

Working Session on Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage

Wednesday, 2 July
Moderator: Catherine Young

Session goals

To share, discuss and reflect on strategies that can be adopted by communities to strengthen and preserve cultural heritage--including music, poetry, histories, knowledge and language.

To encourage Conference participants to act on information shared in the working session toward preserving cultural heritage of their own and other languages and cultures.

Program

Introduction of the panelists (more detailed bios can be found in the conference program)

Brief introduction incorporation of heritage music and stories into the teaching and learning process in MT-based MLE programmes

Brief introduction to the Intellectual Property Rights relating to language and culture

Brief introduction to methods for collecting and preserving traditional stories, songs, poetry, legends and other forms of intangible cultural heritage

Brief discussion and clarification questions

Split into affinity groups for discussion and action planning for preservation of intangible cultural heritage in ethnolinguistic communities

Panelists

Dr. Richard E. Littlebear (Northern Cheyenne, USA), President of Chief Dull Knife College, Montana, USA

Dr. Mere Kepa, Senior Researcher, National Institute of Research Excellence for Maori Development and Advancement, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Todd Saurmann and Marybeth Saurmann, Glenn Stallsmith. (SIL International, Southeast Asia)

Summary of panelists' comments

Dr. Richard Littlebear described ways of collecting stories and his memories of going to the home of older Northern Cheyenne to hear stories such as the bedtime stories that are told to children throughout the language community.

Marybeth Saurmann shared ways of incorporating heritage music into development and education programmes and described ethnographic research in song forms and art forms. Their functions are to

- Communicate
- Reinforce
- Remember
- Instruct
- Teach

Dr. Mere Kepa and Maori team introduced the issue of indigenous peoples' Intellectual Property Rights. She also noted the importance of affirming and making use of the "invisible" parts of a people's culture--their knowledge and wisdom accumulated over generations. The question: How can people identify and make use of this "invisible" aspect of their culture?

Richard Littlebear, speaking to the issue of “cultural tourism” and selling medicines, music to promote cultural awareness: The Northern Cheyenne have separated “real” Cheyenne activities and those traditional activities that tourists have the opportunity to see and hear.

Mere Kepa, responding to the same issue, said that tourists like to “see” the Maori traditions and dances. Sometimes members of the Maori community are proud of the dances and dancers but on other occasions, they feel exploited and abused. It depends on the attitudes of the participants and the observers.

The Maori panelists also noted that members of the cultural communities need to be vigilant and have the strength to move forward. There have been numerous instances in which Maori art and other aspects of the culture have been exploited by outsiders. Tea towels have been produced showing the heads of Maori leaders. This is offensive to the Maori – but what should they do?

Summary of small group discussions

Group One: Music

Their discussion focused on issues of authenticity and the complexities of identifying the authentic amidst many components of culture.

Language preservation should be considered more as “revitalisation” – preservation communicates something “static” whereas revitalisation reflects creativity.

The Garo participant from Bangladesh questioned whether “culture” remains culture if it is not practiced by those from the communities.

Group Two: Property Rights

The group summed up their discussion by asking the question: “How can people act morally in an immoral society?”

Group Three: Storytelling

It will be important to research stories from all sources before they disappear. Also, it would be interesting to compare stories over time. For example, how would the Spanish stories told in the Philippines compare with stories in Spain?

It is important to go to the elders of the community and put their stories into writing. We should also remember that stories are still being made so we should record the contemporary stories.