



Sharing Our Pathways

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A newsletter of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative

Alaska Federation of Natives ♦ University of Alaska ♦ National Science Foundation ♦ Rural School and Community Trust

Learning Dinaxinag (Our Language): A Personal Journey Through Higher Education

by Beth Leonard

Keynote Speech to the 2004 Bilingual Multicultural Education Equity Conference

Dogidinh (thank you) for your introduction. Since Deg Xinag is one of the languages honored at this conference, I would like to give the Deg Hit'an Elder teachers the opportunity to introduce themselves as they are the teachers, and the ones who provided the translation of the conference theme: My aunts, Hannah Maillele of Grayling and Katherine Hamilton of Shageluk and my father, James Dementi of Shageluk.

The Deg Xinag language area has been inappropriately labeled on the Alaska Native Languages Map as "Ingalik." The term Deg Hit'an references the people of the area, while the term Deg Xinag refers to the language. There are currently Deg Xinag speakers living in Anvik, Grayling, Shageluk and Anchorage. The conference theme, "Enriching Student Achievement Through Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction", was difficult to translate. We reworded it in English and the speak-

ers put forward the phrase *Sraqay Xetedz Deg Xiq'i Xidixi Dindli'an* that means "kids learn well/good through Deg Xinag."

In 1992 I attended this conference for the first time. I was an undergraduate student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and had recently changed my major from accounting to linguistics. I had become interested in learning my heritage language and contributing to language revitalization efforts. I was very new to the

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Members of the author's family, L to R: James Dementi (father), the late Lena Phillips Dementi (grandmother), Katherine Hamilton (aunt). In front is the late Susan Dutchman (aunt).

Contents

Learning Dinaxinag: A Personal Journey Through Higher Education	1
New Sharing Our Pathways Editor	6
Advocating Our Educational Priorities .	7
Future Teachers of Alaska	8
Online Survey on Distance Education ..	8
Math in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup'ik Eskimo Elders .	9
Humility	10
Emmonak Regional Training	11
Inupiaq Region Education Summit	12
Southeast Region:	
Where Are the Native Drop Outs? .	14
Macbeth—Through a Tlingit Lens .	15
Kodiak Alutiiq Region Honors Elder ..	16



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fields of education and bilingual education. I remember being overwhelmed as this was the first conference I had attended, and I didn't know many people. I was so impressed with the keynote speakers, and all the expertise represented at the conference from the different areas of Alaska. If someone had told me that I would one day be chosen to give a keynote address at this conference, I would not have believed it. I have attended this conference fairly regularly for the past seven or eight years. I have learned so much from all the present and past participants through your presentations and workshops. You continue to educate me as I go through the process of writing my dissertation, the final stage of my Ph.D. program. The mentoring and support you have provided has been invaluable. For me, and probably others as well, this conference is a time of renewal and re-energizes us to continue the work that we do.

I have lived in Fairbanks since 1978, and currently work as a language coordinator-instructor for the Interior Athabaskan Tribal College (IATC), a post-secondary educational center operated by Tanana Chiefs Conference, a consortium of Interior Athabaskan tribal governments. The IATC language program currently has partnership agreements with the Alaska Native Language Center and the Yukon Koyukuk School District. However, I do want to say a few words about a family language program we are trying to promote—a program that involves children and their parents or caregivers. This program started a couple of years ago when Susan Paskvan, who is currently working with the YKSD Athabaskan language program, decided to offer a Fairbanks community schools course that was open to 8–12-year-old students with an accompanying parent or guardian. Kathy Sikorski also taught Gwich'in and

accepted students at the high school level and above. Kathy and Susan developed a variety of games and other language learning activities and offered their courses once a week. The community really appreciated these courses and they had a great response. Thanks to our current partnership with the YKSD, and funding from the Administration for Native Americans, this program is starting to pick up within some of the TCC region villages. We are also hoping to continue this program in Fairbanks with the help of Velma Schafer and Virginia Ned.

I did not grow up speaking my ancestral language, Deg Xinag. I am currently learning my language as an adult with other adult students from our area. My mother, Jean Dementi, was a non-Native woman from California and English was the primary language used in our home as I grew up. My father grew up in a small community on the Innoko River below Shageluk called *Didlang Tochagg*, which means spruce slough. His father—my grandfather, Charlie Dementi—was from the Holikachuk language area and his mother from the Deg Hit'an area, so he speaks two Athabaskan languages in addition to English. My father has some education within the formal Western system, however is more highly educated in the place-based subsistence educational system that was, and still is, necessary to the survival of the Deg Hit'an people. My grandmother, Lena Phillips Dementi, who had spent time in the Episcopal mission at Anvik, taught my father and his siblings how to read, write and speak English.

I am enrolled in the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. My research focuses on illustrating Deg Hit'an epistemologies and knowledge systems, or Native Ways of Knowing, through analysis of Deg Xinag oral traditions. Through language learning, I am becoming more familiar with cultural

beliefs, world views and value systems that sustained the Deg Hit'an people for thousands of years prior to contact with Russians and Europeans. However, there is a certain measure of frustration involved. I find myself struggling with the best way to learn the Deg Xinag language. Many times I am not aware of obvious differences between English and Deg Xinag or do not understand the social and kinship relationships within the culture. Many of the written resources we have access to do not connect the language with the cultural contexts. I believe this is due in part to the lack of knowledge of deeper Athabascan cultural contexts and constructs and the failure to document language beyond the lexical and grammatical levels.

For instance, in the *Deg Xinag Noun Dictionary*, if I was to look up an entry under kinship, I would find the word for "grandfather" is *sitsiy*. If I looked further into the dictionary under birds, I might find a similar word *yixgitsiy* or "raven." In another section under plants, I would find *yixgitsiy notchidl*, or "puffball mushroom". When you see these words grouped together, you can tell there is some relationship here. For example, *yixgitsiy* literally means "your (pl) grandfather", so there are connections with this bird within the human kinship system. *Yixgitsiy notchidl*, or the puffball mushroom, literally means "Raven's sewing bag". So within many of our resources, there are all these glimpses into kinship relationships and the whole cultural context that goes unexplained without going beyond a literal translation to some other means of cross-referencing.

This past summer I took my written comprehensive exam. On the exam was a question about a story told by the late Belle Deacon who was honored with a Honoring Alaska's Indigenous Literature (HAIL) posthumous award. In her book, Belle told each story in Deg Xinag, then English. The Deg Xinag is presented in the book

with a line by line English translation. Some of the speakers who are here today helped with those translations of her book.

Here is the question from my exam:

Based on your research, discuss Deg Hit'an **symbolic, ontological and epistemological notions of the pike** in Belle Deacon's story, "Man and Wife" in *Engithidong Xugixudhoy*. Discuss the **cultural implications of transformation, subsistence and hierarchy** in this narrative as contrasted to other Athabascan peoples.

I will briefly summarize the parts of the story that relate to the creation of the pike and then address the different components of the question:

"*Ni' oqay Ni' idaxin*—The Man and Wife" (Deacon, 1987) tells the story of a couple living by themselves at the mouth of a side stream. When fall came, the man spent a lot of time trapping while the wife stayed at home chopping wood, sewing and cooking for her husband. The wife would always make fish ice cream for her husband and after he had eaten he would specifically ask for this. As the man continues to go out hunting and trapping for days at a time, his wife begins to feel lonesome. This cycle of the same activities goes on for a number of years, with the wife making fish ice cream (occasionally snow ice cream) for her husband. One day during falltime she does not feel well and does not make the ice cream for him. He urges his wife to make the ice cream since he does not get full without it, and sleeps well after eating ice cream. His wife then goes outside for snow to make ice cream and does not return. The man searches for her and finds the bowl and spoon she had taken with her, but finds no tracks beyond the water hole. He mourns for her during the subsequent fall and winter then becomes thin and

weak, thinking that he will die.

At mid-winter an old man (whom he later learns is Raven) visits him and tells the husband that his wife was stolen by a giant and taken to "a land deep down in the water" (p.15). Raven tells the man that he will not be able to get his wife back without his [Raven's] help. After the man has eaten and rested, they begin work by cutting down a large spruce tree with a stone axe. They then limb the tree and cut the top off, making it about "12 arm spans long" (p.19). The spruce is then peeled and over the course of at least a month, it is carved into the shape of a pike with the insides and mouth hollowed out. After the pike is complete, they tie a rope to it and drag it to the water hole. The carved pike is then painted with white spots. Belle comments that "... *teggxit'a chenh ngizrenh*," "it was such a beautiful fish" (p.21). The man then goes to the cache and brings "things [beads] that were like eyes" (p.21). Raven uses a medicine song on the beads and then puts them in place, whereupon they begin to wiggle and move. Raven instructs the man to go fetch an ice chisel. They then measure the fish (again) and find it to be 12 arm spans long. The man is instructed to chop a hole in the waterhole big enough to accommodate the fish and fetch other items for his journey. Items include a clay lamp which is to provide light for him while inside the fish. Raven then "blew with his hands and made medicine with a song" (p.25), hitting the fish on the back. The fish sinks to the bottom of the river with the man inside and produces a humming noise that shakes the man.

Upon arriving at the underwater village the man leaves the pike and eventually rescues his wife from the giant and villagers. The hus-

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band and wife return and enter the pike, whose head is resting on the shore. The giant and villagers prepare to shoot arrows at the pike, when it swamps their canoe and swims around. Belle says, “*Dit yan’ yit yixudz xiti’ihoyh*” (p.29), indicating there is blood all over. The pike then swamps the village with waves, straightens itself out and begins the humming sound again. Upon their return, Raven is waiting and then washes the head and teeth of the pike with a rag. Raven instructs the fish to “stay in a place where there are lakes, where no one will go,” and “for people who step there on the ice of the lake, you will shake your little tail,” indicating “someone’s impending death” (p.31). The fish then “goes to the bottom,” however they (man and wife) “don’t know where” (p.31). In the English version of the story, Raven strongly reprimands the pike for killing the people in the village.

This is not the end of the story, however, I will end the summary here as there are no more direct or indirect references to the pike.

The Pike’s Role in Subsistence Practices

For the Deg Hit’an people, pike or “jackfish” as referenced by Osgood (1940; 1958; 1959) were an important part of the traditional subsistence cycle as they can be harvested year-round from lakes, side streams and rivers. Traditionally, pike were harvested in basket traps—*gidiqoy tidhi’on*. Osgood (1940) indicates that traps were set as part of a fish weir during the fall and winter months and the harvest was most abundant after breakup (p.231). Pike also could be harvested individually, in clear water, using a double-pronged fish spear—*nitq’adzggik vaxa gindiggad*. Data from a study by

Wheeler (1997) done in 1990–1991 indicates that Anvik’s pike harvest consisted of 19.5% of its non-salmon harvest; Shageluk, 35.8% and Holy Cross, 28.1%, illustrating the continued importance of this fish in the current subsistence cycle (p.160–162).

Nelson (1983) indicates that pike are aggressive, predatory fish and can grow up to six feet in length and 50 pounds in weight (p. 72–73). Their jaws and gills are laced with thin sharp teeth, so they are picked up by inserting fingers in the eye sockets rather than the gills.

Pike are currently harvested using gill nets and the meat is boiled, roasted or fried. As stated above, it is also used to make *vanhgiq*—fish ice cream—as pike flakes well and is readily available at most times of the year, although other white fish are used as well. Fish ice cream is made by combining fat (Crisco or, traditionally, fish oil) with the boiled meat of the fish. This is an extremely time-intensive process as the fish is deboned and the liquid is previously squeezed out of the meat by hand so that becomes dry and powdery. Air is whipped into the fish and fat mixture using the hand, until fluffy. Sugar, berries and often milk are added to finish the dish. This is served at potlatches, mask dances, funeral feasts and other important events.

Epistemology and Ontology: Aspects of the Pike

Moore (1998) references the following definition for the term “epistemology”: “the study of the canons and protocols by which human beings acquire, organize, and verify their knowledge about the world” (p.271). In his introduction to the book *Native Science*, Leroy Little Bear (Cajete, 2000) talks about science as a “search for reality” and “knowledge,”

thereby encompassing both epistemology and ontology within a single term (p.x). Gregory Cajete emphasizes that Native science is a participatory process with the natural world and that the understanding of Native science requires developing the ability to “decode layers of meaning embedded in symbols”; symbols that “are used artistically and linguistically to depict structures and relationships to places” (p.36). Stories, or mythology, according to Cajete “are alternative ways of understanding relationships, creation and the creative process itself . . . how humans obtain knowledge, how they learn responsibility for such knowledge and then how knowledge is applied in the proper context.” These mythologies contain “expressions of a worldview in coded form . . .” (p.62).

Reflecting on the epistemology and ontology of the Deg Hit’an, according to Osgood (1959), the name for pike in the Deg Xinag language is *giliqoy*, literally, “a lance” (p. 24). There are several different entries in the *Koyukon Dictionary* (2000) for pike, including a cognate term which means “that which is speared at something” (p.345); another term for a large pike, literally “that which stays on the bottom” (p.527) and term which means “that which floats” (p.416). The *Ahtna Athabaskan Dictionary* (1990) has a single reference that is said to originate from an “obsolete verb theme ‘fish swims rapidly’” (p.179).

Creation/Transformation, Symbolism and Hierarchy

The spruce tree, or *didlang*, that was used to create the pike, was one of the most useful plants to the Deg Hit’an people providing, for example, medicine in the form of new shoots in the

spring that could be collected and made into tea to treat colds; pitch which was used for bandaging cuts and waterproofing canoes and wood for burning, or the construction of items such as sled runners or household items. This wood burns at a higher temperature than other woods and is softer than birch, making it easier to work with.

The creation of the giant pike takes place through transformation of the spruce tree via the medicine song/breath of Raven. Witherspoon (1977), indicates that the Navajo have established cultural categories or hierarchies that classify the world based on “potential for motion” (p.140) and acknowledge “air as the source of all knowledge and animation” (p.53). Posey (2001) also references the energy stored in inanimate objects that can be transformed into an animate being (p.7). In a similar vein, Gregory Cajete (2000) states that “In many Native myths, plants are acknowledged as the first life, or the grandparents of humans and animals and sources of life and wisdom” (p.108). In the Deg Xinag language, the word *yetr* means “life” or “breath”. Deg Hit’an medicine men or shaman were often able to cure using their breath in ritual song or blowing in a person’s ear for example to cure an earache. When examining these ontologies that acknowledge the power of air, the role of plants in the environment, and potential for motion, the transformation of the spruce tree into a giant pike becomes a natural process.

The clay lamp referenced in the story also seems to be part of the creative or transformative process, contributing to the ontology of the Deg Hit’an concerning fish in general. In Osgood’s (1959) description of the “animal’s ceremony” (p.116), he references an “insignia which holds a clay lamp tied to the bottom cross-piece” in recognition “that each kind

of fish . . . have their own light which corresponds to a person’s clay lamp. When fish pass in the Yukon, the side streams are lighted up by other fish which look like lights in the houses of people. Among human beings of course, only shaman can see them” (p.117).

Summary

The information I covered just scratches the surface in terms of the educational value of one story. In keeping with the conference theme, I guess the point I’m trying to get across is that language learning and research involve core educational processes and content. Bilingual education or heritage language learning are fields of education. Those of us who are struggling to learn our heritage languages are not merely learning another language for the purpose of learning another language, or learning another language so that we can go visit another country and be able to order off the menu. These efforts are not some ephemeral, ivory tower field of study with no real goals or objectives.

Language learning within valid cultural contexts causes us to think about the world we live in and the relationships within this world. Investigation of these questions using both written sources and the expertise of cultural tradition bearers requires rigorous scholarship and involves learning about biological and physical sciences, philosophy, religious/spiritual belief systems, ethics/values and literature that is many, if not all, of the content areas.

This is a small example of what I have learned and what can be learned by following the models and processes many of you, the Native educators participating in this conference, have developed. *Dogidinh* to all of the educators for all that you have taught us and especially the Elders who continue to mentor and support us. ✨

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New Sharing Our Pathways Editor

by Malinda Chase

Last month the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) staff and partners warmly welcomed me as the new editor for the *Sharing Our Pathways* newsletter. I am excited about the work being done in connection with AKRSI, and appreciate the expression and exchange of ideas that takes place in *Sharing Our Pathways*.

My father is from Anvik—an Athabascan community located on the lower-middle Yukon. My mother, who came to Alaska as a nurse and worked first in Tanana, is originally from California. I have a wonderful eight-year-old daughter, Denali, who has family ties to South Naknek in Bristol Bay.

My formal education and cultural foundation is varied, being raised between urban and rural Alaska in a bicultural home of Native and non-Native parents. Given this I have reflected a great deal on what is a meaningful and relevant education. In three generations—my grandmother's, my father's and my own—our individual education represents the variations in Alaska Native education that have profoundly affected our identities, family cohesiveness and collective reality as Native people. From a very young age, following the death of her mother, my grandmother was raised and schooled in Anvik's Episcopal Mission. My father was the first generation from Anvik to be sent to boarding school, followed by a poor experience with BIA's vocational education. Later he excelled professionally through his own initiative and love of learning, which was cultivated during his long hours of reading while on the trapline. I, on the other hand, attended urban schools, a small rural village school,

an alternative high school and eventually Wellesley College (a private women's college) and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Each of these generational experiences highlight major variations in federal and state education policies that continues to affect our individual lives and relations in addition to the maintenance, perpetuation and celebration of our culture and communities.

I have previously worked a number of years for University of Alaska Fairbanks' Interior-Aleutian Campus under the College or Rural Alaska coordinating distance education, support and outreach to students and communities; so place-based and post-secondary education have been a primary focus in my work. I also am interested in Native language use and revitalization, as I am trying to learn Deg Xinag, the Athabascan language of the Anvik-Shageluk area. More recently I have been involved in a comprehensive community-planning project in four rural communities. As a part of planning, these communities are emphasizing the need to address local education as it relates to long-term population and development issues.

Education, whether institutional or cultural, positive or negative, is a transforming experience and therefore impacts and affects our identity

and spirit. The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative's intent is to systematically integrate indigenous and Western knowledge as a foundation for learning in the context of rural and Native Alaska. In essence, it is intended to make changes in a system to provide an educational experience that is validating, meaningful and relevant.

Sharing Our Pathways provides an avenue to share ideas, stories, lessons and approaches that affirm our reality, challenge our intellect and imagination, connect us to our place in the world and magnify our strength and

Sharing Our Pathways provides an avenue to share ideas, stories, lessons and approaches that affirm our reality, challenge our intellect and imagination, connect us to our place in the world and magnify our strength and resiliency.

resiliency. In this issue, among the articles you will find Beth Leonard's keynote speech to the 2004 Bilingual Multicultural Education Equity Conference that demonstrates the depth of knowledge and relationships embedded in our Native languages. "Humility", by Sean Topkok, stresses the importance of being actively involved in our own cultural education, striving to learn lessons from Elders on behalf of our children—as their parents and first teachers—and for our communities and individual sense of self. And as we say farewell to Senator Georgianna Lincoln during her last legislative session, she urges us to stay informed and involved in critical decisions affecting rural and Alaska Native education.

As editor of *Sharing Our Pathways*, I look forward to and welcome your insights, submissions and articles. ✨

Advocating for Our Educational Priorities

by Senator Georgianna Lincoln

For the past 14 years, my top priority has always been our youth—our future leaders! As Senator I have tried to listen to and support the voices inside our schools and communities and not to control them with over burdensome bureaucratic layers. This has been a challenge with the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Our teachers enrich our children's lives with a well-rounded classroom experience and prepare them for options to make healthy choices for their future.

In Senate District C, there are 25 school districts and 16 different Native languages. School districts are unique and depend on administrators, teachers, parents and students to bring their individual talents and qualities toward a successful education. We must be careful in our drive to assess achievement that we do not devalue those qualities students possess that may, in fact, be indicators of success later in life—qualities no standardized test can accurately measure. Several pieces of legislation have been introduced in the 2004 session to address the impact of the high stakes graduation exam. The graduation exam is high stakes because without a diploma a student will not be able to get into the military service, many vocational education programs or trade schools; therefore these are bills you may want to follow-up on:

HB 457

Allows for three types of diplomas. The basic diploma for those who meet the local schools graduation requirements, but fail the exit exam. The enhanced diploma for those students who meet the local schools graduation requirements and pass the exit exam. The advanced diploma for

those students who meet the local schools requirements and pass the exit exam, plus have additional advanced placement classes that are consistent with academic excellence and count toward their college degree.

SB 248

Ensures we have a high stakes exam minimizing the "false negatives" and clarify the legislative intent regarding severe cognitively disabled students. It requires severe cognitively disabled students (as defined by the state) to be waived from the HSQE.

Attracting and retaining quality Alaskan teachers is an issue I have supported over the years. SB 101, which I introduced, is the Teacher Cadet program whereby we can recruit and retain quality teachers who are dedicated to rural schools and communities. There continues to be a 50% turnover rate in many rural districts. We must hire Alaskans first, as our homegrown teachers don't need the same level of cultural training and can begin teaching effectively in our villages.

Our Alaska Native languages are not thriving and healthy. We must ensure funding is sufficient for Native languages to be taught in our



Georgianna Lincoln was born to

Kathryn "Kitty" Evans Harwood of Rampart and Theodore "Rex" Harwood of Michigan. She has two children: Gidget Beach and Sean Lincoln. Georgianna is also the proud grandmother to Acey Jay Beach.

In 1990 she was elected to the State of Alaska House of Representatives. She has been an Alaska state senator representing District C, since 1992. The 2004 Alaska State Legislative Session marks her last legislative session since Senator Lincoln will be retiring.

For all your support and hard work, on behalf of rural and Alaska Native education, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative extends a sincere, *Ana Basee'* (thank you).

schools that want it. In 2000, my Native language curriculum bill (SB 103) became law. This legislation mandated school districts with over 50% Alaska Native students to form a Native language curriculum advisory board. If that board deems it appropriate, then the school district may implement a Native language curriculum.

With 98 schools in Senate District C, school construction and maintenance dollars have been critical. Since 2002 there has been success in rural and bush Alaska with eight new schools, planning and design costs for five more new schools and 39 schools receiving major maintenance projects.

Though I am retiring from the Senate this next year, I will continue to advocate for our children in every opportunity possible. *Ana basee'* ✨

Future Teachers of Alaska

by Ac'arralek Lolly Carpluk

In October 2003, the University of Alaska Statewide and Alaska Teacher Placement, in partnership with the Alaska Federation of Natives, Lower Kuskokwim School District, Bering Strait School District and Nome Public Schools, were awarded a three-year Future Teachers of Alaska (FTA) grant to construct a program that will inspire and support K–12 Alaska Native students to become teachers.

One of the main goals of the FTA grant is to establish pilot FTA high-school clubs in the three partner school districts. Each district has recruited FTA coordinators who are recruiting FTA students to work collaboratively in developing their organizations within their communities. There are many exciting opportunities for the students to participate in various kinds of activities on a community, local school, district, state and national level.

For further information, please contact the following persons for local and district-wide FTA activities:

Sharon Weaver, FTA Project Director

Lower Kuskokwim School District
Phone: (907) 543-4804
Email address:
Sharon_weaver@lksd.org

Sue Toymil, FTA Project Director

Bering Strait School District
Phone: (907) 955-2424

Barb Pungowi, FTA Project Director

Nome Public Schools
Phone: (907) 443-5351
Email address:
bpungowi@nomeschools.com

For overall information contact Lolly Carpluk, FTA Program Director, University of Alaska Statewide, 907-474-1973 or email lolly.carpluk@email.alaska.edu. ✨

Online Survey on Distance Education

The Alaska Distance Education Technology Consortium and the University of Alaska are undertaking an extensive project to determine Alaska's distance education needs. The first phase of the project is an online survey open to Alaskans of all ages, backgrounds and interests—whether for their school-age children or to continue their own education at any level.

Please use the following instructions to complete the survey and urge others to do the same so our data best represents the needs of communities.

How to Register

1. Go to <http://ak.vived.com> and click on the "Sign Up" link at the top. Or go directly to one of the choices in the "Use the Dashboard" box on the upper right side of the webpage if you determine that you are one of the following:
 - School User (teachers, parents, and general staff)
 - School Leader (principals, technology leaders, building technology coordinators)
 - District Leader (superintendent, district technology coordinators, etc.)
2. Fill in the registration information and click "Continue" at the bottom of the page.
3. If you haven't already selected your role, then choose the role that best applies to you.
4. Choose the district or school that best represents you and click "Continue". If you have trouble, just register as a district leader and choose a district. You can always change it later.
5. Join the "Alaska Distance Education Technology Consortium" group by selecting it from the pull down menu and click "Join".

6. Sign in using your email and newly created password.

How to Take the Survey

1. Sign in using your email and password.
2. Click the "Assess" tab at the top of the page.
3. Click the "Take Assessment" button for the ADETC Distance Education Survey

Please note that you may have other assignments from other leaders in your state. If no assignments appear, then click the "Account Info" link and make sure you have joined the Alaska Distance Education Technology Consortium group. We hope this tool will be easy to use and will provide you and the Alaska Distance Education Technology Consortium with the analysis needed to inform key leaders from around Alaska. Please send us any comments or questions. We would like to hear what you think about the survey tool and way we can improve it. If you have questions, please email Sara Chambers at sarachambers@acsalaska.net.

If you would like additional information about the groups behind this survey, check us out at <http://adetc.alaska.edu> and <http://www.vived.com>. The Dashboard is free for schools, districts and states to use for data collection and analysis, so use it for your own projects. Thank you for your interest, and we look forward to your input. ✨

Math in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup'ik Eskimo Elders



by Barbara Adams

M*ath in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup'ik Eskimo Elders* is a series of supplemental math curriculum created by teams of Elders, teachers and university researchers. The curricula provides a bridge between the traditional subsistence activities from Yup'ik culture to the school mathematics of today by using Yup'ik ways of learning combined with pedagogy from the math reform movement.

The series currently includes two published modules and about 10 others in draft form. *Going to Egg Island: Adventures in Grouping and Place Values* uses a story of traveling to Egg Island, collecting eggs and sorting and distributing them to guide the mathematics of number sense around grouping and place value. The module is most appropriate for second grade but can be modified for both first and third grades. *Building a Fish Rack: Investigations into Proof, Properties, Perimeter and Area* follows the progress of building a fish rack to study various shapes and their properties through the methodology of mathematical proof.



The curriculum project is supplemented by both a research and a professional development component. The research includes a quantitative and qualitative approach to identify improvements in test scores statistically while locating the teacher and

student factors leading to those improvements through observations, interviews and video analysis. In a statistical study of over 2000 students, both modules have shown students' improvement in their understanding of mathematics increased using the modules as compared to students using their standard curriculum at 95% or better significance levels. Qualitative research is ongoing at this stage.

The third Summer Math Institute is being held this summer at University of Alaska Fairbanks from July 19–31. The overarching theme of connecting community to math through culturally responsive teaching methods will focus on the concept of representation, showing the same idea in a variety of ways. The first two institutes focused on the major math topics of conjecture and proof and patterns. The Institute is open to teachers and their aides working in first through sixth grade and all expenses are paid.

For more information about the project or if you are interested in attending the Summer Math Institute 2004 please contact Flor Banks, project manager, through email, fnfmb@uaf.edu, or by phone at (907) 474-6996. ✨

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L to R: Amy, Sean, Christopher and Aaron Topkok.

Humility

by Sean Topkok

The warm Alaskan summer sun beats down on the students and counselors, including me. We've danced one song several times, learning and practicing it. When we finish, an Elder says, "Sean made a mistake. We're doing it all over again."

At this cultural camp, held years ago, the campers and staff had the good fortune to learn from Elders William and Marie Tyson from St. Mary's. Yup'ik dancing was part of the camp activities. Although I am Iñupiaq, I enjoyed actively learning along with the students. Not surprisingly, the Elders were aware of everyone, keeping a close eye on each person's progress.

Months later, I asked Mrs. Tyson if she would make me an *atikluk* (kuspuk) if I were to supply her with the fabric. Instead she thought I should make my own and she would teach me. As I was working on my *atikluk* there were times when she would undo the stitching and encourage me to do it correctly.

These are two examples of working with Elders and cultural-bearers, where I have gained significant experience. When Mr. Tyson said I made a mistake dancing and the whole group needed to start again, I did not feel humiliated, but honored. I realized he wanted to make sure I learned the dances correctly. Mrs. Tyson reinforced the same principle as I learned how to make my *atikluk* correctly.

Looking past my ethnicity, these two wonderful Elders focused on my learning process. Being Iñupiaq and not Yup'ik didn't matter to them. They saw something in me and, for me, that felt exceptional. Eventually I started to dance from within myself, know-

ing the motions have a meaning. I joined their dance group. On more than one occasion during a dance performance, Mr. Tyson felt it necessary to dance with us for a *pamyua* (encore).

I did not feel I had acted arrogant; however, through these learning experiences, the word "humility" has been further defined for me. These experiences have helped me realize it is okay to make mistakes. Originally I titled this article "Make Mistakes," but after reflecting on it, I felt it more appropriate to title it "Humility." Humility is part of my Iñupiaq values. Humility, like all our Alaska Native values, is something to teach our children. We need to let them know it is okay to make a mistake and encourage them to learn from their mistakes.

Humility vs. Humiliation

We have all been humiliated in our lifetime. It can negatively affect us and does not feel good. I could tell you a personal account of humiliation, but I would rather share how the Tysons and other Elders taught me humility. I am not, nor is anyone, a perfect person. I can learn from my mistakes, as long as I demonstrate I am trying to learn. Isn't that what we all want our children to learn—that it's okay to make mistakes and to learn from them? We, as parents and those guiding them, need to recognize and acknowledge they are trying.

I do not imagine Elders strive to become Elders, but rather to be the best they can be. Many people see me as just a computer person, however, I am actively involved in the Native community. I make mistakes on the computer, but I learn from them. I've also learned, that in order to learn from any mistakes in the Native community, I have to be active in the Native community. I must be involved, and I must try.

I have organized an Iñupiaq dance group in Fairbanks, the Pavva Iñupiaq Dancers. My whole family is involved with it. My wife, Amy, and I have never pressured our two sons to dance, but they look forward to practice and performances. Aaron, our five-year-old, is one of the strongest singers and drummers in our group. During the recent 2004 Festival of Native Arts, Christopher, our nine-year-old son, told a Native story passed down from one of Amy's relatives. It was his choice to tell the story in front of a large audience. I cannot tell you how proud we were of him. It was not how well he did it, which was awesome, but that he felt comfortable enough with his heritage to express himself in front of others.

We, as educators and parents, expect remarkable things from our students and children. Through our own actions and experiences we must share and reveal ourselves to them. We must act accordingly, whether we make mistakes or not. These are our Native, family and community values. As a parent, I feel that I want my sons to grow up culturally healthy. I also want them to grow up with a healthy self-esteem, regardless of their ethnic background. I want them to grow up to be the best people that they can be. I want them to grow knowing I love to be there with them to say, "I'm proud of you." ✨

Author's note: This is dedicated to my mom, who allowed me to make my own mistakes and learn from them.

A Road To Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Emmonak Regional Training

by Virginia Ned, Workshop Participant

The Alaska Native Women's Coalition (ANWC)* in coordination with the staff at the Emmonak Women's Shelter held a regional training in Emmonak, Alaska on March 23–24, 2004. The overall purpose of the regional training was to address and develop community specific approaches to domestic violence, sexual assault and batterer's intervention.

There were seven members in our resource group who traveled to Emmonak by plane: Eleanor David and Tammy Young, Co-Directors of ANWC, Shirley Moses, Project Specialist, Jacque Actuga—Clan Star Director of Public Policy, Marlin Mousseau—Consultant Batterer's Intervention Project, Tang Cheam—Technology Specialist and myself—ANWC Member.

We arrived on a beautiful spring day. The sun was shining and there was a blanket of fog covering the community when we landed. Arriving at the Emmonak Women's Shelter, a prepared dinner of moose soup, dried fish, fresh bread, and aqutak (ice cream) was waiting for us. We were treated to such meals as this throughout our stay in Emmonak.

Emmonak is the leader of Native communities across Alaska in addressing domestic violence and sexual assault, and in developing culturally specific approaches to addressing these issues. In this collective effort the community demonstrates its self-determination and sovereignty as a People.

The Emmonak Women's Shelter was formed in 1988. It began with conversations in public places such as the store and other community locations. The city eventually donated money and the community people

donated household items. The shelter at that time wasn't much, but it was a safe place for women to go when they had been abused.

Currently the Emmonak Women's Shelter is in the process of receiving funding for renovation and expansion. Lynn Hootch directs the shelter and several Native women in Emmonak, including Martha Gregory, Marlene Waska, JoAnn Horn, Priscilla Kameroff and Elizabeth Redfox help to manage it.

Everyone from the youngest person to the eldest person in Emmonak is involved in the process of making their community a healthy, violence free place to live. It can be seen in the way the Elders and community members utilize the Native language, stories, dances and songs in teaching the concept of respect and values. Elders throughout the state have stated that historically violence was not a problem. The traditional values and beliefs prohibited violence. Community leaders were aware of what was happening in the community and had a system in place to deal with problems.

The people of Emmonak have a traditional Chief and Elders Council to guide them. I think that this is a big factor in their progress in dealing with violence. Their traditions are intact. An Elder spoke of the time the missionaries came into their community.

He said that the people were told to do away with their language, dances, songs and potlatches. At that time, an Elder stood up to the missionaries and explained to them the similarities between the teachings of the Elders and the teaching of the Catholic religion. The people of Emmonak continued speaking their language, singing their songs, dancing and having the potlatches. As a result, they have a strong cultural foundation.

Many Elders participated in the conference. We heard stories and words of wisdom from Joe Agathaluk (Traditional Chief), Ben Tucker, Rose Borkowski, Eugenia Yupanik, Alec Bird, Maggie Charles, MaryAnn Andrews and Edward Andrews. They spoke in their language and Billy Charles translated for them. Many spoke of the respect that was given to women. They spoke of the importance of women and of how our survival depends on women.

Highlights of the training included; Marlin Mousseau's presentation on batterer's intervention and Native men speaking about their road to healing. Other highlights were the Elder's stories, use of the Yup'ik language, singing and dancing, the hospitality of the community and the commitment shown by the community to address domestic violence, sexual assault and batterer's intervention in a culturally relevant manner.

An outcome of the regional training is a series of monthly teleconferences facilitated by Marlin Mousseau to work with communities throughout the state to begin planning for a community initiated Batterer's Intervention Project.

(continued on next page)

Inupiaq and Bering Strait Yup'ik Region Education Summit

by Katie Bourdon

In the fall of 2003, planning began for an Inupiaq and Bering Strait Yup'ik Region Native Education summit as a collaborative effort between Bernadette Alvanna-Stimpfle, Inupiaq lead teacher; Rich Toymil, Bering Straits School District bilingual/bicultural director and Katie Bourdon, Inupiaq regional coordinator/Eskimo Heritage program director. Funding came from respective programs to bring representatives from all school districts—North Slope Borough, Northwest Arctic Borough, Bering Straits Schools District and Nome Public Schools. Tom Okleasik, Northwest Planning and Grants Development, facilitated the gathering; his skills in eliciting information from participants, encouraging group participation and honing a group's ideas are excellent—he is also an Inupiaq and local.



Facilitator, Tom Okleasik, with large group

The summit took place at the Nome Eskimo Community Hall in January 2004 with 58 registered Native educators. The presence of this many Native educators was energizing. The theme of the gathering was “Education: Building Strong Ties” that embraced the idea of sharing across districts to help all of our children succeed.

A great deal of stories, ideas, resources and information were ex-

(continued from previous page)

One of our goals is to encourage the development of community-based curriculum to address domestic violence, sexual assault and batterer's intervention. The people of Allakaket have drafted a culturally-relevant curriculum which consists of video clips of Elders sharing their traditional knowledge and a written curriculum.

Another goal is to hold trainings in each of the regions. A regional training was held in Allakaket, Alaska in February 2003. An article was written about this training in the March 2003 Tanana Chiefs Council Newsletter. The next training will be in Sitka, Alaska in September. For more information on ANWC please contact Eleanor

David at (907) 968-2476 or Tammy Young at (907) 747-7689. The website is located at www.aknwc.org

*The Alaska Native Women's Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is a non-governmental, non-profit organization formed in 2001 to provide for the safety of women and children in rural Alaska. The purpose of the organization is to identify and close gaps in service coordination, engage in systems advocacy to improve institutional responses to domestic violence and sexual assault of Alaska Native women, and to develop and establish an infrastructure in our Native communities to provide for the basic human right to safety. ✨

The theme of the gathering was “Education: Building Strong Ties” that embraced the idea of sharing across districts to help all of our children succeed.

changed. Elder Jacob Ahwinona shared his experience with education and gave encouraging words for Native education today. Frank Hill, co-director of AKRSI, reported on the status of the AKRSI project. Dr. Bernice Tetpon, University of Alaska Southeast reviewed the Alaska Department of Education Native Student Learn-

ing Action Plan. Linda Green had everyone laughing and at ease during her presentation on the Association of Interior Native Educators curriculum development project. Esther Ilutsik, AKRSI lead teacher, shared her activities in ensuring cultural accuracy in books for education. Finally, each school district had an opportunity to share curriculum materials they had developed and used within their district, instruction practices that integrate Native ways of knowing and cultural awareness and future Native education plans for their districts.

Brainstorming and strategic planning in mixed groups (representatives from different districts) and in same groups (members from one district) took place to address the goal of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative. The goals are to improve the quality of education in Alaska by providing support for the Native voice (students, parents, teachers), developing workshops or curriculum to enhance cultural responsiveness in schools and collaborating with MOA partners, Native educators, parents and students to further Native education.

Some of the major outcomes and strategies developed by the participants include:

Better Communication and Sharing

- Create a web page that everyone can use to ask questions or share ideas.
- Work on a regional Inupiaq/Bering Strait Yup'ik newsletter.
- Create a resource list, e.g. cultural books for classrooms, etc.

Networking

- Native education association meetings via teleconference.



Yummm . . . Native food potluck!

- More meetings like this summit.
- Create a listserv of Native educators in the regions to disperse information on educational issues.

Strengthening Ties and Similarities

- Cultural exchanges through classroom visits to other schools.
- Gather data from each school to compare strength and weaknesses.

Stronger Unity

- Need Inupiaq summer institute (like Yup'ik area) to develop curriculum.
- Create a vision for Inupiaq/Bering Strait Yup'ik education.

Needless to say, the summit was very exciting. Comments were made to me after the gathering that teachers "don't feel so alone now." We don't have enough Native educators in our schools and often times they feel alone in the issues that face our students and parents. The summit helped connect us together providing stronger support to validate and perpetuate our unity. We need to continue these gatherings. Please contact me at ehp.pd@kawerak.org if you would like a complete report on the Inupiaq and Bering Strait Yup'ik Native Education summit. *Quyanna!* ✨

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Southeast Region: Goose wŹ Drop outs? Where Are the Native Drop Outs?

Andy Hope

In the previous issue of *Sharing Our Pathways*, Ted Wright documented an average 59% loss in Alaska Native enrollment for Juneau Douglas High School for the graduating classes of 2000 to 2006. This time period represents students enrolled in school from 1996 to 2003.

Many of these Alaska Natives enroll in GED programs. In a one-year period, from 2002 to 2003, a total of 4,723 enrolled in GED programs. Of those, 1,395 or 29.6% were Alaska Natives (695 women, 700 men). Of the 1,860 GED diplomas issued in that time frame, 879 or 47.2% went to Alaska Natives. The challenge is to develop data collection systems to track high school dropouts and those that do not complete a GED program.

Recent observation of the court and health care systems indicate that many of these drop outs enter into the correctional system. The December 2002 Department of Corrections Offender Profile shows that 1,338 of the 3,625 offenders in institutions (36.9%) were Alaska Native. For probationers/parolees, 1396 of 4927 were Alaska Natives, or 28.3%. Based on this data, it appears that many Natives in the correctional system are public school dropouts. Many of these people are low income or homeless and many should be mental health referrals.

Too often, Alaska Natives do not have effective advocates and are caught in what District Court Judge Peter Froehlich, recently described as a "vortex." They lack the resources to comply with court orders, treatment programs and probation requirements. The existing drug, alcohol and mental health treatment programs also lack adequate resources to provide the enormous challenges.

Native children in the public school system need support, scaffolding and encouragement.

How can we begin the effort to change this situation? I believe that will take a concerted effort by the Alaska Native community, working in conjunction with judicial, educational and health care institutions. We can begin by developing advocacy training programs. This project could bring Native organizations together in partnerships with other organizations to provide training to enable Native family members to interact effectively with the education, judicial and health systems.

Native children in the public school system need support, scaffolding and encouragement. Parenting education is also needed, but we should broaden participation to include families, given the enormous challenges.

A related program could be a Native inmate education program. The prison system is a black hole, educationally and otherwise, for Native inmates. A Native inmate education program could bring education programs with an indigenous worldview into the prison system in Alaska. The initial focus would be on curricula developed over the last several years by Native educators. In Southeast this would include the Native Oratory project, the Math in Tlingit Art project, the I Am Salmon project, the SE Tribal Resource Atlas project and the Math in Indigenous Boat Building project.

What kind of partnerships are required to address the issues outlined in this essay? I envision a coalition of Native families, Elders, storytellers, educators, health care providers, human service providers, healers and community organizations working with their counterparts in the state judicial system and the health care and educational systems. There are existing resources and programs in place and these resources could be allocated to start a pilot program, at the very least.

Editor's Note:

1. Teachers can integrate the many suggestions and approaches for supporting Native children in public school from the *Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers for Alaska's Schools* booklet.

2. Guideline #2 for Parents, outlined in the *Guidelines for Nurturing Culturally Healthy Youth* provides parents ideas for supporting their children.

Both of these booklets are published by and available through the Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Macbeth Through a Tlingit Lens

by Ishmael C. Hope, Director of Outreach, Perseverance Theatre

Perseverance Theatre's production of William Shakespeare's

Macbeth is preparing for a statewide tour of Alaska! Macbeth features an all-Alaska Native cast of 14 and is set in the context of Southeast Alaska's Tlingit culture. In this uniquely Alaska interpretation of Shakespeare's great tragedy, audience members are transported into what Director Anita Maynard-Losh called an "alternate universe," featuring striking contemporary Tlingit designs by set designer Robert H. Davis from Sitka and costume designer Nikki Morris from Juneau. Indeed, the play opens with Tlingit warriors stealthily gliding onstage in preparation for war as fog and red light steam out of the cracks of the clanhouse floor.

This production, featuring Tlingit actor Jake Waid in the title role and Yup'ik actress Ekatrina Oleksa as his ambitious wife, packed houses in Juneau in January 2004, playing to over 2,200 attendees during its two week run. Special Outreach performances were also held for 2,280 Juneau students.

Perseverance Theatre is now building plans for a 2004 fall tour to Anchorage, Fairbanks and possibly to other communities such as Kotzebue, Sitka, Hoonah and Valdez. It is our intention to train and work with Alaska Native writers, designers, carvers, storytellers, orators, actors and other artists. We plan to train Alaska Native actors during our summer Core Training theatre skill-building workshops. We are collaborating with Sealaska Heritage Institute to stage the Tlingit story, "A Woman Who Married a Bear," for our young people's Summer Theatre Arts Rendezvous (STAR). Also, we are planning for the fourth annual Beyond Heritage, a celebration of traditional and contemporary Alaskan culture. We hope to mount new stories and plays such as the Raven Cycle, an odyssey of interwoven Raven stories. We are dedicated to providing services to all ages and levels of education, and to all cultures Native and non-Native. Let's keep it going! Gunal'cheesh!

As Native artists, we feel a sense of community, and also a sense of urgency, to share knowledge that we refuse to let die out.

Using Shakespeare's classic tale to take a new look at Tlingit culture was an enlightening and celebratory experience and we are hungry for more. We know we must keep learning from our Elders and stay grounded within traditional knowledge. We realize we must develop an intricate network of artists, educators, community leaders, families and Elders to maintain

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Kodiak Alutiiq Region Honors local Elder

by Teri Schneider,
Native and Rural Programs Support, KIBSD
Alutiiq/Unangax Regional Coordinator, AKRSI

I had the honor and pleasure of presenting John Pestrikoff's HAIL award to him during the lunch break at a recent gathering hosted by the Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA). John, or "JP" as he is referred to locally, and his late wife Julia were the Native Educators of the Alutiiq Region's (NEAR) nomination for this year's Honoring Alaska's Indigenous Literature award given each year at the Native Educator's Conference in Anchorage. Unfortunately JP and his escort, Dennis Knagin, were unable to attend the Anchorage ceremonies due to poor weather.

JP and Julia have been instrumental in many projects including a mapping project of the Afognak area and a children's book, yet unpublished. Throughout their lives they have contributed greatly to the oral histories, genealogy and language documenta-

tion of the Kodiak area Alutiiq people.

Quyanasinaq (thank you very much) to Afognak Native Corporation (ANC) for responding fully to NEAR's request for funding to support JP and an escort to attend the Anchorage ceremonies. Though it



John Pestrikoff (pictured) and his late wife, Julia, were honored for their contributions to Alaska Native literature.

ended up not being needed, ANC quickly acted to provide plane tickets and per diem! Thank you, also, to KANA staff and board who graciously allowed the award presentation during their strategic planning meeting. This was a wonderful opportunity to share this award among JP's own people! Thank you especially to JP's good friend, Dennis Knagin, for his willingness to travel with JP to Anchorage and, instead, taking him to the Buskin River Inn for the local presentation in March.

Congratulations JP! ✨

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