

Parenting & Teaching: One and the Same

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Waqaa,

As I begin this article, I am reminded of the Yupiaq woman who had an irritated skin condition on her hands and was given a tube of ointment with an applicator. One night when she was awakened by the irritation, she reached over in the dark to retrieve the ointment and applied it to her hands. The next morning, she woke up and looked at her hands. She was astounded and bewildered. Her hands were completely red. She worried as to what was happening to her skin. She finally looked at the tube of ointment she had applied, and then laughed when she saw that it was a red Bingo dauber!

During the last century or so, we, as parents and teachers, have been working blindly just as this woman because of the promises of the American Dream—promises of a quality education, a good job, a good home, earning top dollars and getting promotions. We have become Americanized to a high degree. In the process, we have been losing our Native languages and cultures. A recent newspaper article suggests that our Native languages are eroding and many will be gone within a generation. Will we, as parents and teachers, allow this to happen? Historically the American way has encouraged the loss of Native languages and cultures. The English language and its cultures continue to have a very voracious appetite and will devour our Native languages and cultures if we allow it.

In the past, our children were born in a sod house or a tent at spring camp or delivered under an overturned skin boat in an emergency. From the outset the newborn is introduced to the voices of the family members, the words of the midwife, the hum of the wind, the sound of falling rain and the call of the Arctic loon. The newborn is already immersed in nature from its first moments of life. During the gestation period and after a given time, the child is talked to, sung to by the mother and exposed to family members

eating, sleeping, doing work and playing. The child learns of the sounds peculiar to its parents' language, love and care bringing an indelible sense of belonging. The child is exposed to and lives within nature all its life. When the mother walks, the child is placed inside the parka on its mother's back. The child can then look around and see things from the same level as its mother and is treated as a beautiful living being.

As the child progresses through its growing stages, the parents, grandparents and community members assess the talents and inner strengths the child might have. These are nurtured with the thinking that the community will become greater with a responsible and caring member. As the child grows older, the members look for ideas that the child expresses, skills it shows, its interaction with others and its respect for everyone and everything.

There are rites of passage that are practiced as the child grows. The killing of a first mosquito, first pick of berries and other acts are times of joy by villagers and are reinforced by giving support and encouragement for continued growth, physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Puberty is a time of ceremony—the becoming of a woman or a man. First menstruation of a young lady is considered a time of power requiring that the young lady be housed apart and served only by the mother or grandmother for its duration. No work is required of her.

As the young person matures, the community members may ask the youngster: “Have you counted your blessings lately?” In actuality, they are asking: “Have you counted your inner values, talents, strengths, important relationships and connectedness?” This connectedness is spirituality. Knowing this about oneself will make one beneficial to the community.

With respect to discipline, the home must be a place of love, care, companionship and cooperation. If these are practiced, the child is well-behaved. If such ingredients are lacking in the home, how can the parents expect to discipline the child? If the home is dysfunctional, then where will the child find the love, care, attention and companionship they need? It is possible for a parent to be a teacher, but a teacher cannot really substitute for a parent, yet this is what we sometimes expect of the school. When teachers meet with parents, it is important that they encourage them to be loving, caring and attentive to their child's needs and then the teacher should reinforce the parents attention.

As educators, we must try to make the classroom an environment where children can be with and of nature. Take them outdoors as much as possible. Have the children express their ideas of what is beautiful that they see in nature; guide them to begin to see beauty

in oneself and in others, in one's village or in one's neighborhood. The young person will then begin to see the value of their own Native language and culture. This is an invaluable asset in one's life. From this, you begin to see that "community/place is an experience that is created." *Quyana*