

IK-Today **Indigenous Ways of Knowing**

The IK-Today series:

The early Share-Net *Indigenous Knowledge Series* (IKS) materials were developed from stories told by Mrs Manqele to her Daughter Mba. These opened a window on the wisdom in many Indigenous ways of knowing and other insights followed.

Mba, a science teacher, shared some of the stories with her friend Mabongi Mtshali who had researched indigenous knowledge and who worked at a museum. When Mba and Rob worked together in an environmental education project, they were surprised at the practical common sense hidden in many of indigenous ways of knowing and doing things. Rob thus challenged Mba to write some of the stories down and she published IK materials for adult literacy classes through Share-Net.

When Lynette Masuku was looking for a research project some years later, Rob suggested that she also follow her passion for indigenous knowledge. Lynette found that urban learners were enthusiastic about indigenous knowledge but had little sense of what it was about until they worked with some of Mba's early materials on 'Collecting Sweet Water (*amanzi amnandi*).'¹ She found that the materials started the learners off on a mother tongue quest to uncover the practical common sense in everyday indigenous ways. This research allowed us to revise the IK Series so that it was presented in mother tongue and in English, the indigenous language carrying the IK and the English allowing a sharing of the ideas with others

Edgar Neluvhalani reviewed this research as part of a PhD he is undertaking with the support of the National Research Foundation (NRF). He found that learners working in mother tongue and with artefacts were able to uncover and recover (mobilise) indigenous knowledge within the learning area framework of the new Outcomes Based Education (OBE) curriculum. In discussing his continuing research it struck us that fragments of indigenous knowledge were to be found in indigenous ways and words in use in the challenges of the everyday; hence this series of moving images on some indigenous common sense ways and the title, ***IK-Today***.

We approached Mabongi to co-develop and narrate this ***IK-Today*** series and designed it to provide images and ideas in action as starting points towards a mobilising of indigenous knowledge in the new curriculum. In so doing we have drawn on some of the materials that Mba first put together, Lynette developed and has now expanded as we worked with differing partners to develop this series. We have also incorporated Edgar's interim findings: that indigenous knowledge might be mobilised in the curriculum through mother tongue learning actions that are shared in other languages and applied to the challenges of the present day.

What we are learning:

In southern Africa, indigenous ways of knowing have often been seen as out-dated and even primitive in a modern world where the sciences have the answers. We are finding that indigenous environmental knowledge is not something commonly found in books but in the peoples of an area, their language and their successful intergenerational patterns of life. It is, quite simply, the common sense, local ways of knowing and doing things that humans have developed as we have lived for many generations in the diverse environments of the world.

This series is thus about how much of our common sense environmental knowledge has come to us over generations, to still be found today in the practical ways of doing

things that still seem to work well. Indigenous ways are not always best, but they are often starting points that allow us to see and to work on problems in the ways that we do many things today. *IK-Today* thus opens up spaces for more relevant environmental learning, something that indigenous cultural groups have always done when they encountered new technologies and crops. Maize, for example, is now seen as an indigenous African crop, stored in different ways in diverse African environments even though it came to Africa from America only a few hundred years ago.

The series is thus not about an unchanging indigenous past, but *IK-Today* explores examples of indigenous African ways of knowing and the challenges of the present day. The series thus challenges us to respect and explore indigenous ways of knowing and doing things that have been successful over many generations and in differing ways in the diverse environments of southern Africa. The intention is not to communicate indigenous knowledge in authentic settings or as ideas that have been verified by specialists and scientists. *IK-Today* simply portrays ideas as these arose and became useful starting points for meaning making enquiry in mother tongue and in a local socio-ecological environment.

How to use the materials:

The series has been filmed from the vantage point of a young child looking in on indigenous African ways of knowing as these are acted out with the relevant artefacts. The commentary is in English with some words in mother tongue as situated cues so that learners have African images, words and wonder as starting points for them to explore indigenous ways of knowing in mother tongue and in local community contexts. This approach allows all learners to participate without being labelled or marginalised in any way, as was often the case with indigenous languages and knowledge in Africa during its colonial past. It is important that all ways of knowing are respected and that the wisdom in diverse ways of knowing is uncovered for an engagement with the environmental challenges that we all face today.

In a recent indigenous knowledge process using the African IK materials on storing food, we explored similar technologies and ways of knowing amongst USA first nations peoples, early Britons and communities in India. We also noted that in Indonesia they use bay leaves to keep weevils out of their rice and that there are different indigenous ways of knowing and doing things in the moist and dry areas of South Africa.

We hope that you enjoy using the *IK-Today* materials as starting points for environmental learning that might allow indigenous learners to uncover, recover and share much of the wisdom that has been marginalised and lost in Africa. We also hope that through looking at and using the materials in creative ways in your local environment, you and the co-learners you work with might begin to respect and develop a passion for the indigenous ways of knowing that we share.

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