Language and Literacy in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

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There are today nearly 2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States, representing 175 languages and more than 500 federally recognized tribes. Nearly one quarter of the indigenous population are school-age children who attend a variety of schools: federal schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), tribal or community-controlled schools funded through grants and contracts with the federal government, public schools, private schools, and mission or parochial schools. Although many of these schools are located on reservation lands and have a majority American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment, 56 percent or more than 250,000 indigenous students attend public schools with less than 25 percent Indian/Alaska Native enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995, pp. 10–13).

This situation suggests some of the linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity glossed by the title of this chapter. We explore that diversity here, at the same time pointing out common historical and contemporary experiences that enable us to consider American Indians and Alaska Natives as a group.[1] Our discussion represents the combined perspectives of local and outside educator-researchers. Lucille Watahomigie is Hualapai and the founder of the nationally recognized Hualapai bilingual/bicultural program at Peach Springs School in northwestern Arizona. Teresa McCarty is non-Indian, a social-cultural anthropologist and a university-based teacher and researcher. For more than a decade we have collaborated on a variety of local, regional, and national projects in American Indian/Alaska Native education. In this chapter, we look both forward and backward to examine the sociocultural context for language and literacy development in American Indian and Alaska Native communities today. We begin with a discussion of historical antecedents.

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The Sociohistorical Context of American Indian/Alaska Native Education

> *"I don't know what to put in a journal,"* the teacher wrote. *"I've never been good at writing. I have a writing handicap."*

The American Indian teacher who wrote these lines submitted them as her first entry in a dialogue journal for our university course on literacy and biliteracy in American Indian classrooms. Her words speak volumes on the disenfranchising legacy of formal schooling for indigenous groups in the United States, and on the continuing impacts of that legacy. A graduate of English-only federal Indian boarding schools, this teacher had been convinced from her schooling that the language and culture resources she brought to the classroom were irrelevant, even a "handicap" to her English literacy. The teacher had been effectively blocked by her school experiences from entering what Smith (1988) calls the language and literacy "club." And, teachers who do not view themselves as full and unqualified "members of the club," have difficulty admitting children to it.

This teacher's experience is all too common. To understand this situation and its implications for language and literacy development among indigenous students today, we must look critically at the history of schooling for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States. It is a history unlike that of any other ethnolinguistic group, because schooling for American Indians and Alaska Natives was until very recently primarily a federal responsibility. The sources of that responsibility are educational provisions in treaties beginning in 1794, and federal legislation. The U.S. Constitution recognizes a special government-to-government relationship between tribes and the Congress, which includes broad federal authority and trust responsibilities on the part of the U.S. government (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. xi). In 1819 Congress approved the Civilization Act, acknowledging and formalizing the federal responsibility for the schooling of American Indians. The title of that legislation is a disturbing but accurate portrayal of government officials' view of their role at the time; education was synonymous with forced assimilation or "civilization." The statement of one Commissioner of Indian Affairs sums up the historic thrust of federal Indian education policy: The goal in Indian education, he stated, was to remove "the stumbling blocks of hereditary customs and manners," and of these, *"language is one of the most important"* (quoted in Medicine, 1982, p. 399; emphasis added).

Such repressive policies lasted well into the twentieth century. The primary means for their enforcement was the removal and placement of children in distant federal boarding schools, many located at military forts that had been the sites of intense Anglo-Indian conflict only a few years before. Stories abound of young children being kidnapped from their homes at an early age and brought by Indian agents in horse and wagon to the boarding schools (see, e.g., Sekaquaptewa, 1969). There, students' hair was cut and they were issued cast-off army clothing, subjected to harsh and humiliating militaristic discipline that included weekly parades before the school

superintendent, and forbidden to speak their native language. Drills and manual labor accompanied a curriculum in English, arithmetic, and for boys, preparation for the trades; girls studied homemaking. Often students did not see their parents for months or years. Children who fled these conditions, if caught, faced being shackled by school officials intent on preventing further escapes. Galena Sells Dick, a teacher and director of the Navajo bilingual program at Rough Rock Community School in Arizona, describes her boarding school experience this way:

> [We] were punished and abused for speaking [our] native language. . . . If we were caught speaking Navajo, the dormitory matrons gave us chores like scrubbing and waxing the floors, or they slapped our hands with rulers. Some students had their mouths "washed" with yellow bar soap. Thankfully I never experienced this last punishment. (Dick and McCarty, 1997, p. 73)

Only recently have these policies and practices been replaced by ones intended to encourage indigenous control over education and the meaningful incorporation of indigenous languages and cultural knowledge into school curricula. Most of these changes began in the 1960s, when "American Indians began actively to promote self-determination and their own civil rights generally" (Reyhner, 1989, p. 1). Along with other Civil Rights reforms and the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, two pieces of federal legislation—the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the 1975 Indian Educational Assistance and Self-Determination Act—provided for curriculum development and teacher preparation in indigenous languages, and enabled tribes and indigenous communities to operate their own schools. Additional legislation allowed for the construction and improvement of public schools on Indian reservations. Later in this chapter we discuss the promising educational developments growing out of these reforms.

The policies and practices of the past left a profoundly negative imprint, however, as the teacher's comments at the beginning of this section suggest. Today, American Indian/Alaska Native students are significantly overrepresented in low-ability, skill-and-drill tracks and experience the highest school dropout rates in the nation—over 40 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). A recent Indian Nations at Risk Task Force attributes these outcomes to linguistically and culturally irrelevant curricula, low educator expectations, loss of tribal elders' wisdom, and a "lack of opportunity for parents and communities to develop a real sense of participation" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, pp. 7–8). Moreover, while complete linguistic assimilation never was achieved, the English-only practices carried out in boarding schools did exact a price. Convinced by a brutally punishing school experience that, as one bilingual teacher told us, "our language is second best," many parents vowed that their children would learn English, even at the expense of the heritage language and culture.

Contemporary language and literacy issues in American Indian/Alaska Native communities must be understood in light of this sociohistorical context. To be sure, tremendous differences exist between tribal communities in terms of their histories and contacts with Anglo Americans. What all groups share is a unique status as the first North Americans and hence, a special political relationship with the U.S. Congress. That relationship entails both legal and moral obligations on the part of the federal government. It also has entailed an unparalleled history of experience for indigenous students in Anglo-American schools. One consequence of that experience was enormous sociocultural dislocation, including the loss of many indigenous languages and internalized ambivalence by adults and children about the value of those languages. The teacher's comment quoted at the beginning of this section suggests the depth of these feelings. At the same time, many indigenous languages have survived and remain a vital part of contemporary community life.

The present situation, then, is complexly colored with the struggles of the past and the resultant individual situations of tribes and indigenous communities today. We do not and cannot speak for them all. What follows is a discussion of the parameters of diversity among indigenous groups, some shared concerns relating to language and literacy, and suggestions for the specific ways in which Indian and non-Indian educators can capitalize on the resources indigenous students bring to school to develop literacy, biliteracy, and an affirming sense of self and community.

Language and Culture Diversity Among Indigenous Communities Today

Language Diversity

A bilingual teacher explains her reaction to the myth that all American Indians share a common language and culture: *"People often say to me, 'You're American Indian,' and the expect all American Indians to understand the same language. I have to explain that there are nearly 200 American Indian languages, and that most are as different as Russian and Japanese. We've all experienced those kinds of situations."*

No one knows precisely how many languages once were spoken by the people native to what is now the United States and Canada, although one prominent scholar estimates over 300 (Krauss, 1998). We do know that in the past and today, indigenous peoples can be characterized as much by their linguistic and cultural diversity as by what they share in common. Most scholars agree that the original 600+ indigenous North American languages, between 150 and 210 are still spoken in the United States today (Krauss, 1996; McCarty and Zepeda, 1995; Zepeda and Hill, 1992). Twenty-six of these languages are spoken in Arizona and New Mexico alone (Martin and McCarty, 1990). Within major language groups, people often speak distinct dialects,

some so different they merit being treated as separate languages. All of this has led some observers to liken Native North America to an "American Babel" (Spencer and Jennings, 1997).

But linguistic labels mask the immense differentiation that exists with regard to *proficiency* in indigenous languages. For languages with large numbers of speakers—Navajo in the Southwest, for example—there are speakers of all ages, and more than half the school-age population still speaks Navajo as a primary language. But even among Navajos, who claim over 160,000 speakers, a marked shift toward English is under way, as past education policies coupled with exposure to English mass media, technology, and the larger society all take their toll. Among many other groups, only a handful of elderly speakers remains; in some cases, the heritage language has been lost entirely or is spoken by adults but no longer transmitted as a child language.

As the threat of language loss has grown, many tribes have implemented language policies asserting the primacy of the native language for all business conducted on tribal lands. Some tribes, such as the Tohono O'odham of southern Arizona, have developed education standards to assist schools in implementing tribal language policies. In California, where fifty indigenous languages are spoken—none as a mother tongue by children—some younger tribal members work as language apprentices to elderly speakers in order to learn and revitalize the heritage language (Hinton, 1998). Among the Navajo and Hualapai of Arizona and the Crow of Montana—groups in which there is a good number of child speakers—language immersion and two-way bilingual programs serve the dual purposes of maintaining the native language and facilitating children's acquisition of English (see, e.g., Crawford, 1995; McCarty, 1999). Yet in other communities, such as some Pueblos in Arizona and New Mexico, there is strong resistance to teaching the native language in school, as language is believed to be the province of the family and community rather than outside institutions.

Compounding these differences in the status of *spoken* languages is the great differentiation of *written* forms of indigenous languages, and of native language literacies. Some indigenous languages have relatively long written histories. Yup'ik, Navajo, and Cherokee, for example, all have been written for well over a century. Other languages, such as Hualapai and O'odham, have only developed practical writing systems in the past twenty years, largely as an outgrowth of bilingual education programs. For virtually all indigenous groups, spoken language has historically taken precedence over written language as a critical marker of ethnic identity. "Although it is true," Tohono O'odham linguist Ofelia Zepeda writes, "that certain ideas were 'written' before contact with Europeans—as in petroglyphs, rock writing, calendar sticks, and so on—it is clear that the interpreters or the literate people of these writings were but a select few" (Zepeda, 1992, pp. x–xi).

Nonetheless, through their school boards and tribal councils, many communities today actively promote literacy in the heritage language. The great need is for authentic native language texts. Development of a writing system is the first step in meeting this need. Most indigenous languages now have practical orthographies—locally developed writing systems through which native language literacy can be taught and learned. Orthographies for different languages vary widely, with some using adaptations of the Roman alphabet and others using their own symbols, including syllabaries.

But just as differences of opinion exist about whether the native language should be taught in school, there is no universal agreement with regard to writing the heritage language. Many tribal members believe that oral tradition is the truest form of the heritage language, and oppose attempts to write it down. The issue becomes even more complex when questions of standardization arise: Whose dialect should be written down? Whose variety should be accepted as the "standard"?

Such questions reflect honest differences of opinion that must be acknowledged and respected. Each speech community has its own language norms and values. And, while native language literacy is valued by some and not by others, virtually all indigenous communities desire literacy for children in English—but not at the cost of the heritage language.

In light of this situation, the framework for language and literacy development presented here advocates what Zepeda (1992, 1995) has called the *literacy continuum*. Within this continuum, indigenous children are encouraged to connect orality with literacy as each child "reaches deep into a past, a past he or she shares with a community—a past thousands of years old" (Zepeda, 1995, p. 11). What the literacy continuum helps us understand is that all students come to the classroom with a storehouse of cultural and linguistic knowledge; in the case of American Indian and Alaska Native students, that knowledge typically includes storytelling traditions, the flow and structure of oral narratives, and the importance of oral traditions within the community (Zepeda, 1995, p. 14). To the extent that classroom environments allow students to draw on this reservoir of oral tradition, children can apply that knowledge to acquire literacy in the native language, English, or both. Later [on pages 500–04] we provide specific suggestions for how this might be done.

In concluding our discussion of linguistic diversity, it is important to point out that different as they are among themselves, the structure of American Indian and Alaska Native languages in no way resembles that of English or other Indo-European languages. Anything that can be said in English can, of course, be said in any indigenous language. Indigenous languages, however, are organized quite distinctly. Aside from their different phonemic structures, American Indian and Alaska Native languages, in general, handle verbs and nouns much differently than does English. For example, the distinctions between singular, past, perfect, or progressive tense verbs in English (verbs marked with *-s, -ed, -en,* and *-ing* endings) are not at all natural to a speaker of Crow, which has one ending for singular verbs with singular subjects and another for plural verbs (Kates and Matthews, 1980). A teacher of Crow students, therefore, could expect them to omit the *-s* ending on present tense/other person-singular verbs, in an intuitive effort to "regularize" the English forms (McCarty and Schaffer, 1992, p. 125).

It is a given that language and culture are inextricably linked. Just as it is a myth to assume that all American Indians speak a common language, it is equally fallacious to assume the presence of a single, monolithic "Native American culture." Reflecting their distinctive social-ecological environments, individual tribal groups evolved rich and varied cultural traditions that historically ranged from matrilineal to patrilineal kinship systems; horticulture to fishing, hunting, and gathering; shamanism to priesthoods; and dispersed, pastoral lifestyles to concentrated village and town life. Anglo-European colonialism and the usurpation of indigenous lands did much to destroy and distort these lifeways. Like some indigenous languages, many cultural traditions were lost as well. Yet in most indigenous communities today there remains a strong cultural core that melds traditional ways of living and values with cultural forms introduced from outside the community. These new cultural forms, along with elements of traditional cultures, are in many places directly incorporated into children's socialization and have taken on new meaning as representative of ethnic identities.

The Hualapai of northern Arizona provide one example of the dynamics of cultural change and its meaning for children today. Hualapai is within the family of Yuman languages, spoken by peoples indigenous to the region extending from the southern Pacific to the mountains and deserts of Arizona. *Hwal bay* or Hualapai means People of the Tall Pines, and refers to descendants of twelve of the thirteen bands who traditionally occupied that arid plateau that stretches over a sixth of the state of Arizona (Watahomigie and McCarty, 1997). Until the late 1800s, the Hualapai lived by gathering wild plants, hunting game, and planting gardens of corn, beans, squash, and melon. Because extended families lived in close proximity, interaction between the generations was easy and natural, and children were enculturated by peers, parents, and grandparents. Storytelling, origin accounts, family and tribal history, and lessons about the land and the Hualapai way all were part of this enculturation, and the province of parents and elders.

This sociocultural foundation was ruptured in the late 1800s by genocidal U.S. military campaigns, the imprisonment of twelve Hualapai bands at a military fort on the Colorado River, and, after their subsequent escape, by their involvement in wage labor. Most of the Hualapai population of 1,700 now lives in the town of Peach Springs, on the million-acre Hualapai reservation south of the Grand Canyon. . . . Straddling the Santa Fe Railroad and U.S. Highway 66, Peach Springs includes a K–8 public school—the only educational facility within forty miles of the reservation—a post office, general store, two gas stations, and the tribal government and U.S. Public Health Service offices. Homes built under federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) projects line both sides of the Santa Fe Railroad tracks.

Wage labor, cattle raising, and settlement in the town have replaced traditional forms of economic and social organization. HUD housing has had a nucleating effect on extended families; this, and the mobility associated with wage work have undermined traditional forms of cultural transmission. Television, video, and radio all compete with traditional forms of communicative interaction, simultaneously opening compelling new use contexts for English.

Yet a core of the traditional Hualapai lifeway remains integral to contemporary community life. Within a close network of kin, extended families continue to trace relationships back many generations. Food-sharing and ceremonial gatherings unite the community, and traditional forms of oratory, arts, and crafts are still known and a great source of pride. Community-organized storytelling and dance activities provide new forms for old customs, and for transmitting tribal history and the Hualapai language (Watahomigie and McCarty, 1997).

For the past twenty years, bilingual educators at Peach Springs School have worked to capitalize on these cultural and linguistic resources, providing bilingual instruction and a curriculum emphasizing contemporary and traditional Hualapai life. At the same time, the bilingual/bicultural program has made a concerted effort to reach out to community elders, involving them in the creation of curriculum and as linguistic and cultural experts in the classroom. While Peach Springs School reflects the changing community environment, the bilingual/bicultural program seeks to provide children with a valued identity *as Hualapais,* and the academic skills necessary to grow and learn.

In many ways the situation at Peach Springs is typical of rural reservation communities. Visitors to the larger Navajo or Pine Ridge Sioux reservations, for example, will observe physical features (housing, schools, and government facilities) similar to those at Peach Springs. Visitors also are likely to observe a similar blending of traditional and contemporary cultural forms. Yet beneath these superficial similarities, each community and tribal group is unique. Moreover, there are immense cultural differences between rural/reservation and urban Indian communities, and equally great differences between indigenous communities in the "lower forty-eight" and those in Alaska and Hawaii. Thus, the patterns and norms of each community must be understood in their own sociocultural context. Reading resources [on pages 742–43 in the Notes and References section] are intended to facilitate such an understanding.

Diversity in Communication and Interaction Patterns

Many writers have attempted to identify common cognitive or interactional styles among American Indian/Alaska Native learners. Indigenous students frequently are described as nonverbal learners, a characterization associated with holistic or nonanalytical thinking and an emphasis on affective versus cognitive variables in learning (Jimenez, 1983; Kaulbach, 1984; Marashio, 1982; McShane and Plas, 1984; Rhodes, 1988; Tharp, 1989). Often, such characterizations are applied to large, undifferentiated populations such as

"Algonquians and Athabaskans," "urban Indians," "northern Indians," and even "traditional Indian cultures" (see, e.g., Diessner and Walker, 1989, p. 87; More, 1989, pp. 17–19; Ross, 1989; Wauters, Bruce, Black, and Hocker, 1989, pp. 54–55; Walker, Dodd, and Bigelow, 1989, pp. 64–65).

Generalizations such as these do little more than stereotype. One obvious danger in such stereotypes is that they can be used to justify remedial, nonacademic, and nonchallenging curricula for indigenous students. In their extreme form, such generalizations raise far more alarming concerns. For example, Ross (1989, p. 72) asserts that the "traditional Native American mode of thinking is uniquely different from modern man." He then goes on to characterize "Native American thinking" as a right-brain process that is "holistic versus analytic" and "feminine versus masculine," and that involves "imagination versus reading," "dance versus writing," "inability to think in work versus neatness," and being a "poor speaker versus planning" (Ross, 1989, pp. 74–75).

Beyond their racist and sexist content, such claims are, of course, patently false. Yet even as we reject these claims, we recognize that children from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds do bring to the classroom unique learning dispositions developed in the context of their socialization within families and communities. These dispositions may stand in opposition to school-based interactional, organizational, and communicative structures—a situation that, as Swisher and Deyhle (1993, p. 90) note, "can have a significant effect on whether students learn or fail." Hence, understanding these differences *as they reflect distinct sociocultural environments* can suggest curricular and pedagogical innovations that enable educators to strategically use indigenous students' knowledge and experiences in support of their literacy development (Au, 1993).

For example, working in Warm Springs, Oregon, the ethnographer Susan Philips investigated the structures for verbal participation and learning in the Indian community and in the classroom (Philips, 1972, 1983). Whereas Philips observed an emphasis on silent observation and supervised participation in community-based learning activities, she likened interaction in the classroom to a "switchboard" in which the teacher called on individual students and forced them to perform on demand in front of the class. Teachers in Philips' study interpreted students' reluctance to respond under these conditions as evidence of their shyness or boredom. At the same time, however, Philips observed students willingly cooperating in small groups where they directed the activities themselves. The "differences in readiness to participate in interaction," Philips concludes, "are related to the way in which the interaction is organized and controlled" (Philips, 1972, p. 379). The practical implication of these findings, she adds, "is that in Indian classrooms the participant structures preferred by the Indian students can be used successfully . . . for the transmission of curriculum content" (Philips 1983, p. 133).

A case study from the Navajo community of Rough Rock, Arizona, further illustrates Philips' point and the need to evaluate cultural differences within individual social settings. At Rough Rock, a team of ethnographers and bilingual curriculum developers found that the same students identified as nonverbal and nonanalytic, when presented with familiar cultural-linguistic curricular content, became highly verbal, ventured opinions and spoke up in class, and easily made inductive generalizations, a form of analytical thinking (McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, and Benally, 1991). These outcomes were attributed to a bilingual, inquiry-based curriculum that not only drew its overt content from the local community, but which in its pedagogical approach reinforced patterns of learning in natural situations outside the classroom. Specifically, those patterns assume a constructive, interactive learning process in which children use inductive processes to build increasingly sophisticated understandings of the world. Young girls, for instance, master the art and economics of rug weaving not through lecture or didactic instruction, but by observing an experienced weaver and in the context of the life tasks of which weaving is part, making inferences and generalizations about the process (Begay, 1983). These teaching-learning interactions closely parallel the assumptions underlying classroom inquiry: Knowledge is built incrementally through the recursive expansion of children's prior understandings, in meaningful dialogue and socially significant interactions.

The Rough Rock data highlight the conditions under which inquiry, analytical thinking, and "speaking up" can be effective instructional components in American Indian classrooms (McCarty et al., 1991). "This work reminds us," Au (1993) notes, "that, while becoming informed about cultural differences, we should be careful to avoid stereotypes that suggest that certain groups of students cannot benefit from literacy learning activities that require their active, constructive involvement" (p. 119).

In combination with qualitative case studies by Philips for Warm Springs, Au (1980) for Native Hawaiians, and others (e.g., Heath, 1982), the Rough Rock data also point out that undifferentiated characterizations of learning styles can obscure the complex social-behavioral processes underlying students' out-of-school learning experiences, which influence their receptivity to particular pedagogical approaches. Hence, even as we recognize that indigenous students share much in common in terms of the learning dispositions they bring to school, we also must recognize that these dispositions emerge in and are nurtured by the particular features of a given sociocultural environment. It is these particulars, more than anything, that determine the patterns of communication and interaction distinctive to each tribe and local community.

Linking Home, Community, and School

How can educators respond to both the diversity and the unity in indigenous students' experiences in ways that effectively link home, community and school? The remainder of this chapter provides data from real schools and communities that address this question, and that simultaneously show how teachers can bridge the literacy continuum.

Teachers can enhance their ability to build on indigenous students' cultural, linguistic, and personal resources by first, learning more about those

resources. One obvious way to do this is to work in partnership with parents, grandparents, and other community elders. This can involve home visits as well as parental visits to the classroom. An even more effective way to acquire this knowledge is for teachers, students, and parents to explore their community together, in a manner not unlike the way children naturally acquire knowledge of their language and community.

Lipka and Ilutsik (1995) provide a useful model for doing this. In their work in southwest Alaska, these educators note the "widespread belief that Yup'ik only 'gets in the way' of English and Western knowledge" (p. 201). To reverse this situation, they write, "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" (p. 201).

To achieve these goals, Ilutsik—a Yup'ik bilingual teacher—and Lipka—an ethnographer and teacher educator—developed a school change group, the *Ciulistet* (literally, Teacher Leaders). The *Ciulistet* is composed of teachers, teacher aides, and elders who work collaboratively on the co-creation of curriculum. Over several years the group has been remarkably successful in formalizing an indigenous knowledge base in mathematics and science that also teaches Yup'ik language and culture. For example, the *Ciulistet* researched the math and science concepts embedded in everyday fish camp experiences. "Fish camps were chosen," Lipka (1994) states, "because Yup'ik people still engage in catching and processing fish for the year, and their work groups are still organized in traditional ways" (p. 17). By videotaping fish camp activities and analyzing the videotapes, the *Ciulistet* was able to articulate an indigenous knowledge base that not only included mathematics and science, but that also revealed the complex social relationships intrinsic to Yup'ik subsistence. Yup'ik elders also have provided curricular content on hunting, trapping, weather forecasting, the geometry of parka making, and storyknifing, a traditional storytelling form in the snow or mud using a knife and specific symbols to represent various characters (Ilutsik, 1994; Lipka, 1994; Lipka and McCarty, 1994).

In this collaborative learning-teaching process, "Two-way learning occurred, and both Western and Yup'ik systems were valued," Lipka (1994, p. 18) writes. For Yup'ik students, knowledge from their own heritage has provided concrete connections to abstract mathematical and scientific concepts. Students see, for instance, "that mathematical systems have evolved from the concrete to the abstract, are based on familiar patterns and ways of ordering, and relate to concrete and cultural symbols" (Lipka, 1994, p. 25). Language and literacy development are natural and integral components of this learning.

Equally significant, Yup'ik community members have had a direct voice in their children's education—a process that, as Ilutsik (1994) describes, involved a painful yet necessary transformation:

> Many of our own people and many other educators were painfully aware that we were different, and that difference—based on culture and language—had been internalized in a negative sense. In that respect, we had to get over our feeling of inferiority, especially if we were truly going to be the "leaders" in education as the term *Ciulistet* implies. (p. 10)

This transformation occurred "by valuing Yup'ik language and knowledge and by providing an opportunity for elders and the school community to visualize the possible ways in which everyday tasks and knowledge can be a basis for learning in school" (Lipka, 1994, p. 26).

In facilitating changes such as those initiated through the *Ciulistet*, it is important to respect and validate the norms for interaction within the community. Discriminatory structures, as Cummins (1989) points out, "are manifested in the *interactions* that minority students and communities experience with *individual* educators" (p. 51). In this regard, educator Vivian Ayoungman (1995) cautions that "the *form* of educators' presentation may be as important as the message itself" (p. 184). Speaking of her work with Siksika (Blackfeet) community members, Ayoungman (1995) writes:

> Prior to one parent meeting I chaired as vice principal, a parent whispered, "I hope she doesn't use big words." Overhearing this, I conducted the session in Siksika. It turned out to be quite a productive meeting; use of the native language literally invited parental participation, and many who rarely spoke in public actively participated.

Ayoungman goes on to urge that parents and grandparents not be "used as 'tokens'":

> From our experience, elders appreciate having specific information on what is expected of them so they can contribute productively. One suggestion . . . is that [teachers] identify the specific information they seek, and request this of elders invited to the school. Arrangements should also be made to assist elders' travel and ensure their comfort. Elders have said they sometimes feel out of place at school because there is no one to greet or direct them to where they are supposed to go. (pp. 184–185)

Educators, then, must be aware of and responsive to a wide range of local cultural features, including formally articulated knowledge such as that tapped by the *Ciulistet* in Alaska, as well as more subtle expectations and rules for communicative interaction, such as those Ayoungman highlights for the Blackfeet community. For teachers unfamiliar with the community, formal study can aid such understandings. Ethnographic accounts such as those on Warm Springs (Philips, 1983), Rough Rock (McCarty et al., 1991), and other words cited [in the Notes and References] are good places to begin. Yet even for teachers who are from the community, and especially for those who are not, it is necessary, from time to time, to become students

themselves and to explore the community together with parents, elders, and children.

The bilingual/bicultural program at Peach Springs provides an additional illustration of how this might be done. At Peach Springs, learning extends well beyond the classroom walls. Students and teachers work together on community videography projects, interviewing elders on local oral history, photographing the varied geological formations of the nearby Grand Canyon, and investigating other aspects of the natural and social environment. Students learn the art of basket weaving from elders, conduct field studies of the petroglyphs and pictographs of their ancestors, and undertake the comparative study of Hualapai ethnobotany and Western plant science. Throughout these projects, language development is integrated with challenging content area study, enabling students to learn through multiple literatures—including the oral literature of their community—multiple technologies, and most importantly, their own prior knowledge and experience.

Studies such as these can be adapted and carried out in any community. Like the work of the *Ciulistet*, such community studies bridge the continuum of literacy, providing a seamless transition from oral tradition to the formal development of language, literacy, and biliteracy in school. Further, community studies offer a wealth of opportunities to bring parents and elders directly into the language and literacy learning process. All of this enriches the shared experiences of teachers, students, and community members, increases the pool of knowledge for future learning, and builds the general climate of support for education.

Certainly efforts such as these are not minimal; they require considerable time and commitment on the part of teachers and community members alike. But the stakes are high, and the benefits to indigenous students amply reward the extra effort such collaborative work entails. We are reminded here of the words of one grandmother and long-time resident of Rough Rock: *"If a child learns only the non-Indian way of life,"* she remarked, *"you have lost your child."* Working side by side with the community, educators have an obligation to help ensure that such a loss does not occur.

Learning the School Language and the School Ways: The Literacy Continuum in Practice

The pedagogies presented in this chapter presuppose a set of educator assumptions that both reflect and help construct an image of the child—and eventually, the adult—and her or his language and learning potential. Consider again the teacher's reference to a "writing handicap" quoted earlier. This statement exposes the teacher's negative image of her own literacy, demonstrating how potently self-fulfilling, even among professional educators, deficit-view assumptions can be. Transform those assumptions into ones that view bilingualism and multiculturalism as assets, and an entirely different image emerges.

In the case of this teacher, we encouraged her to write in her native language if she chose, without worrying about form, and from her own experience. Over the duration of the course, she filled a large notebook with her reflections on the teaching and learning of language and literacy in American Indian classrooms. She also began to write her own bilingual poetry. The teacher's final journal entry best reveals the power of her revisioned literacy: *"I feel I really am a literary person,"* she wrote.

There are clear implications in this account for elementary and secondary educators, especially those working with American Indian and Alaska Native students. In classrooms, curriculum and pedagogy are the mirrors in which students see themselves reflected, and through which they construct images of themselves as thinkers, learners, and users of language. Educators have the ability to strategically manipulate those mirrors in ways that ensure that the image students see and develop is one of self-affirmation, efficacy, and trust (McCarty, 1993b).

To illustrate these possibilities, we present several classroom vignettes. The vignettes are extracted from our videotapes and ethnographic observations in schools in the western United States (see, e.g., McCarty, 1993a; McCarty and Schaffer, 1992). Although the classrooms vary in their social and demographic characteristics, they share these essential features: All are environments rich in oral and written language, and places where students have the opportunity to learn about themselves and the wider world through the heritage language and English. In short, these are classrooms that in many small and large ways, effectively bridge the literacy continuum, enabling students to draw on the language and culture resources of their communities to exploit their literacy learning potential.

We begin with a first-grade classroom on the Tohono O'odham reservation in southern Arizona:

> The room is abuzz with activity. All students in the class are O'odham, but there is great variety in their O'odham and English language proficiencies. Several children sit at a table listening to audiotapes of favorite stories in O'odham. Elsewhere in the room, students work in pairs to create stories in English from wordless picture books. Within each pair, one student is stronger in O'odham, while the other is more proficient in English. If a writer has a question about spelling, the partner can help; invented spellings are encouraged. In another part of the room, three students read from an English big book, helped by their tutor, a third grader. The teacher, a fluent speaker of O'odham and English, walks among the groups, stopping to ask or respond to a question, or to listen as students read their completed stories. The walls in and outside the classroom offer colorful displays, in O'odham and English, of students' artistic and written work. Later in the morning, the teacher gathers students together for a traditional O'odham round dance and song. The children participate joyfully in this, concluding the activity by greeting each visitor-observer in O'odham.

Several hundred miles to the northeast, in a high school language-arts class in a town bordering the Navajo reservation:

> In this classroom of Navajo students, the non-Indian teacher and her students sit around a long seminar table, reading and discussing the poems they have written. Over the past two weeks, the class has read works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry dealing with a theme they selected: love. At other tables around the room, a few students work with a partner on their poems, sharing drafts and clarifying meanings. The poems are written in English, but much of the discussion about them is in Navajo. The teacher, whose first language is English but who has studied Navajo, encourages students to use their native language. When students are satisfied with their final versions, they will publish them in a class anthology. Later, students will select other themes to research and write about: fear, fantasy, success, and a study of the local community. The most exciting aspect of this work, the teacher confides, is the autonomy she and students feel in "determining what and how they're going to learn."

In a second-grade class in the interior of the Navajo reservation:

> Students work in small clusters around the room. Virtually all students speak Navajo as their first language. The classroom exudes purposeful activity. Several students work together on a mural, using butcher paper stretched across a row of desks. The teacher, a native of the local community, explains that students are illustrating "what happens in our community that reflects the government in any way." Their government unit grew out of students' questions about the recent presidential election; they are studying local, tribal, and national government. On one wall is a chart with a brainstorming web showing students' questions and their existing knowledge of Navajo tribal government. Another display shows a brainstorming web on Bill Clinton. As the mural group continues its work, several other students work at a research center, reading books on Arizona landmarks. Their findings will be incorporated into writing projects on Navajo tribal government. The teacher explains that students also have interviewed local officials to learn more about the history of government in their community. All classroom activities are intended to answer real questions posed by students themselves. As they engage in their various projects, students share their ideas, writings, and laughter in Navajo. The teacher monitors the progress of each group, asking and answering questions as they arise. Later, the class comes together to see and hear an illustrated story on local government created by the mural group. The morning concludes with a quiet time for journal writing in Navajo.

Finally, from an urban middle school language-arts class in the San Francisco Bay area:

> This is a multicultural learning environment. There are five American Indian students in the class, representing five tribal groups. All have grown up in the city. Only three speak the heritage language, but all say they return to their home reservations at least once a year. In addition to these students, the class is composed of Anglo, Latino, and African-American students, as well as several students who have recently immigrated from Vietnam. The African-American teacher leads the class in a discussion of Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Based on historical events involving the Chumash of the central California coast, the book's plot captivates students; they easily relate to the main character, Karana, who survives against all odds after being left on a deserted island. On this particular day, the class is joined by a respected local Indian educator, who provides cultural information on the Chumash and asks students to critically consider the impact of missionization on California Indians. He also shares stories about such customs as the naming rituals referenced in the book, using examples from his native Lakota Sioux oral tradition. Later, the students will work in small groups to research questions arising from this discussion and their reading. As the bell rings, the teacher tells us that over the next few weeks, he plans to introduce other multicultural literature to encourage cross-cultural inquiry.

How do these classrooms exemplify the literacy continuum? First, they capitalize on the power of *story* to connect literacy to children's lives. As children hear a favorite book on audiotape, listen to the factual and fictional stories of their peers, create poetry together, and participate in the unfolding of oral texts, they experience, in those moments, the joining of oral and written narrative forms. Through a rich variety of learning enterprise—mural-making, story-making from wordless books, song, literature discussion, and their own research and writing—students are encouraged to apply their prior knowledge of oral narratives to the creation of written texts. Orality and literacy, indigenous and Western narrative forms, are united in ways that allow students to use what they know to develop new language abilities and to inquire about the world.

Second, in joining spoken and written narrative forms, these teachers draw narrative *content* from the culture of the community and the students. The teachers of Navajo students do this by grounding language and literacy in larger investigations based on student-generated themes. The O'odham teacher does this by blending native stories, song, and dance in a multifaceted language experience. Though his classroom is organized more conventionally, the urban middle school teacher also maximizes the cultural resources available in his multicultural community. His choice of literature, the involvement of local cultural experts, and the self-selection students exercise in their follow-up projects all access the distinctive resources of students and their community.

Within the literacy continuum, both the native language and English have value and a place. The classrooms profiled here show how domains for native language use can be established and activated. By their presence and their own bilingualism, the O'odham and Navajo teachers model the value of the native language. But language lessons in these classrooms go even deeper. In the Tohono O'odham classroom, the teacher pairs English- and

O'odham-proficient students. Their varying backgrounds and abilities in O'odham and English, and their teacher's bilingualism, become the foundation for strengthening each child's language abilities and resources for new learning. In the classrooms with English monolingual teachers, the teachers nonetheless validate the heritage languages of their students. One teacher does this through formal study of the local language and by encouraging student interaction in Navajo. The urban middle school teacher takes advantage of the linguistic knowledge of local experts. Though these latter two classrooms do not provide a genuinely bilingual learning environment, both teachers bring the languages of their students into the life of the classroom in natural and academically challenging ways.

In all four classrooms, students become aware of the psychological power of words. "This power is different from that which is held by a select few," Zepeda (1992, p. x) writes; "This is the power ordinary people can have with words." And this is the essence of the literacy continuum: There is no single, uniform literacy; no one, straight-line path to literacy; nor is the literacy club open only to a privileged few. Instead, there are multiple literacies, many paths, and a variety of ways for children to acquire and use their literacy potentials. What is noteworthy about the teachers and classrooms described here are the specific ways they make use of indigenous students' unique backgrounds to expand their literacy and learning potential. In the process, the image each child sees reflected, and is helped to construct, is one of unqualified and lifelong membership in the language and literacy club.

Reading and Writing in the Heritage Language and English

In discussions of literacy in two languages, we may take for granted the presence of print in those languages. In the case of indigenous languages, such a situation cannot be assumed; the lack of native language print materials is a formidable obstacle to native language literacy. Simply put, there are not enough good texts in indigenous languages, and publishers see few market incentives to produce more (McCarty, 1993b).

The situation is far from hopeless, however, as tribes, schools, and indigenous communities over the past thirty years have produced a number of excellent native language materials. In most cases, this has required literally beginning "from scratch." At Peach Springs, the Hualapai Bilingual/Bicultural Program began its work by first creating a practical orthography for the language. In the words of the present bilingual program coordinator, staff members had to "become their own linguists" (Watahomigie and McCarty, 1994, p. 33). They then generated a list of community and student characteristics and ways of teaching, as a foundation for developing a child-centered curriculum. Over time, and through sustained staff and parent involvement in on-site workshops and university-based institutes, the Hualapai bilingual staff has developed a host of curriculum materials—attractively illustrated children's literature, expository texts, a grammar, dictionary, and a series of teacher guides with cultural-environmental units—now used throughout the Peach Springs School.

At Rough Rock, the Navajo Curriculum Center has undertaken similar efforts, producing written and audio materials on Navajo history and life. Like the Hualapai materials, these are based on the stories and knowledge of the local community. Rough Rock bilingual teachers and teacher assistants also have become the authors of children's storybooks in Navajo. From their own life accounts and those passed down from elders, teachers have developed a small but growing collection of authentic Navajo literature. Desktop publishing, the talents of a local artist, and a small printing budget have turned those texts into high quality, beautifully illustrated works (McCarty, 1993b).

Figure 1 provides an example of these teacher-developed texts. In Jessie Caboni's (1994) *Líłtsooí ayázhi nináyiijááh (Yellowhorse bringing lambs home),* children learn of the gentle, smart horse whose owner saddled him with gunnysacks, filled the pockets with newborn lambs from the field, and trusted the horse to return safely home with his newborn charges. Materials such as these not only open new possibilities for biliteracy development, they also allow students and the community to see their school's bilingual teachers as published authors—in Navajo. . . . At places such as Rough Rock and Peach Springs, teachers and students are creating new contexts for indigenous literacy. This, in turn, is catalyzing community consciousness about the heritage language and its significance as a pedagogical tool. As parents and grandparents see their children learning and growing through bilingual/bicultural/biliteracy programs such as these, community attitudes toward literacy forged in the boarding schools are beginning to change. *"I thought only the Anglos wrote books,"* one Rough Rock elder recently told us. Parents and grandparents now have tangible demonstrations of texts produced by local educators in their own language. By bringing the texts of their everyday lives directly into the process of schooling. American Indian and Alaska Native parents, teachers, and students are validating the multiple literacies that constitute the complex dynamics of their communities.

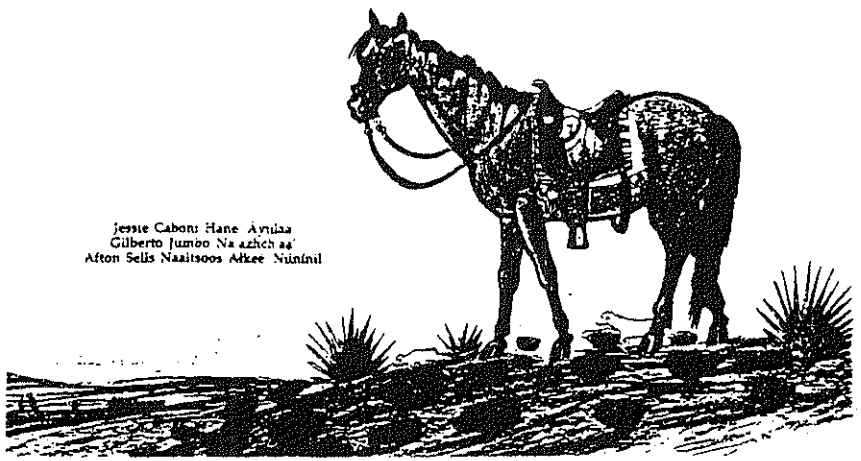
Constructing Change

Developments such as those reported here for Peach Springs, Rough Rock, the *Ciulistet,* and the work under way in many other indigenous communities are the antithesis of what schooling historically has been for American Indian and Alaska Native students. Clearly, reversing past patterns requires far more than changing pedagogy alone, and many of the necessary bureaucratic and institutional changes are outside the control of individual educators. Educators are, nevertheless, critical participants within the educational system who have the power to revision and reform that system.

In this chapter we have described some of the forces for positive change emanating from the work of indigenous and nonindigenous educators in diverse school-community settings. Much remains to be done in challenging

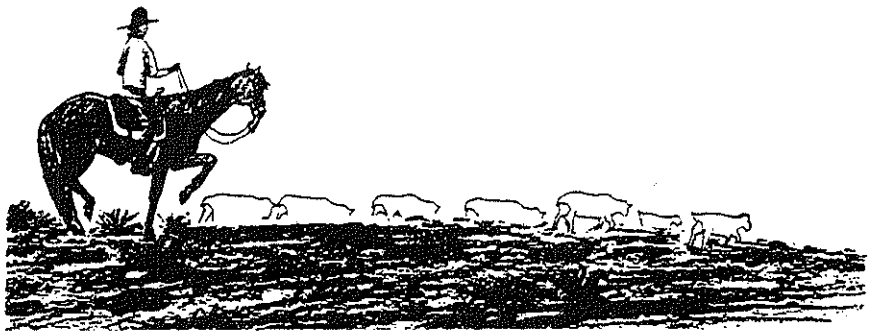
FIGURE 1 Excerpts from a staff-developed Navajo storybook, *Ł̨i̯ltsooí ayázhí nináyiijááh (Yellowhorse bringing lambs home).* From Caboni et al. (1995).

Ł̨i̯ltsooí Ayázhí Nináyiiljááh



Jessie Caboni Hane Ayniba
Gilberto Jumbo Na azhch aa'
Afton Sells Naaltsoos Atkee Nininil

Doo dah na'ałgo'da jiníigo t'áá éí t'éiyá hwoł naaldloosh łeh. T'áá akwíjí dibé bikéé' chojool'i̯go nahayéii łeh. Ł̨i̯' bidáą' dóó tł'oh ayóo yee yaa áhályą́ą́ nít'éé'. Łahda bilasáana yaanél'áah łeh. Éí binahjí' t'áá bí hooghanjí' nizhónígo nináhályeedgo yíhool'áą́'. Dibé taah nánił déé'da, nidáá' dę́ę́'da, bizh'dichi'go t'áá bí hooghanjí' nizhónígo anáhályeed silį́'.



deficit views, labels that limit, and historical relationships of domination and exclusion. Yet we are confident that current efforts in bilingual, bicultural, and biliteracy education for indigenous students will open new doors for them and for future generations of American Indians and Alaska Natives. This statement by bilingual educator Galena Sells Dick, a graduate of the boarding schools, suggests that such a process is already well under way: *"When we went to school,"* she recalls, *"all we learned about was Western culture. We were never told the stories that Rough Rock children now are told, and write themselves. We're telling those stories now. In the process, we are reversing the type of schooling we experienced. We see both sides of it—and we're helping children make connections through literacy to their own lives."*