

# The Way I See It

by Dr. Dean Chavers, President  
Native American Scholarship Fund  
Albuquerque, NM



## How Indian Children Should be Educated

Back in April of 1997 I wrote in this space about how Special Education had become the growth industry of Indian education. It is the wrong growth industry, in my opinion. According to former Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos, some 46% of Indian students nationally are enrolled in Special Education.

This is the highest percentage for any ethnic group. I mean that half of our Indian children are being labelled by the schools as incompetent. This marks them for life. Their school records will follow them until they are 50 years old. Their chances are being very limited.

That column prompted a lady named Sylvia Lambert to write to me. She had concerns about two things. One, Indian children are being forced into English-only instruction as soon as they enter school. Second, I said we should give Indian children rewards for reading books.

She is a very thoughtful person, and a great reader. She sent me copies of seven articles and chapters from books to support her contention.

She contends that Indian students should be taught in their Native language for the first five to seven years. She supports this contention with a chapter from the book "Multicultural Education" by Christine Bennett, which states that Cummins says "thinking skills developed in the first language will transfer to the second language. However, if the transfer from the first to second language occurs prematurely, prior to five to seven years typically required to reach the 'threshold level', the child is likely to be cognitively retarded in both languages."

That struck a chord with me. In seven years of doing education evaluations, I found instance after instance of teachers, and aides who said Indian students were poor in both languages... They are being forced not to use their Native language from their first day in the school. They are suppose to learn English and not forget their first language. But because the new English language is forced on them so early, they never really learn it well, either.

In another chapter another book which Sylvia sent me a copy of Dr. Jon Reyhner is quoted as saying "Children who are fluent in a language before entering school are usually handicapped throughout their lives."

These are the clearest statements I have seen yet for the "transitional model" of bilingual educations. Indian students rarely get taught this model, which calls for five to seven

years of instruction in the Native language, then a transition to English in middle school. Instead, they get taught the "submersion model", in which they either sink or swim. All instruction is in English only. Most of the Indian students sink; way too few learn how to swim.

About the only places I know where transitional bilingual education is taking place is at Rock Point AZ, and at the Akwesasne Freedom School in NY. Both of these teach in the Native language only for six or eight years.

About all other Indian bilingual programs I have seen or worked with start teaching English in pre-school or kindergarten. I doubt they are doing the right thing for students. According to Cummins and Reyhner, they are actually doing harm to students-handicapping them with a language deficiency unnecessarily.

Sylvia's second concern, giving Indian students rewards to read books, is being tested right now. The situation is so bad that I am in favor of almost anything to get them to read. In data I collected from two different reservations, Indian students were reading under one book per year outside of the classroom. This situation is seriously flawed, especially for students who go to college. I am sick and tired of stories. I hear about the Indian valedictorian in high school who goes off to college and flunks out. The main reason they flunk out is their lack of ability to read well. She sent me a chapter from a book Alfie Kohn called "Punishment by Reward". It reviews the literature on using rewards to kinds for reading books does not turn them into people who like books more, they stop reading when the reward are no longer offered.

I agree with that. I agree with his point that people should read because they love to read, the love to learn new things. But Indian students read so little that they never learn to appreciate the joys of reading. Sylvia also sent me a short bibliography on learn and how children read. Some of them people I have never heard of, but some are very familiar and popular writers (Howard Gardner, John Goodlad). So now I have a pile of reading to do to learn all I can about how children learn.

One thing is clear to me, however--the schools need to teach Indian students mostly in their Native language for the first few years, if most members of their local Indian tribes speak their Native language extensively. Otherwise they are being handicapped.

This raises the question of what these children will read. One of the articles Sylvia sent me stated that giving children pizza as a reward gets them to read books only lasted as long as the pizza lasted. When the pizza is withdrawn, the children stop reading books. A second point the author made was that the pizza-eaters only read easy books, not one with string academic content.

Educators in Indian Country need to re-think the whole paradigm of the education of Indian children. Two-thirds of the high school graduates in the U.S. now enter college, according to the latest report from the Education Department. The percent of Indian who go? Only 17%. And 80% of these drop out before they get a degree.

Educators will tell you, in subtle and not so subtle ways, that they need to educate Indian students for vocational work. This idea, which is almost a century and a quarter old, is still prevalent in Indian schools. Talk about sending Indian students to college, and they will counter with the need they perceive for Indian students--the need for student to be trained for blue-collar jobs.

We need to start meaningful changes in the way Indian students are educated. They need to be challenged to achieve the maximum. They need to be assisted and motivated by their parents. They need to be given homework every day. They need to plan for careers--as early as middle school. They need to READ, READ, READ.

The Indian education box was built in the 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's. Indians were to be trained as farmers, housekeepers, and blue collar worker. That is the box most people are still in. That is the culture of the schools. It needs to be changed. The next generation of people need to be able to achieve things our generation never thought of.

To do that, they have a high quality education. They should learn their Native language first. They should read books. Then they should learn all the other things, and learn them well.

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## Letters to the Editor

# LRDA commended for great pow wow held the weekend

Dear Editor,  
I just want to take a few minutes to congratulate everyone for a good event. The LRDA fall pow wow had something for everyone. My hat is off to Ben Jacobs, Wanda Locklear, Marilyn Locklear, Connie Jones, and the list just goes on and on. They all did a wonderful job. They had support from the Arts Council and the NC Indian Cultural Center, with assistance from other agencies. If they continue to get support from other organizations, the event will continue to grow.

Here are some suggestions I came up with. First, have more lights and a shade tent up for the elderly. Also bigger bleachers that will seat more people. Friday night I thought that LRDA had sprung for fireworks. The lights went out and there was a big bang. That is when I realized a transformer had blown out. The guys from Lumber River were there before everyone left, working away to get the lights turned back on. I believe the street in Pembroke were empty Saturday night because it looked like everyone was there. There were some touching moments: We had a memorial for Dwight Lowry and his father, Mr. Marvin Lowry, spoke about his experience as a veteran during the Korean conflict. He spoke of his faith in the Lord and how that faith got him through all the things he has experienced.

I was glad that none of the people running for office spoke very long, not did any of the people who came to the mike.

What I really liked was all the small children who danced for the first time. I pray that they will continue to dance until they are way up in years. I would rather see our kids into pow wows than Rap, of that other stuff. Pow wows really bring families together and helps build self esteem in our youth.

Our drum, Southern SunSingers had James Had to sit in with us for a song or two. A lot of people would be surprised to know that before James became Executive Director of LRDA, he was a dancer and singer a number of years ago.

We had Mike Wilkins to sit in with us before he started cravering stone and before he worked with Fleetwood. He also sang and danced. Looked around the drum and at one time we had former members of Lumbee and Friends and every other drum group to be formed from the Pembroke area before 1985 and some new singers who have just started.

My hat is off to Karl Anthony Hunt and Reggie Brewer. They work with the kids at the Indian Cultural Center, teaching them to dance and sing. I would like to encourage the young drum, Red Snake, to keep singing. I hope to see Red Snake at many events in the years to come. My wish for all the youth is that they will

continue on this path and not give up when they get older. I can't count how any people we have had who at one time danced or sang, but as they got older they stopped dancing and singing, especially, the Miss Lumbees. I must say, however, that I have seen more of them this year than ever. I even ran into the first Miss Lumbee. I challenged my cousin, Charlie Lowry, by asking her once she gave up her crown would she stop coming to pow wows. She said no, but we will see. I think of all that knowledge and wisdom lost, all that experience gone to waste and kids have so few people to look up to today. To me pow wows are like family gatherings, and I believe it is a great way to keep kids off drugs and alcohol. I also ask that we older adults set examples of clean living that these kids can follow. I now see that as adults we are to share our wisdom and pave the way for those who follow. It is at events like the pow wow you see the elders interacting with adults and the youth, sometime at the same time. You might say it is where the past and the present meet the future. It is at a pow wow. Parents take your kids and spend some time with them. I believe it is the greatest investment you will spend without it costing you a dime.

We, as always, I hope I have given you something to think about. Take care.  
In the True Way,  
Derek Lowry

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## Son of Rowland (N.C.) Residents Serves with Pride on USS Cape ST. George

by: Kevin Moore

Naval Base Norfolk, VA--Having just returned from a two-month deployment, the stately gray ship prepares earnestly at its pier at Naval Station Norfolk, for its next call to duty. The ship, USS Cape St. George, is a guided-missile cruiser with a crew of more than 350.

During the deployment, the ship participated in Operation Baltops. The Baltic operation is the largest annual naval exercise in the world. Fifty ships from 13 countries conducted air, surface and subsurface operations designed to increase their ability to work together as a team.

Joseph Hunt, son of Leonard and Kay Hunt of Rowland, N.C. (28383), was one of the Sailors who helped make Baltops a success.

The ship he serves on is one of the most powerful warships ever put to sea. It is versatile, fast and designed to protect its battle group against all threats from above, on or below the sea. The ship has the AEGIS weapons system. It centers around a powerful radar that enables the crew to detect, track and fire on more than one hundred targets at a time.

Hunt, a 19-year-old petty officer third class, is an operations specialist. "I use our radar system to determine where we're at and what's around us. I have to be able to determine if the ships and planes on the radar are our friends or enemies."

Hunt joined the Navy to gain experience. "I graduated from high school and wanted to start my life off right. I wanted to travel and visit other countries and gain real world work experience."

A 1995 graduate of South Robeson High School, Hunt continues to learn in the Navy. "I've learned a lot about discipline. I've learned about my rate. The Navy sends me to different schools so I can operate and maintain the equipment I work with."

Hunt, married to the former Kathryn Fagan of Jamesville, N.C., is undecided about making the Navy his career. "I've saved a lot of money with the GI Bill and would like to get a degree. I may do my next tour of shore duty and leave after that enlistment. I'd go back home after that and go to college."

No matter what his future holds, Hunt will always be able to look back on his time in the Navy and know his service was valuable and appreciated.

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Florence H. Bassi, M.D., has joined the medical staff of SRMC and is associated with Carolina Eye Associates in Lumberton. A native of West Virginia, Dr. Bassi's practice includes general ophthalmology as well as laser surgery of the eye, and she is certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology.

Dr. Bassi is a graduate of the West Virginia University School of Medicine. She completed an internship at Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA, and residency training in ophthalmology at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta.

### Florence H. Bassi, M.D.

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