



THE CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF SCHOOLING

BEING A NATIVE AND BECOMING A TEACHER

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In the following paper I will attempt to reconstruct the conceptual evolution of a program for the training of Alaskan native teachers. I will describe the first two years of the program's development, focusing on those aspects that reflect consideration of the unique cultural environment in which the program operates. I address these issues from the perspective of an academic coordinator for the program since its inception. My formal training is in anthropology and education. To the extent that a native point of view is expressed in this paper, it is a product of my interpretation of that view as a non-native, and should be judged accordingly. "Native"

is used here to refer to descendants of all the indigenous peoples of Alaska.

Background

The program, known as the Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps (ARTTC), was established in 1970 as a four-year experimental program with a number of vaguely stated purposes, one of which was the training of native elementary school teachers. The original proposal specified that the training would be primarily field-centered (that is, two out of three semesters coursework per year would be delivered out to the villages),

and that it would meet the usual requirements for a Bachelor of Education degree. Under a somewhat ambiguous administrative arrangement involving two universities and the State-operated school system, three staff persons (one representing each of the above) were hired and charged with implementing the program. Eleven training sites were established in rural native communities around the state, and each was assigned a team of four to eight students and a full-time certificated team leader. Thirty freshman-level students were recruited from the local communities and another thirty junior-level students were recruited statewide. Due to a limited number of native students with two years of college training available at the time, half of the junior-level students selected were non-native. In the beginning, then, a typical team had three native freshman students, most of whom had not completed high school, and three juniors, one or two of whom were non-native, along with an experienced teacher as a team leader. The total group included a nearly balanced distribution of male and female members, an age range from 18 to 48 with a median of 26, and a mixture of five distinct native ethnic groups.

With the above ingredients, we (the three program staff and eleven team leaders) set out to produce teachers. We began planning for a six-week orientation program that was to prepare everyone for the years ahead. As we proceeded, however, we gradually realized it was not going to be simply a matter of applying the latest teacher training techniques to this particular group of individuals, thus producing an improved breed of teacher for rural Alaska. With this realization, we found it necessary to step back and ask ourselves some basic questions.

- (1) Why train natives to be teachers?
- (2) What is a "native" teacher?
- (3) How do you train "native" teachers?

Why Train Natives to be Teachers?

Our initial response to the question, "Why train native teachers?", was to point out that nearly every recent study and report on native education in the country recommended such action. In addition, there was the political pressure from the natives themselves to become a part of the action. But that didn't answer the basic question "Why?" It soon became obvious that we were moving into relatively uncharted territory and the only landmarks we could see were a few untested assumptions, such as:

- (1) A native teacher will be better able to assess and respond to the needs of a native child. This assumption presumes that similarities in language and cultural background between teacher and child will improve communication and, thus, foster greater mutual understanding and learning.

- (2) A native teacher will provide a model of success in the native community, and thus motivate other native persons to aspire to achieve similar positions. This assumption presumes that a native teacher will achieve status in the eyes of the native community.

- (3) A native teacher will serve as a community leader and help bridge the gulf between the *native* community and the *outside* society. An inherent danger in this assumption is that the "bridge" provided by the teacher, native or non-native, may allow for one-way traffic only—away from the native community.

Since these remained as untested assumptions due to an insufficient number of practicing native teachers to provide an empirical basis for judgment, we had to explore another question, "Why have so few natives become teachers in the past?" On the basis of our own training and experience, we were unwilling to accept any notion of "inferior inherent ability" on the part of the native, so the easiest response to the question was to blame "the system." Only a few native students were coming to the universities for an education, fewer were enrolling in teacher training, fewer yet were completing a four-year degree program, and of those who did complete a teacher training program, only a small number returned to a native community to teach. But blaming the system did not satisfactorily resolve the question either. So again, we had to postulate some ideas through which we could determine how best to proceed with a program that was supposed to attack this particular problem. Our assumptions were:

- (1) The university campus does not provide a satisfactory learning environment for students whose cultural background is significantly different from that out of which the university system emerged. Coming to the university is a one-way street for most native students. A successful campus experience requires familiarity with and adherence to a wide range of sociocultural patterns, many of which are not compatible with the attitudinal and behavioral skills required for survival in the village. Thus, a native person who learns to survive on campus may find he is no longer satisfied with, or acceptable to, his home community. The transformation of an individual's interests and outlook during four years of college is further complicated by the unprecedented changes taking place in the life styles existent in the villages themselves, resulting in even greater potential incompatibility.
- (2) The teacher training curriculum is largely unsuited to the needs of students desiring to teach in rural native communities. While it could be argued that

this assumption applies to teacher training in general, the problem is most acute for those who wish to teach in a physical and cultural environment that is divergent from the unidimensional, ethnocentric model around which most teacher training programs are designed. Contemporary teacher training curriculum places a great deal of emphasis on preparing the teacher to assess and provide for "individual differences." Students are saturated with a psychological perspective of learning and teaching derived largely from the study of individuals and small groups within Western society. While such training may be useful, and even necessary, it does not provide an adequate perspective for assessing and responding to the needs of children in rural native communities. Their individual needs can be adequately assessed only within the context of the broader social and cultural environment within which they exist.

Assuming, then, that native teachers would provide a unique and desirable service to rural native communities, and that the detachment of the campus experience and the inadequacy of the teacher training curriculum were partially responsible for the limited number of such persons, we now had a rationale and some points of departure from which to proceed on our evolutionary journey.

What is a "Native" Teacher?

We did not proceed far, however, before we realized that in order to develop and operate a teacher training program we had to have some idea of what the end product might be, or at least a direction in which to move. We had an alternative to the campus setting, in that the program would be largely field-centered, but we could not develop an alternative curriculum until we had some idea of the kind of teacher we wanted. We could have taken the traditional teacher training curriculum and delivered it to the students in the field, on the assumption that such an approach would at least succeed in placing some natives in the teaching profession. But this approach would not capitalize on the unique strengths the students might possess as natives. Worse yet, it might even destroy some of those strengths.

On the other hand, we could deviate from the traditional curriculum by defining the teachers' role in terms of "competencies" and judge the students' teaching ability on the basis of "performance criteria." In this way we would at least have some flexibility in defining the end product. But defining the competencies required for a "native" teacher provided to be an elusive endeavor, for no prototype existed. The handful of teachers of native descent in the state had all gone through a traditional teacher training program and were

barely distinguishable from other teachers. In addition, no one prototype of a teacher, native or otherwise, could possibly satisfy the diverse cultural and educational needs of the rural native communities. For these and other programmatic reasons, we were unwilling to accept a strict "competency-based" approach.

We knew, from the limited literature on the subject (primarily Collier), that subtle differences between *native* and *non-native* teachers in their relationships with native children appear to have a significant impact on the response of those children to formal learning, even though the materials presented and the learning environments are otherwise similar. The differences are reflected largely in non-verbal behavior and derive primarily from differences in prior experience and particular attitudes and values. One of our major concerns, then, was to avoid destroying those characteristics inherent in the native person's attitude and behavior that might allow them to relate effectively to native children. Although we still could not define the ultimate end product, we could at least now state that the program would attempt to protect and nurture the intrinsic qualities that the students brought with them. But we were no further along in explicating those qualities.

We were also aware that the institution of "schooling" and, thus, the role of "teacher" as we know it today were once alien notions in the rural native communities, introduced to the native people within this century by outsiders who only vaguely understood or anticipated the consequences of their action. While "education" was viewed primarily as an informal and life-long process prior to the arrival of schools in rural Alaska, it has since become synonymous with those activities that occur within the large, luminated building on the hill, and is further restricted to six hours a day, five days a week. Consequently, the parents and children in the remotest community in Alaska have developed expectations regarding the role of "teacher" similar to those held in any other community where a school, a classroom full of children, and a teacher exist.

Any effort to define the native teacher's role in the context of a specific cultural background was further constrained by the desire on the part of the students themselves to be prepared to teach, not only in a rural Alaskan native community, but in any school in the country where an Alaskan teaching certificate could be parlayed as an acceptable license to teach. They did not want a second-rate education. We resolved, therefore, that the best judges of what constitutes a native teacher would be the students we were about to train, so the most logical course of action was to obtain their assistance in the development of the program. In that way, we could help the students define their role as we went along. Maybe in the end we would have some basis for determining whether a native could be a native and a teacher, too. Consequently, what follows is as much the

product of student thought and effort as it is that of the program staff.

How do You Train Native Teachers?

With a few assumptions in hand to serve as guidelines, a limited conceptual framework within which to work, a vague direction in which to move, and a group of enthusiastic students to lead us, we ventured forth on our journey. Following a brief getting-acquainted and settling-in period out in the field sites, all the students and staff came together for an intensive six-week orientation and work session. It was during this session that the essence of the program evolved. By living and working in confined quarters over an extended period and coping with a variety of social pressures and emotional issues, the members of the group developed a bond of friendship and a commitment to common purpose that has enabled many of them to endure subsequent pressures and adjustments that might otherwise have resulted in defeat and failure.

The individuals from each field site, including the team leader, began to work together, gradually forming a closely knit working team in which the whole became more than the sum of its parts. Team members assisted each other in their work and openly exchanged ideas and opinions to their mutual benefit. Native and non-native students viewed each other as equals and began to explore their similarities and differences. Natives from different ethnic backgrounds within the state discovered they could learn much from each other. They learned how to communicate and understand each other's views through direct experience. Once established, this interaction process carried over on their return to the field sites. The native students learned how to cope with "the system" from the non-native students, who in turn learned how to cope with village life from the native students.

Following the return of the students to the field, we discovered that one of our earlier assumptions needed a corollary: The native community does not provide a satisfactory learning environment for students whose cultural background is significantly different from that of the native community. The non-native students, who comprised one-fourth of our student population, were responsible for nearly one-half of our drop-outs during the first year. They were experiencing the same problems of adjustment to the native community that native students experienced coming on campus. But while this approach created some adjustment problems for the non-native students, it provided numerous advantages for the native students, and for the program as a whole. The delivery of the training to the rural native communities permitted the native students to control the effect of the learning experience by allowing them to encounter it on their own ground and on their own terms. With the help of fellow team members, including

the team leader, the students approached their coursework as a cooperative enterprise. When a student had difficulties with a particular assignment, someone was close at hand to help him out. Also, the students did not feel threatened by the instructors (who were sometimes 1500 miles away) or a large classroom environment, so they did not hesitate to provide feedback to the instructors regarding the courses they were receiving. Instructors working with the program frequently commented on the high quality of work and degree of interest shown by the students in the coursework.

The most significant consequence of the field-centered approach was that it permitted the native students to maintain contact with their own community. Their relationships in the community were often strengthened and several students moved into leadership positions as they developed their abilities to understand and deal with community and school problems. Although the native students were developing many skills and ideas of non-native origin, they were learning and changing within the context of the community, so that no major discontinuity was experienced. Changes within the students and within the communities were continually blended through cohabitation, thus allowing for compatibility of interests and roles as the new life styles evolved.

The same process applied to the native students' experiences in the schools. They gradually worked their way into the classrooms and assumed a variety of roles, sometimes adapting to the situation, other times adapting the situation to themselves. In this way, each student was able to define and carve out his own role as a native teacher in the school and community.

Curriculum

So far I have focused my discussion on two particular structural elements of the training program, namely the team concept and the field-centered approach. What about the "curriculum"? What were the students doing, and what were they supposed to be learning during their stay in the program? In the development of the training design for the program, our concern was focused on the totality of the students' experience—not just the particular courses they would take. Thus, curriculum was viewed in its broadest sense, as encompassing context, process, and content. In that sense, the team concept and field-centered approach were integral parts of the curriculum.

The *context* was the community, within which the school was viewed as one element in the total educational experience of each child. The students spent nearly all of the first year living, working, and studying out in the community. The training program attempted to capitalize on the resources available to the students through activities that brought the students in direct contact with the realities they would face as teachers.

Within this context the students learned through an *experimental process*—that is, they came to understand the world around them and their role in it through direct experience. They learned how a community operates by living in and studying their own community. They learned how a child grows by interacting with and observing real children. They learned how to teach by teaching. They learned how to learn from each other as a team.

On top of all this, we had the curriculum *content*. This could be partially summarized by running down the course list on a student's transcript. But the course titles cannot adequately portray the learning experiences associated with each course, particularly those offered in the field. The field courses were drawn primarily from the social sciences, the humanities, and education, since these could be most easily adapted to, and capitalize on, the field setting. The "real-life" circumstances in the field provided numerous opportunities for the students to experience, first-hand, the fruits of their labor. For example, the household directory compiled by the students in one community as part of an "anthropological field methods" course was instrumental in convincing the U.S. Census Bureau that they had made a 40% error in the official 1970 census conducted the same year. In a community of 500 actual population, an error of this magnitude can result in a drastic misappropriation of critical funds and services that are allocated on a per capita basis. Such results can stimulate a great deal of motivation and interest on the part of the community as well as the students.

If one reviewed the transcripts of the students who have participated in the ARTTC program, one would find that the academic discipline most frequently represented would be that of anthropology. While this may be, in part, a reflection of the educational background of those of us responsible for the academic component of the program, it did not occur without purpose or reasoning. If the students were to eventually overcome the ethnocentric confines of the existing educational system and see beyond the usual narrow definition of concepts such as "schooling" and "teaching," they would have to develop a perspective that transcends cultural boundaries and provides a holistic and adaptive framework for assessing needs and resolving problems. For that perspective we looked to the content and method of anthropology. We employed the concept of culture in its many and varied manifestations as a means to help the students better understand and assess the needs of the children they were preparing to teach. We used the methods of anthropology to guide us in the development and implementation of the program design. In a sense, then, the program became an exercise in applied anthropology, not because it was involved in the training of "natives," but because anthropology provided the conceptual and methodological framework

through which the program evolved.

What Have We Learned?

During the summer of 1972, 21 students graduated from the ARTTC program. Ten of these were natives, who were now also teachers. These ten alone nearly tripled the number of native teachers in rural Alaska at the time. One year after graduation, three of the ten native graduates and eight of the non-native graduates were still teaching in elementary school classrooms. Of the remaining seven native graduates, six were directing or working with non-school related education programs, while one was attending to family matters.

By the end of summer 1974, we will have graduated another 21 students, 20 of whom will be "native teachers." They will then join the ranks of the approximately 900 rural teachers in the state and begin making their contribution, along with their earlier team-mates, to the improvement of education for the children of rural Alaska. The significance of that contribution will not be known for several generations.

Since the program was intended to be experimental in nature, we have taken advantage of the rare opportunity to do a lot of experimenting. The whole program has been, in effect, an experiment in the techniques of survival in a bureaucratic society. We have experimented with alternative models in teacher education. We have experimented with different approaches to the delivery of academic coursework. We have experimented with a variety of conceptual frameworks for viewing the process of education. And, we have experimented with peoples' lives to the extent that we have ventured forth with them into the unknown.

So what have we learned from it all? In effect, we have learned most of what I have presented above. Although we had some vague notions about what we wanted to do in the beginning, we had no detailed, premeditated plan or preconceived model from which to work. Since we were unable to obtain an acceptable training model elsewhere, and we did not want to force the students into a potentially inappropriate model of our own making, we decided to use a process approach and let the program evolve. What I have described above as the program, then, is what we have learned through a process of evolution.

We also have learned that the single most important characteristic that program personnel must possess, if such an approach is to succeed, is a high tolerance for ambiguity. Many persons find it difficult to cope with uncertainty and to proceed with little more than intuition and instinct as guides. They seek structure or closure on a matter prematurely, thus reducing the opportunity for flexibility and adaptability. Under contemporary pressures for accountability and related demands for the delineation of specific objectives and the development of flow charts in pursuit of explicit end

products, it is indeed difficult to survive on a creed that declares, "We will know where we are going when we get there." So far, we have learned enough about what we are doing and where we are going to satisfy our own needs in time for direction and to meet the challenges of each step along the way. If we had tried to anticipate in the beginning all that we know now, we would have been overwhelmed and given up long ago.

We have learned many other things since we started our journey that have implications for what we are trying to do. Since some of these are still vague and undocumented notions, and others are fundamental questions that may not be resolvable, I will present a few of them in brief, summary form here as points of departure for future discussion.

We have learned that it is difficult to be a native and a teacher, too. Many aspects of the two positions are incompatible and the demands of the role are enormous. On the one hand, as a native the native teacher is expected to represent the community's interest in the school. On the other hand, as a teacher the native teacher is expected to represent the school's interest in the community. Until the function and format of the school is compatible with the needs and cultural milieu of the community, however, compromise is inevitable for the native teacher. In addition, the adaptation is usually in the direction of the school, for it is difficult to significantly change the role of the teacher in the context of a conventional school environment. So the native teachers face a Catch 22—the more effective they are as a teacher, the less effective they may become as a native, and vice versa. Our concern, then, is that placing native teachers in the schools may not significantly improve the education of native children, if the design of the institution itself does not change. But who is to change it, and in what direction?

We have also learned that our program may not really be training "teachers" after all. Six months into their first year of teaching, we brought the first group of graduates back together at a meeting to find out how they were doing in their hard-won profession. They related a variety of concerns, particularly in reference to the day-to-day routine of teaching. They did not feel comfortable with such everyday teaching responsibilities as lesson planning and classroom management. The consensus of the group was that they were frustrated as teachers in the schools, because they had been prepared as "educators." They felt more like general practitioners than specialists. Consequently, most of them left the schools and took up practice in other types of educational programs. Our tendency at this point is to view this outcome more as a success than as a failure.

Finally, we have learned that the literature in education, as well as anthropology, is often of limited use in our program. Almost all of the literature normally used to help prepare teachers for work with cultural minor-

ities assumes that the teacher will be from outside the culture. From the native students' point of view, the literature is "culturally deprived." While such issues as "familiarity with the cultural background of the children," or "ability to communicate effectively," are major issues in the "outsider" context, they become secondary to the native teacher. In most of the literature, the natives usually find themselves as the objects of study. In an effort to break down some of the stereotypes embodied in the anthropological literature, we have focused our studies on groups and institutions in Western society. So now the native students are taking on the role of anthropologist and studying the primitive society of the school. They compensate for the lack of appropriate literature by generating their own.

These are only highlights of what we have done and have learned over the past few years. We intend to continue learning, from our successes as well as failures, because we have only scratched the surface in our efforts to tap the vast reservoir of humanity embodied in the native people of Alaska. While mankind is taking giant technological leaps to the moon, man is still taking painfully small steps toward improving the quality of life in this remote corner of the earth.

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I wish to gratefully acknowledge the patience and forbearance of all the students and team leaders who participated in the Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps during those first two tumultuous years. Their contributions in thought and effort permeate all that is presented in this paper. And a special thanks to former university coordinators Pat Dubbs and Doug Rider, and the program director Mick Murphy, for their personal commitment to make it all happen.

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COMMENT

This brief description of a teacher training program is of real value to anthropology and education, particularly as the search intensifies for identifying and developing roles in education for anthropologically trained personnel. Even though Barnhardt and his colleagues learned that the literature in anthropology and education was "often of limited use" to their program, they obviously brought to program planning, implementation, and evaluation a point of view reflecting a productive intersect of the two fields. One hopes this report foreshadows a more extensive case study to explicate further educational roles and process in the setting in which they worked.

The report describes one program in a unique setting, but it raises questions for more general consideration.

For example, the articulation of training sites and curricula with traditional and changing community life, new definitions of the teaching role and the consequent implications for established "licensing" requirements, and the conflict between professional socialization and cultural identity. Barnhardt observes that a high tolerance for ambiguity is required of personnel in such a program. He could make the same observation of any number of educational enterprises in our society. Ambiguity, conflict, contradiction, discrepancy these manifestations of cultural tensions seem to be endemic in the schools we have created. The native-teacher conflict has its counterpart in more conventional settings.

Richard Warren

POTLATCH GAME

Following an introduction to gaming in a cultural ecology course taught by Dr. Douglas Uzzell at Rice University, we undertook an independent study project culminating in the creating and testing of the "Potlatch Game." This simulation of the famous North American Indian ceremony was developed with the intention of producing an entertaining yet informative educational tool. It is designed for use at both high school and college levels as an exposure to what seem to have been aspects of the culture of the Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia.

Participants are divided into four or five teams (numayms), each with an "identity kit" containing name, rank, food resources, and blankets (a Kwakiutl medium of exchange). Game action proceeds through seasonal time with summer negotiations and food replenishment, winter potlatching, and finally voting for prestige points. Negotiations are for the accumulation of

wealth, which in turn is given away during the host numaym's potlatch, simulating some basic economic processes of the Kwakiutl. Potlatches comprise distribution of food and blankets, speechmaking, and short theatrical performances (simulating the Kwakiutl's reported fondness of dramatics and ceremony). The generosity, originality, and courtesy exhibited by the numayms provide the criteria for the voting and thus determine the winner when the votes are tallied at the end of three or four 45-minute rounds.

Our testing of the Potlatch Game on high school and university students in formal and informal settings has evidenced a high degree of participation and enjoyment in the game itself, as well as stimulation of interest in Kwakiutl culture.

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