

Ikani Context Rational

Introduction

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I was born and raised in Kodiak, Alaska. My grandmothers were Lydia Sheraveloff, from Afognak, and Caroline Weaver, from Paso Robles, California. My Grandfather was George Stoltenberg from California. My Alutiiq name is Arnangcuk, which means "Little Woman." I moved to Old Harbor in 2002 as the Special Education teacher for Old Harbor School and have served in that capacity for the past thirteen years.

I have been learning Sugt'stun, the Alutiiq language, for the past eleven years. From 2004-2007, I participated in the Alutiiq Museum's Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit Master-Apprentice project. I apprenticed under Elders Mary Haakanson and Stella Krumry. Following that program, I have taken many college courses and participated in language symposiums and trainings offered in Kodiak. I have completed Kodiak College's Alutiiq Studies Occupational Endorsement Certificate program and graduated May 2015. At the completion of this program, I reached the intermediate speaking proficiency level as described in the ACTFL 2012 proficiency standards.

Our Kodiak Island Borough School District rural elementary students have been receiving Alutiiq language enrichment lessons over videoconferencing equipment for nearly ten years. For the past two years, I have taught these lessons and connected via

VTC with five of the seven rural elementary classes. I have also taught face-to-face lessons to the Old Harbor elementary classes and a middle and high school class of Alutiiq Language.

My experiences teaching both on-site and via distance helped me to recognize the disparity between my teaching methods. When teaching students in a face-to-face lesson, I incorporate many more learner-centered activities. My students played games, worked on completing tasks together, and completed individual and group projects. When I compare these activities to my distance classes, I realized that the majority of my content delivery was teacher-centered with me presenting the language to the students and they repeat after me. We did incorporate some games and songs, but I rarely allowed the students to interact with each other. I did not see the same level of engagement and retention from my distance students that I observed in my on-site classes. I need to find a way to shift from a teacher-centered pedagogy to a learner-centered pedagogy and increase the interaction and engagement of my distance delivery methods.

My project seeks to address the aforementioned goals by engaging students through goal setting, shared and repeated readings, and digital storytelling.

Location

Kodiak Island is located in South-Central Alaska, separated from the mainland by the Shelikof Strait. Positioned in the Gulf of Alaska, the Kodiak Archipelago includes the city of Kodiak and seven rural communities. There are six Alutiiq villages accessible only by plane or boat: Port Lions, Ouzinkie, Old Harbor, Akhiok, Karluk, and Larsen

Bay. Chiniak is a rural community connected by forty-two miles of road to the city of Kodiak. The Kodiak Island Borough School District serves all of these communities.

Language Status

The Alutiiq language, also known as Sugt'stun, is a Pacific Gulf variation of Yup'ik Eskimo spoken from the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Island, to Prince William Sound ("Alutiiq/Sugpiaq," 2012). The dialect spoken on Kodiak Island is known as Koniag Alutiiq. April Laktonen Counciller (2010, 2012) describes the language status of Kodiak Island as "severely threatened" and "dire" reporting that current estimates of fluent speakers of the Koniag dialect are 48 with 33 living on the island (p. 1, pp. 4-5). Language shift, or the replacement of one language with another, for the Alutiiq people began with the Russian's conquest. According to Drabek (2012), "Believing that formalized education would offer further control of the Alutiiq people, in 1786 Shelikhov established the first school in Alaska at Three Saints Bay, nearby the current day village of Old Harbor" (p. 103). The Russians created schools and encouraged intermarriage and baptism in an attempt to assimilate the Alutiiq people and develop cooperative workers for their economic enterprises (Drabek, p. 194). Russian Orthodox monks were brought to the island to help with the subjugation process, but with the leadership of Saint Herman, worked to defy the agenda of the Russian American Company and established bilingual schools around the island (Drabek, p. 105). The Russian Orthodox priests provided the first written form of Alutiiq using Slovanic Cyrillic to translate biblical texts into Sugt'stun. Many Alutiiq people became bilingual, speaking Sugt'stun and Russian; and others trilingual, adding English (Drabek, p. 108).

Drabek (2012) explains that, "Supportive bilingualism did not last for the Alutiiq,

as the transition to American colonization buried translated texts, and suppressed both Alutiiq and Russian languages through ‘English Only’ policies that encouraged corporal punishment” (p. 108). Alutiiq students were ridiculed and penalized for speaking their language. Older students were sent to boarding schools effectively cutting them off from their families and culture. Drabek explains:

The boarding schools inevitably resulted in loss of language and traditions, loss of access to community role models, shifts in sense of identity and were successful at assimilating a whole generation of Alaska Natives... Hitting us hard at home, they used their education system to crush our voices. They took our Sugt’stun language, abusing and stealing our children, until only a few could remember how to talk to their mothers. It is no surprise that there is distrust or disinterest in participating in their schools as many feel inadequate, uncomfortable or shy — never quite realizing the ancestral history that established their perception. (pp. 112, 195).

It is only through acts of linguistic survivance that our Elders held on to their Sugt’stun language. Linguistic survivance refers to the complex ways that indigenous communities use languages, second languages, and mixtures of languages in spite of hostile circumstances (Wyman, 2012, p. 2). I have heard stories from our Alutiiq speakers that demonstrate their acts of linguistic survivance. Mary Haakanson recounts her reaction when her teacher told her she could not speak Alutiiq: “I told her, ‘you will never keep me from speaking my language!’” (personal communication). Katherine Chichenoff learned to speak Alutiiq by hiding under the kitchen table when her parents would visit with family and friends. She discussed with me her father’s reluctance get

involved in teaching the Alutiiq language after suffering trauma as a student. She says that at first this influenced her to not to get involved with the language movement, but later she decided that if people really wanted to learn, she would teach them. Others retained their language by refusing to attend school.

The language socialization trajectories, how a person is socialized through the use of language and to use language, of the Alutiiq people changed rapidly (Wyman, 2012, p.11). Our current Elders, all over the age of sixty, were the last generation of first speakers of Koniag Alutiiq. The next generation produced a number of passive speakers, those that- through exposure- have developed a native-like comprehension of the language, but have little speaking ability. Within one generation, children were being socialized to speak English so they could be spared the treatment their family had endured.

School District

The Kodiak Island Borough School District, hereafter referred to as the District or KIBSD, serves the city of Kodiak and each of the seven rural communities around the island. There are four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in the city of Kodiak. Each of the six villages has a K-12 school, and the rural community of Chiniak has a K-10 school. The city of Kodiak is home to a diverse population. The district serves English language learners from many language backgrounds including Tagalog, Spanish, and Laotian. In all of the village schools, the students are English speakers with English as the home language. Kodiak Island has not had bilingual schools since the Russian period. To find KIBSD's position in regard to language, one must turn

to the World Languages Curriculum document. The following is the District's World Languages Philosophy:

A successful language program incorporates varied instructional strategies and technologies, while providing opportunities to participate in culturally authentic experiences. The study of languages and cultures develops appreciation and understanding among the world's peoples, broadens university and career choices, and enhances student performance in other content areas. The study of a World or Heritage language allows students to value their own distinct culture and history, enriching the students' personal lives. Studying languages and cultures is an integral part of the essential curriculum for students of all ages and abilities (World Languages Curriculum Committee, 2010, para 1).

The curriculum document goes on to include an excerpt from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development website:

Aleut, American Sign Language, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Gwich'in, Hebrew, Inupiaq, Italian, Japanese, Laotian, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Tlingit, Vietnamese, Wolof, and Yup'ik are just some of the over one hundred languages used by the people of Alaska. We ascribe to the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples... In this framework, we refer to the languages we teach as world languages to reflect the experience of the ancient cultures that preceded us, our own present multilingual populace, and our vision of a multilingual community for the twenty-first century. (World Languages Curriculum Committee, 2010, para 4).

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008)

Article 13 addresses the rights of indigenous peoples to “revitalize, use, develop, and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures...” (p. 7). At the time this declaration was adopted, the United States voted against its ratification (United Nations, 2007). Later, after pressure from Native American groups, the United States released an Announcement of U.S. Support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (n.d.) which the statement points out, “While not legally binding or a statement of current international law- has both moral and political force” (p.1). The announcement goes on to declare that “many facets” of the Native American cultures need to be protected, including language (Announcement, n.d., p. 13). They further mention proposed changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would allow for greater flexibility in the use of federal funds to finance Native language immersion programs (Announcement, n.d., p. 14). The Districts stated adherence to the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples appears to be a tacit commitment to support indigenous languages, and in particular, the indigenous language of Kodiak Island- Sugt’s tun.

The District has been open to language revitalization efforts. In 1993, Philomena Kinecht and Florence Pestrikoff launched a pilot high school Alutiiq class. As part of the Alutiiq Museum’s Administration for Native Americans grant funded Master-Apprentice program, the District has allowed the use of Video Conferencing equipment to deliver Alutiiq language lessons to the rural school elementary classes since 2004. In 2011, Alisha Drabek and Candace Branson launched another Alutiiq pilot class that allows students to earn dual high school and college credit through Kodiak College (Drabek, 2012, p. 117). They now offer Alutiiq I and Alutiiq II credit. The District’s decision to award World

Language credit for Alutiiq Language classes aligns with the Native American Languages Act of 1990 (NALA). NALA states that it is the duty of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote the rights of Native Americans to use, develop, and practice their languages (p. 62). The U.S. “encourages” and supports instruction in indigenous languages to support the survival of Native American languages (p. 62). It urges secondary and post-secondary institutions to support the granting of comparable credit for Native American language proficiency as that of foreign language proficiency and encourages, “all institutions of elementary, secondary and higher education, where appropriate, to include Native American languages in the curriculum in the same manner as foreign languages” (p. 63). KIBSD has also demonstrated its support for the Alutiiq language by endorsing two Alutiiq language teachers for a Type M Certification through the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. A Type M Certification is a Limited Teaching Certificate that allows local experts to become certified to teach in their field without having to achieve a Bachelor’s Degree (EED). It is at the discretion of School Districts to authorize this type of certificate and the Superintendent must request the certification from the state. This has helped the language revitalization effort because the Alutiiq speaking community is very small and there are few certified teachers who are proficient in the language. There is not currently a Bachelor’s Degree in the Alutiiq language. For the past ten years, Alutiiq language education through the school district has been funded through various grants and not sustainable beyond the timeline of these grants. This year, the District has taken steps to maintain the Alutiiq Language program at Kodiak High School by agreeing to fund the teacher using General Funds rather than grant funds. This is an important step in ensuring the program continues.

Educational Model

Our rural elementary students have been receiving Alutiiq language enrichment lessons over videoconferencing equipment for nearly ten years. These lessons have been available anywhere from one to two days per week for thirty minutes. For the past three years, I have taught these lessons and connected via VTC with five of the seven rural elementary classes, as well as face-to-face classes with the Old Harbor elementary students. During the past two years, I met with sites one day a week for forty-five minutes. This year, I am working with the villages of: Old Harbor (20 students), Ouzinkie (10 students), Akhiok (7 students), Larsen Bay (5 students), and Chiniak (10 students). We meet two days per week for forty-five minute lessons. School's participation in these lessons counts towards meeting the State of Alaska World Languages Standards; however, the high stakes testing under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has teachers feeling pressure to focus on reading, writing, and math skills. Some teachers don't feel that they can "sacrifice" the time for Alutiiq language lessons.

My goal for joining the UAF Applied Linguistics Master's Program- with a focus on Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL)- was to improve my distance delivery methods to increase student engagement and interaction. Through this project, I am developing a framework to meet that goal.

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