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**Discussion:**  
NEGOTIATED CHANGE: YUPIK PERSPECTIVES ON  
INDIGENOUS SCHOOLING

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This volume represents a distinct departure from considering indigenous "culture as deficit" in school contexts (McDermott, 1994), to recognizing indigenous cultures and communities as assets (Ruiz, 1994). Although the settings described throughout this volume differ, we are struck by underlying similarities of struggle for community control over schooling and reversing the deleterious effects of a colonial past. Each school/community has its own history and relationship to the federal government and to funding sources (state, federal, or private endowment). Each group is concerned with language and cultural survival, schools as vehicles for promoting indigenous cultures and languages, and the importance of indigenous teachers and teacher groups in transforming schooling. To the extent that these articles suggest distinct ways of making schooling a community institution, they make significant contributions to our understanding of the multiple ways of organizing schooling to be both modern and indigenous.

Virtually all the articles here, as well as our own work in Alaska, point toward the precarious position and yet the strength of indigenous languages. Each of these language groups has witnessed a serious drop in the number of fluent speakers.

Contemporary culture (e.g., the language of television), the historical role of schooling, and the attitude that indigenous languages are a barrier to school success all are factors which undermine these languages. Yet each of the articles in Section III shows how groups have successfully transformed schooling by involving parents and communities in bringing the indigenous language and culture into education.

Each school/community attempts its own way of doing this. The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is most concerned with connecting community sociolinguistic norms to the classroom, while Rough Rock, Rock Point and Peach Springs attempt to reverse language loss and improve student achievement through community involvement, increasing the number of indigenous teachers, and using the indigenous language as the core academic program. Each situation also represents long-term collaborations between university researchers, indigenous communities and schools.

We view issues of indigenous language education as a subset of a larger struggle for the local language and culture to be respected so that each individual can reap the benefits of modern society without losing himself or herself in the process. The dilemma of language renewal presents a particularly thorny problem: Schools, once the site of cultural hegemony, are now called upon to become sites of language and cultural revitalization. The following comments reflect upon ways each site described in the foregoing two sections has faced these dilemmas and opportunities, and how we in southwest Alaska also address these concerns.

**Bilingual Programs and Language Recovery.** Holm & Holm, and McLaughlin speak clearly to the concern of language survival and reversing language loss. At Fort Defiance, very few children come to school speaking Navajo. To alter this situation, Holm & Holm, in collaboration with community members, established a partial Navajo immersion (NI) program, beginning with kindergarten children. The grounds for this program are counterintuitive to two arguments held by many educators and

parents: (1) getting rid of the indigenous language necessarily results in good academic English; and (2) teaching children to read and write first in the target language adversely affects second language acquisition (Crawford, 1990; Rosier & Farella, 1976; Wong Fillmore, 1989). The Holms argue that Navajo children will acquire Navajo and at some point be doing at least as well in English-mediated learning as comparable students in monolingual English classrooms, at no "cost" to the NI students' English learning. Holm & Holm report on the strong support of parents who enroll their children in the NI program. By being tenacious--by creating choices and alternatives--these parents have established a way of increasing the number of Navajo speakers and instilling a sense of "Navajoness" in the students.

At Rock Point, the school removed the caste system separating and reinforcing old stereotypes based on race, about who is and is not a teacher. In addition, the role and number of Navajo teachers reached a "critical mass," allowing a change in the culture of the school to occur. No longer is this school beset with a "revolving door" of first-year teachers whose tenure often is brief. Similar to the situation at Rough Rock (Begay, Dick, Estell, Estell, McCarty, & Sells), when the school staff became stabilized it became possible to establish a strong community direction. Now "outside" teachers must choose to teach in these community schools. This eliminates one obstacle that historically has prevented indigenous schools and communities from transforming curriculum and pedagogy-- constant "cultural wars" over the what, how, and why of schooling, resulting in an educational gridlock which reinforces the status quo.

**Organizing Classroom Interactions: Cultural Compatibility.**

KEEP is probably the best known educational program to capitalize on the language and cultural strengths of its students. Critical to KEEP is the concept of cultural compatibility (see Jordan, this volume, and 1985, for definitions of this). In general, this involves bringing cultural patterns of Hawaiian children into the classroom. KEEP has organized reading instruction around the indigenous "talk

story," allowing students to speak to one another in ways familiar to them and encouraging peer-assisted instruction (Au & Mason, 1981). More recently, KEEP has moved to a whole literacy approach. Further, KEEP has fostered the role of teachers as researchers and change agents (Vogt & Au). Through these processes, KEEP has grown and changed from its original behaviorally-oriented model. The KEEP and Rough Rock exchange provide evidence that KEEP's pedagogy was more than "good schooling," but was based, in part, on the degree of match between the school and community.

KEEP's funding is private, while other programs must struggle to obtain funds for such programmatic changes. The issue of funding and control has led other projects, such as our own, to devise different strategies to support positive change. For example, because of their political importance as well as their vast knowledge, our project, *Ciulistet* (Leaders), includes elders as co-developers of curriculum and pedagogy. The elders' knowledge, suppressed for generations, is now coming to light. Because we fundamentally include elders, and because the major language of *Ciulistet* meetings is Yup'ik, the elders have felt increasingly comfortable in sharing their knowledge with Yup'ik teachers, "outside" teachers, aides, administrators and university consultants. Elders demonstrate such topics as how to observe the sky to predict weather, how to navigate on land and sea without instrumentation, how to observe natural directional indicators, how to weave grass baskets, and how to tailor by visually "measuring" a person for a *kuspuk* (women's parka). These examples represent a small portion of the wealth of knowledge the elders bring to the group. (For a more detailed account of how the elders connect to school mathematics, literacy, and science, see Lipka, 1994 and 1994c). To use Zepeda's metaphor, our work is designed to "urge things up" from oral tradition. And like Zepeda's literacy continuum, we believe the elders' holistic knowledge also can be perceived as a continuum as it intersects with school knowledge. The elders' storytelling through dance, storyknifing and drumming are

intimately related to Western forms of literacy, and elders' environmental knowledge is directly related to Western science and mathematics.

**Incorporating Elders' Knowledge into Schooling.** The work of the Ciulistet concerns itself not only with collecting, recording and learning the elders' knowledge, but with interpreting that knowledge so that it is accessible to students and fitted to the culture of the school. The processes we use to accomplish this resemble the work at Peach Springs (Watahomigie). Like Peach Springs, the elders associated with our work examine and contribute to materials and lessons adapted from their knowledge and devised by teachers and consultants. For example, in mathematics we developed a place values system that corresponds to Yup'ik numeracy, which is base 20; this was taught with a Yup'ik drum.

**"Critical Mass" of Indigenous Teachers.** Essential to this work is the growing number of Yup'ik teachers in Alaska. In the early 1970s there were only a handful of Yup'ik teachers in southwest Alaska, and very few within the state. As at Rough Rock, Rock Point, and Peach Springs, we have systematically sought to increase the number of indigenous teachers, thus creating a whole new realm of teaching and learning possibilities. In effect, the work of these teachers and in particular, that of teacher study groups such as Ciulistet and RREN LAP (Begay, et al.), have created zones of safety (Lipka & McCarty, 1994a) space and place in which indigenous teachers can explore the politics of schooling, the adverse effects of colonial education, and obstacles to including local knowledge in instruction.

As Begay, et al. show, these groups have moved beyond passively understanding the politics of schooling and "cultural compatibility," to begin the slow process of making schooling more inclusive, and of changing power relationships. Much like Freire's (1970) concept of critical consciousness, these groups are now in a position to re-create the role of teacher. Choices now available at Rough Rock, Rock Point, Fort Defiance, and in southwest Alaska,

are signs of such re-creations. For the Ciulistet, the use of the Yup'ik language, once discouraged, has slowly become the "norm" of instruction in one school (Lipka, 1994c; Sharp, 1994). Further, including indigenous language and culture as a part of schooling encourages more open discussion of power and control issues. These changes are clearly related to the increased number of indigenous teachers, and to how these teachers have organized themselves into effective work groups.

Such changes do not occur without costs. The role of Yup'ik and other indigenous teachers is complex and differs considerably from that of "outsiders," who are not directly tied to local kin and community networks nor to the local power structure. At once, indigenous teachers threaten the existing asymmetrical power relations between school and community, and run the risk of standing out from their kin and colleagues at the school. At times, indigenous teachers face the consternation of relatives and community members who may accuse them of "acting white." Our research has shown how Yup'ik teachers may also be viewed by non-Yup'ik teachers as lacking classroom management skills, not caring about their students, or simply not performing "up to standard" (Lipka, 1994b). Despite these judgments, teacher study groups such as Ciulistet and those described in this volume must overcome their ambivalence toward schooling, put behind their own punitive formal education experiences, and work to reinforce the indigenous language and culture within the context of the school.

**The Role of Elders and Community.** Watahomigie states eloquently that for schools to make the local language and culture a meaningful part of the school, they "must have the support of Indian parents and community members." She and Ayongman openly address the "brainwashing" that has occurred for over 100 years concerning indigenous languages and cultures. Watahomigie, Ayongman, and the articles in Section III show how parents and communities can reverse this legacy and the process of language and culture loss.

In southwest Alaska, we have faced similar community resistance and the widespread belief that Yup'ik only "gets in the way" of English and Western knowledge (Lipka, 1994c). To face this situation, we continue to hold our meetings in various communities of southwest Alaska. We invite the community, especially the elders, to join us, and we encourage their input in planning meetings. Not only do we want the elders to share their knowledge with us, but we want to show the larger community—particularly the next generation—that the elders' knowledge "counts," that their language holds wisdom, and that their stories teach values, science, and literacy.

We also have used the strategy of having elders visit and observe how other schools established and organized a language immersion program. We have had the good fortune to visit the Hualapai school at Peach Springs, and observe how they connect their curriculum to the local environment; how elders contribute their knowledge; and how the school uses sophisticated technology. We have met and discussed common issues with RRENLAP teachers, and McCarty has worked with our group. These contacts, along with opportunities to present at national conferences with many of the authors in this volume, have enabled a collective discourse and helped establish an informal network of indigenous educators. This has provided models of how others address the same difficult questions—the role of an indigenous educator, political support for incorporating indigenous cultures and languages, and examples of how community- and culturally-based programs work and their effects. This larger discourse stands in stark contrast to the politics of denial and assimilationist schooling.

Although the models reported here differ in their organizational features, funding, and instructional specifics, all share a tenacity, vision, and support from outside collaborators in developing new types of curriculum and pedagogy. In Ciulistet, we also have received increased support from local school districts who are pleased with our approach to the teaching of mathematics and science. We continue to receive support from elders and

community members, and to develop alternatives to the either/or concepts of schooling. Despite the struggles, we have made great strides during the past 15 years in establishing an alternative reality for indigenous education. In the final sections below, we share some of those changes.

### **Yup'ik Literacy**

KEEP incorporated sociolinguistic features of native Hawaiian culture into the school's reading program; at Rough Rock teachers increasingly are using Navajo literacy. We, the Ciulistet, are establishing approaches to literacy that combine mathematics and folklore. At our last meeting, while some members of the Ciulistet worked on ways of teaching mathematical concepts such as symmetry from Yup'ik patterns, the female elders were making *suguaq* (dolls). (Some of the elders used the word *innugguat* [dolls], which represents a more northern dialect of Yup'ik [Jacobson, 1984]). They used brightly colored materials, small pieces of wood, and thread. When they finished they moved to the middle of the room and sat on the floor with their dolls in a tight circle, along with daughters and grandchildren, representing three generations. The rest of the group sat in a circle around the women.

The elders improvised a story in which the four or five families were living in a village alongside a river near the bay. This day they were to be visited by a nurse. This form of role play with dolls immediately became a lively forum for teasing and teaching about Yup'ik values and customs:

- A: The nurse is arriving.
- B: But she has gone to school with some unknown people at an unknown place.
- S: She has been away at school. She is coming home.

- A: She arrived. She must be a *kass'aq* (white).
- ?: Hello.
- S: Come over (to the nurse).
- ?: Nice to see you. [They shake hands. Other members of the village come over to shake hands.]
- Nurse: I came to see you and to give you a shot.
- Others: She is white.
- Nurse: I didn't forget my Yup'ik way of life. [A is telling L to put the other dolls outside of their house: Put the other two dolls aside and we will entertain her.]
- A: [The daughter goes over to another house.] That nurse over there has arrived and she is a half-breed. (A person is helping her and the father comes forward when they are given shots, because he has learned through experience. The others come forward and receive their shots; some talk about being hurt from the shots.)
- A: Well then, where are you going to go?
- Nurse: I'll be going home.
- A: Without eating?
- Nurse: No.
- A: *Issurutevkenaqkaa?* (Without eating seal?) [Laughter and overlapping talk.]
- Nurse: I'd rather have dried fish. [Then they go off to a home; a female doll runs into the house.]
- S: I saw a kayak out in the bay. Here he comes. Father went to check him. [The father was prepared to greet him. The doll pulls the large kayak onto the shore.] The guest came over that way [around the boat] and came in.

A: Where did you come from?

Guest: From the interior, up there on the Kuskokwim.

A: Well now, how was it while you were coming?

Guest: It was good. It was calm and sunny.

After this meeting, Esther Ilutsik recounted that when she was a young child, she experienced similar hospitality, which also underscored Yupik values. She noted:

The Yup'ik village that I grew up in treated children differently than in the mainstream culture. For example, at a very young age the children are virtually "given" the world and adored by the extended family and community.

At the next stage of development, the children are acknowledged and expected to observe and assist as much as possible in all the simple tasks of daily survival; they are also the main messengers between households. At this stage, the children also learn the appropriate behaviors for obtaining special treats. For example, one of the most prized foods in the village I grew up in was the walrus skin and meat. If we heard that a family had obtained and prepared this for consumption, we would visit.

We usually entered without knocking. Upon entering we were greeted with the following statement: "What is the purpose of your visit?" If we had a "message" we would relay it; otherwise the response was, "I have come for no purpose." We would then sit down. The hostess, knowingly, would continue with what she was doing. We sat there and observed quietly until she offered us something to eat.

*Suguaq* was an excellent pedagogical vehicle to convey Yup'ik values through Yup'ik, and to reinforce language skills, oral

presentation and formalities. In fact, we were struck by the power of *suguaq* as a teaching vehicle. We asked the elders and the group, "Do you ever 'play dolls' at school? Do the elders ever come up to school and demonstrate this?" The answer was "no." This speaks to the larger issue of how local knowledge is still viewed as superfluous to schooling. Our hope resides in the elders' willingness to reveal cultural teachings such as *suguaq*, and the absolute joy and pride the teachers experienced during this time. More frequently, the elders are sharing their knowledge and seeing its relevance to today's context.

### **Conclusion**

Through 14 years of collaborative work, the Ciulistet, elders, school administrators and university consultants have demonstrated and documented that cultural differences no longer should be viewed as a barrier to schooling, but as a great asset. In so doing, we have begun a long, slow process of reversing the effects of a colonial education system. We continue to work on effective ways to demonstrate to Yup'ik communities that their cultural practices and language "count." Community meetings involving elders and traditional Yup'ik culture, and inviting indigenous guest educators, have been two ways we have slowly encouraged a discourse of inclusion and acceptance.

With many more Yup'ik and other indigenous teachers working together in formal and informal groups, we believe a difference is being made that is having a positive impact on students. Parents and community members have requested that we continue the work of bringing their knowledge into the schools. Schooling, after all, is a Western invention, at least in how it is conducted and interpreted in southwest Alaska. With our elders assisting us and acknowledging traditional educational methods, we can evolve into a true bilingual/bicultural education system, thus creating equal education for all.

The articles in this volume speak clearly and strongly for such a future. Taken as a whole, indigenous education is in the midst of a transformation in which local knowledge and ways of teaching are becoming prized. Schools must become allies as sites of such cultural transformation, shedding their historical assimilationist role. This will be aided by the growing numbers of indigenous teachers and by actively involving local communities. The future remains uncertain, as evidenced by the declining numbers of young speakers of indigenous languages. Nonetheless, the articles in this volume point to indigenous educational alternatives which hold promise for a healthy future for indigenous languages, cultures and communities.

#### **Authors' note**

Ilutsik is Yup'ik and Lipka is not; Ilutsit and Lipka have worked closely with the Ciulistet group from its inception, Ilutsik as a teacher-leader and Lipka as a consultant. They have worked together for 14 years, each bringing a different perspective to this work. For readability we have chosen to use "our" and "we." This writing simplifies the dynamics of insiders and outsiders working together—a complex relationship that is beyond the scope of this article.

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