

## **Building a Foundation For Living Life That Feels Just Right**

By Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, Ph. D.  
University of Alaska Fairbanks

First, I would like to thank the conference committee of Greenland for inviting me to speak. I am a Yupiaq from Bethel, Alaska which is a member of the Inuit. I have been involved in education all my life and have experienced the alienation from my own Yupiaq language and lifeways, and a segregated school system in my early years. The things that I will say about what education should be and do for the Native students will be generated from my own experiences and what I am seeing now from the younger generations.

You and I know as we read and hear reports of what young people are doing to themselves, to each other and those around them how life is so irrelevant to these young people. They have no respect for anyone, their families, their possessions, law and order. This to me is due in large part to the valueless education that they have received in public schools. This is not to say that there is NO value in education because everything that is taught to them has the underlying value of consumerism, conformity, linearism, standardization, efficiency, and fragmentation. The students get the understanding that technology has an answer for all problems that confront us. But, did you know that mathematics, science, and their offspring the technologies are destroying our world from what it to be? To give an example, modern medical technology has increased live births and longevity and we are in the midst of a global population explosion. And, it is straining the earthly natural resources. We are polluting our backyards which destroy flora and fauna.

My questions is: How long can Mother Earth be able to connect life web breakages due to extinctions until there is a complete collapse of the ecological system? We, in America, are known to be voracious eaters and consumers, and at whose expense do we

live this abundant life? Yours and mine! We, as members of the First Nations, don't care that that rest of the world is going hungry, live at the poverty level, grow cash crops to feed us at their own expense, deplete their natural resources, receive technological tools and chemical material which are known to be destructive, and learn the "American Dream" which is an unattainable goal for many. So, what should our schools be teaching the youngsters to bring about a turnaround in our narcissistic thinking?

I believe the first step would be to instruct school in the language of its Native people, the language of instruction has to be the Native language. It is the God-given language, developed lovingly and caringly from the mind-in-nature. It is the language of place and tells us how to relate to ourselves, to others, to nature and to the spiritual. It gives us our identity, our uniqueness as a special people. Without our language, we become a people with an identity determined by others especially those that live outside their birthplace. We hear what others think of us, we read what a person thinks of us, we read and see what an anthropologist thinks about us, we hear what religious people think about us. We don't have a true identity without fluency in our own Native tongue!

We must learn about our own cosmogony, cosmology, ecosophy, ecopsychology, and epistemology in our own Native language. It must use the myths, legends and stories which contain the webbing for what it means to be human, how to interact with others, nature and the spirits. The elders will play a vital role in this endeavor.

Secondly, we must have elders and knowledgeable people explain how, what and why we make certain implements for use in hunting, trapping, cleaning and preserving foodstuffs, and making clothing. Our technology is nature-mediated which is why our ancestors merely modified a natural resource to make an instrument. Our ancestors could see and make use of nature-refined copper but chose not to replicate the process because to do so would change our relationship to Mother Earth and her natural resources especially mineral. This whole process must be value-creating based on the Greenlandic values. The values have to be explicitly explained, examples given, and role models identified. The role models have to be Native people who are at peace with themselves and are living a life that feels just right. In balance physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Thirdly, in determining what from the Eurocentric worldviews is to be grafted onto the Greenlandic worldviews, those that are engaged in the process must ask the following questions:

1. Does adding this particular knowledge enhance or detract from ones Nativeness?

2. Does adding this knowledge increase or decrease natural diversity and cultural adaptability?
3. Is this Eurocentric knowledge useable in place?
4. Are the Native people able to come up with phrases or coin words that reflect the most often used mathematical and scientific words and theories? They have to feel that these are important to know.
5. Are the estimation measurements of our ancestors applicable today? Make use of their sense of pattern and symmetry without mathematical computations to confuse the issue.
6. Are the computers and other technological tools conducive to natural diversity and cultural adaptability? Use these tools sparingly as our memories are getting obsolete.
7. Will the addition of these technological tools add to the environmental and mental pollution?

Fourthly, we must begin to address the psychological and emotional responses to what Native elders, scientists and environmentalists see as nuclear pollution and environmental degradation. Have the elders come into the classroom and talk about their observations from the time that they were born to what they see now. What do they see that is disturbing to them psychologically and emotionally? How do you as student react to this? In this technological world, has life become easier? At what expense? Look around your own community and see if you can see signs of pollution? When you happen to get away from your community, what debris, flotsam, noise, and signs of pollution do you see? If we can begin to think on this level then we can begin to deal with it on a pragmatic level. We and the students can begin to connect with life and everything around us. Then we begin to ask ourselves what can we do to begin to clean our own environment? When we begin to clean without ourselves, we begin our own healing as a people.

These are just a few thoughts on what education should do to make a person and people who are satisfied with self, have needs and wants that are kept to a minimum, whose greatest satisfaction is living in harmony and cooperation with the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the winged, fish, wind, the mountain, and the sea. When we have reached this highest point spiritually, then we have attained connectedness with life and all living beings. *Quyana*.