6. THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN MAORI AND TIBETAN VILLAGE SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

There is a need for research on indigenous education in order to identify commonalities in the perspectives of indigenous communities, especially in regards to the quality of mass, monolingual education for children, as well as to examine community responses to perceptions of low quality which stem from inadequate incorporation within schooling of the mother-tongue and of indigenous community culture and spiritual perspectives. The two cases examined in this chapter are the Māori schools of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the case of Tibet. The aim of the chapter is: 1) to define the role of spirituality in both Maori and Tibetan village schools (Bosacki, 1998); 2) to determine in what ways and to what degree the two cases resemble each other or differ; 3) to draw useful lessons for indigenous Tibetan communities from the relative success of Maori community schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand; 4) to make policy recommendations for village school curriculum and organization in indigenous areas that can both meet policy makers requirements and satisfy indigenous communities spiritual needs.

Education of indigenous groups cannot be considered quality education unless it meets certain standards. One standard is that perspectives on the relation of indigenous knowledge, culture, and spirituality to quality in education must be incorporated in order to achieve educational quality in the eyes of users of the education system: students, their families and communities (Fraser, 2004). Top-down attempts to increase enrolment, attendance, achievement and attainment blame the students, their families, communities, cultures and languages, without considering the reasons indigenous students and communities have for dissatisfaction with standard centralized education models. Improvements in indigenous education require inclusion of community spiritual perspectives in the curriculum and consultation with the community for the formation of school policy. Contrary to Western perceptions, community-based involvement in education may lead not only to increased maintenance of indigenous spiritual worldviews and culture, but also to increases in enrolment, attendance, achievement, and attainment that is so desired by policy makers. Attempting to grasp the different understandings of spirituality within different indigenous cultures and schoolings is one of the important components of this chapter.
Estanek (2006), in *Redefining Spirituality: A New Discourse*, takes a critical view on spirituality studies and also mentions that many academic groups have been embarking upon spirituality research. Although, spirituality is not a new word, only religionists understood the concept of spirituality within their perspective. Estanek (2006) also poses the important question, “What do we mean when we say spirituality and why is it important?” (p. 271). His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2000) points out that the spirituality has two levels: spirituality without religious faith and spirituality with religious faith (p. 118). He emphasizes that secular spirituality is more important because the majority of people are not religious. A few other scholars are paying attention to the indigenous spirituality in village communities and in their schools. Fraser (2004) discusses secular schools, spirituality, and Maori values in New Zealand and argues that the school has the responsibility to reflect indigenous values and suggests spirituality should challenge what we have traditionally considered as learning in school (pp. 87-95). Graveline (1998) states that “clearly, one cannot argue for the revitalization of Aboriginal Tradition in the modern era if one believes that colonization as a force was successful in entirely eliminating the consciousness of Aboriginal Nation” (p. 36). Schools have been set up as a political tool, one whose goal was eliminating the role of indigenous children’s spirituality from their daily village experience; an example of this is the Chinese’s blind closure the village schools in Tibet which impacted villagers’ life very much. Their moving of primary age indigenous students to boarding schools is not a minor change, it is huge for age 6-7 children because they are having their spiritual perspective distorted and lost, as well as losing physical care from their parents.

The same situation has occurred in New Zealand where “Māori culture has been marginalized and a monoculture now prevails, driven by the determination of government to eliminate all race-based programs from the government agenda” (Hook, 2007, p. 1). Tisdell (2003) argues for “culturally relevant education” and “a spiritually grounded approach to culturally relevant pedagogy,” which is applicable within both the context of Maori and Tibetan village education. In indigenous education, spirituality is one of the inseparable components for both Maori and Tibetan village schooling. The notion of “culturally relevant education”, which works to support the decolonization movements, is a significant concept to reconcile the issues of cultural and spiritual alienation that is causing further mental sufferings and social conflicts in indigenous students. Smith (2003) presents that the indigenous struggle for the transformation of education and schooling around the world is related in many ways. This chapter has several critical points to empower indigenous education and communities and also emphasizes that the indigenous topic needs more spaces within the academic fields.

**GROUNDING OF EDUCATION IN TIBET**

This chapter is informed by the overall perspective that indigenous community survival requires both spiritual and cultural maintenance and also adaptation to the broader world, but that to achieve both of these goals requires negotiation among...