program or intervention should harness the necessary skills and impart the needed content and values for them to be able to be active participants in engaging the present times while shaping the future (not just to adapt and fit into a projected future).

- response seeks to be systematic, not reactive. There were tendencies in the past to just focus on changing content and doing these changes only when problems arose that needed to be solved. With the present view, it is the whole system that has to be addressed, and it should be done systematically.

Transforming a dream into a Reality …

In the case of basic literacy-numeracy (BLN) efforts or interventions (could be a program or school) being done within the Episcopal Commission of Indigenous Peoples' (ECIP) network, the goal of nurturing the sense of identity of IP youth and the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programs (IKSPs) of the community while learning mainstream competencies are manifested in the following:

Curriculum

Efforts in South Central Luzon apostolates now look into orality (the system of communication, knowledge storage and retrieval, and thinking that is shaped by the oral word; the dominant form of communication of almost all IP communities in the Philippines) and how to nurture this side by side with literacy (the system of communication, knowledge storage and retrieval, and thinking that is shaped by the written word). Orality as a system of communication and thinking nurtures linguistic intelligence while sharpening memory (voluntary, involuntary, iconic, implicit, semantic, symbolic, and musical) and associative thinking among others (Revel 2005).

Orality is also central in maintaining community cohesion (Ong 1982). For these reasons, the competencies of orality are now being looked into and are being incorporated side by side with literacy.

Other competencies of the learners based on the tribe's stages of learning are also being incorporated (eg. competencies related to daily tasks, etc). Efforts do not focus on just teaching literacy-numeracy competencies.

Another concern in implementing BLN is teaching literacy in the tribal language first before the second language (could be Bisaya, Hiligaynon, Filipino, depending on the area). This is extended further to an appreciation of their language/dialect before moving on to the second language. For example, the sentence construction so that this topic is tackled in this context. In the case of the Hanunuo Mangyans who have their own writing system, literacy classes start with the students learning their own script first. Since their script is different from the Roman form, transition activities have been designed to bridge the difference. As for the teaching of numeracy, local mathematics is also looked into and first taught before going into mainstream math.

Also being considered when teaching BLN is whether or not the participants joining the class or sessions are the first generation to attend such sessions. The literacy experience of the community is also surveyed. If the community has scant literacy experience (no calendars in the home or posters, no posted materials in any part of the community, very few experiences to go to the town proper, etc.), then their curriculum will be heavy on bridging the participants from orality to the fundamentals of literacy. If, however, the participants and the community have more encounters with the literate world, then the curriculum can now focus on nurturing orality while building on prevailing literacy experiences. Exercises, for example, will vary because of this factor.

With adults, the literacy program tandems with issue discussions and community concerns and activities so that BLN activities find relevance. For children and youth, BLN has as its content their present involvements and activities. The curriculum is also sequenced in such way that it

flows with the life cycle of the community (usually includes planting and harvest time). This aspect requires that research be an inherent part of the program's implementation.

To stress that the ancestral domain and not only the classroom is the learning space, sessions are also held in other parts of the community especially when the topics are about the surroundings (eg. going to the river when the topic is related to water or river creatures). Skills in BLN are also practiced in the context of the ancestral domain (counting harvest, land area, etc.)

Various forms of expressing what has been learned are also encouraged especially because in the IP learning system, dances, songs, chants, poems, weaving etc are common ways of storing and transmitting knowledge. Today, this is what is called multiple intelligence.

Every now and then, when appropriate, topics that can be tackled or discussed with the community are organized as community gatherings so that learning as a community affair is maintained while healing and nurturing intergenerational ties.

The key principle in this aspect is to start with and affirm the community's worlview and IKSPs before introducing foreign concepts or processes.

Instruction and classroom management

The goal in this aspect is for teaching strategies and classroom/session management to be based on an understanding of Indigenous Peoples' psychology, behavior and spirituality. This is to foster cultural congruence in the learning process and environment (Ladson-Billings 1994, Abayao 2015).

One common complaint of those who have taught in IP communities is that the students easily become restless in the classroom. This is because our learning has always been outdoors with movement every now and then (except for those who really grew up in the towns or cities, or whose communities have long been exposed to the mainstream school or the literate tradition). Sitting still for long periods will thus be a bore. Given this, the practice of balancing indoor and outdoor sessions is now being done. This is also one way of helping the students remember that the classroom is the whole ancestral domain, and that learning is anywhere and anytime.

Also in first generation schooling communities, time is given for children to transition between being outside the classroom and experiencing the classroom (climbing the roof, etc.) to coming and being inside. It has been noticed that in two to three months, attentiveness and focus inside the classroom increases.

The learning process for many IP communities is a community act, thus the propensity to really work in groups. Thus, suddenly having individual activities or recitation can be a shock. In present efforts, there is a conscious effort to start with group activities before going into individual work, with individual work and achievement being valued by the whole class instead of being a basis for competitiveness among learners.

Learning is also very much affected by the relationship of the learner to the teacher since (Indigenous Peoples Organizations) IPO communities are very relational in dynamics. Thus it is more appropriate for the teacher to come across as a guide and adopted relative than a distant authority of knowledge whose relationship is only in the classroom during the session proper.

Since the transmission and maintenance of IKSPs is a focal concern in the emerging approach, elders and parents are given a substantial role in the sessions whether as resource persons or co-facilitators during sessions.

Consistent with the expectation that those who know have the responsibility of sharing their knowledge, students who learn fast or who are older and already understand the lesson can be tapped to assist the teacher with other students. Again, this is also consistent with the inclination towards group learning and mentoring which is a feature of indigenous learning processes.

Evaluation

Efforts in South Central Luzon are now exploring a variety of evaluation tools consistent with the effort to encourage multiple forms of expressing learning. This is similar to the growing movement in testing and evaluation that is individualized and based on multiple intelligence. Also, indigenous processes of recognizing and giving merit to learning are being incorporated in the programs/school's learning processes (eg. publicly recognizing/assigning new tasks for the 'graduate' instead of having a first honor, etc.).

Program/ School management and design

Key community persons are now part of the whole process of setting-up and managing the school so that the whole community can monitor if indeed the effort is going towards the direction they have articulated.

In cases where a school was set up, the community took part in designing the structures and the landscape. The structures were built using local materials and were friendly to the psychological needs of the students (eg. open walls so that students feel there is more space).

What have been mentioned are concrete examples of changes that are being undertaken in BLN interventions based on the articulated needs and analysis of IP communities. It is a moving away from the assumption that IP communities are uneducated; rather, IPs have always had a system for lifelong learning. What needs to be done now is for this system to once again have space to grow and be enriched by the competencies needed in dealing with the contemporary times. Only in this way will IPs as a people and as a culture continue to flourish into the future.

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