

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

It's Okay To Be Native: Alaska Native Cultural Strategies in Urban and School Settings

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4cc4k1wd>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 22(4)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Grantham-Campbell, Mary

**Publication Date**

1998-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

## *It's Okay To Be Native: Alaska Native Cultural Strategies in Urban and School Settings*

MARY GRANTHAM-CAMPBELL

---

---

Today most Alaskan schools are public. However there are important historical differences between predominantly Native rural schools and predominantly non-Native urban schools.<sup>1</sup> Many Alaskan rural schools have evolved from a handful of Russian-operated mission schools into approximately 150 small village public schools, while many urban schools are not unlike large schools outside of Alaska; that is, they reflect socioeconomic diversity rooted in broader U.S. society. Urban schools now enroll more Natives<sup>2</sup> than ever before.<sup>3</sup> In various ways the wider social forces and political battles which ensued as Alaska became a U.S. territory and later a state are represented in all of Alaska's schools. The particular history of Native education reflects a long relationship of struggle between the original inhabitants of this land and those who came to exploit it. This brief paper is about Alaska Native life and education in and around Fairbanks, Alaska's second largest city. Schooling and educational contexts are examined as key sites where specific cultural strategies are utilized to maintain Native identity. These strategies allow for a complex set of cultural responses to urban and school settings,

---

Mary Grantham-Campbell is Inupiaq and African American. She was the former director of the Yukon-Koyukuk Rural Education Center with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and is currently completing her doctorate in anthropology at Stanford.

which historically have been inhospitable to Natives. By “cultural strategies” I mean those attitudes, behaviors, and activities that enable individuals and communities to participate in their own culture(s), as well as in other cultures with minimized risk of cultural conflict. In Alaska these cultural strategies are deeply intertwined with issues of self-esteem, cultural pride, and academic achievement.

For the last thirty years social science research has documented Indian and Native migration from rural and reservation areas into American cities. While this body of work describes some of the difficulties occurring in the lives of tribal peoples, it generally portrays urban adaptation as the culmination of acculturation and adjustment for Natives. Also, found implicitly in this work is the assumption that there are only two goals served by urban adaptation—either complete assimilation or an all-encompassing tribal orientation.<sup>4</sup> Going beyond the urban-rural continuum approach taken to explain the Native presence in cities I posit that Natives are not acculturating “out of” one setting—the rural village—and “into another”—the growing city. Alaska Natives are living their lives in both settings. More specifically, aspects of both settings shape the structure and meaning of schooling and academic experiences. Alaska Natives are developing cultural strategies to rely on their rural ties, rather than sacrifice them, and forging a richer overall ethnic identity which meaningfully shapes their urban experiences. Moreover, this identity encourages success in urban settings, particularly in schools.

For several generations formal schooling and Native living have been processes fraught with discontinuities and conflict.<sup>5</sup> Until recently, relatively few Natives became high school educated, college educated, or professionally employed. Recently scholars and educators, Native and non-Native, have begun to unravel just how complex the relationship is between schooling and Native living. As an example, Roy,<sup>6</sup> an Alaska Native educator, often recounts for his Native students how gaining educational credentials is measured against Native knowledge within his home community:

I grew up at Qaaktugvik ... and my family, majority of my family live[s in the village]. I went to high school , junior college and after a few years away from school I decided to come back to school at (the university). I decided to enroll in sociology, minor in anthropology ... then three more years

away from the state of Alaska ... in May of 1976 I graduated ... and also in 1976 I shot and killed my first whale.

When I talk to people about the time I came out with a masters degree (and started my professional career), my family (in the village) they thought of me being [on] a scale of one to ten and ten being like Bo Derek, I was about three with my masters degree. But when I shot and killed my first whale, then that zoomed up to seven, I think. All these years that I was away at school, away from home and away from the culture. Three months out of [graduate school] on September 27 at 10:45 am 1976 I shot and killed my first whale. My mother and my aunt are still telling the world about it, still. So it's one of those things that shot down the feeling that those schools in the western culture, for instance that you are going to lose your Nateness and your culture. It might be true for someone else but it wasn't for me....<sup>7</sup>

Not just about credentials, Roy's story conveys that the educational path from village life to "outside" school settings can be a challenging and unfamiliar one. By sharing this and other stories Roy affirms Native students' experiences and perhaps boosts their ability to persevere in such settings. Importantly, Roy's story highlights how common the belief has been that "those schools in the western culture" will in fact force one to lose one's "Nateness" and "culture." His story is a strong reminder that schooling has been a *subtractive* process<sup>8</sup> for many Natives. By "subtractive" I mean that in order to succeed in school, students feel forced to sacrifice much of their cultural identities as Natives and completely emulate mainstream cultural and behavioral norms in school settings. Certainly within many Native and marginalized communities the historical phenomena of harsh, discriminatory, racist, and assimilative schooling policy and practice have been accompanied by longstanding cultural and community notions that *either* students "do school," and therefore hide and camouflage parts of their identity, *or* they remain fully committed to their ethnic identity by intellectually and/or physically dropping out of school.<sup>9</sup>

This paper examines not only how Alaska Natives are living their lives in multiple settings, but also why they are doing so with more success than ever before. Native teachers, students, and community members are taking large strides toward promoting additive processes both in and out of the classroom. By "additive" I mean those processes which pri-

marily strengthen a unique and viable Native identity. The key dynamic is that this emergent identity cultivates more favorable and functional attitudes toward high academic achievement. Urban settings and experiences, in part, are a means to that achievement.

As a new millennium approaches, scrutinizing the relationship between schooling and Native identity is needed due to the increasing numbers of Native children attending urban public schools. Many of these schools have an overall low Native enrollment.<sup>10</sup> The small numerical presence of Native students does not mean that their social and cultural adjustment is unimportant to administrators, teachers, and Native community members. In fact, Native students' adjustment to the schooling environment can be a very large issue.<sup>11</sup>

Alaska, too, has experienced a parallel demographic trend. In the 1970s and 1980s a large voluntary migration of rural Natives occurred as the oil industry expanded into Prudhoe Bay and employment opportunities increased. The Fairbanks public schools began enrolling more Native children.<sup>12</sup> During this period Alaska Natives found themselves to be "emigrants in their own homeland" since the adjustment to urban life and to public schooling was neither simple nor smooth.<sup>13</sup>

Simultaneously, as this migration from village to city took place, sociolinguists were discussing the nature of classroom participation in American Indian communities.<sup>14</sup> Not unlike the adjustment and acculturation studies of urban Indians, these classroom studies have tended to describe and conceptualize only two schooling options for Native students: either that of "participation" or that of "silence" and/or complete absenteeism. Analytic emphasis has focused on whether or not schooling and home cultures are "congruent" and whether or not "participation structures" are in place to allow students to reap educational benefits. These classroom studies, like the urban adjustment and acculturation studies, remain valuable because they document the wide cultural divide between Native students and non-Native teaching methods and content during a particularly unique historical period for Indians and Natives. Yet the theoretical underpinnings of cultural congruency and participation structures fall short as full explanations for Native adjustment and Native school achievement in the 1990s. A fuller analysis needs to examine a broader picture of Native schooling. Such a picture must include the continuing importance that Native communities place on attaining formal

education;<sup>15</sup> the increasing numbers of Native students in a variety of schooling configurations such as tribal schools, charter schools, public schools, and the like;<sup>16</sup> as well as the continuing importance of maintaining a rich Native identity in urban and school settings.<sup>17</sup>

To provide a glimpse of the Alaskan picture, I summarize in this paper some findings after conducting doctoral fieldwork. I believe that three important cultural strategies have emerged from the long, troubled history of formal schooling for Alaska Natives. The first cultural strategy—asserting one’s Native identity by claiming that “*it is okay to be Native*”—occurs at the individual level or face-to-face with another Native, but often behind closed doors; that is, it is most often used among Natives in the absence of non-Natives. The second strategy is the personal and professional navigation of finding and using culturally relevant curricular materials. This contested domain most often involves the subcommunity of Native educators interacting with the larger schooling and Native communities. The third strategy is the work behind the blossoming of culture camps across the state of Alaska. These camps can be seen as a larger ethnic response, an effort to build Native institutions outside of the classroom which better meet the needs of the young in the classroom. Each cultural strategy has academic achievement as a part of its purpose and design, and each uses and relies, in part, on Native ways of knowing and being. I close this paper by briefly sketching out research implications and why it remains important to examine issues of identity and additive cultural processes to better understand how and why many Natives are living successfully in urban and formal schooling settings.

#### CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THIS RESEARCH

Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau are the three major urban centers in Alaska, “where life-styles more closely resemble the way of life in other states.”<sup>18</sup> Rural Alaska lies outside of these three cities and makes up more than 90 percent of the state’s landmass. Of the 600,000 or so Alaskan residents less than one-third are Native. Most of the Alaska Native population live in approximately 200 villages, “most being homogeneous by ethnic group.”<sup>19</sup> Alaska Natives make up 10 to 12 percent of the urban populations.

Inupiaq, Yupiq, Aleut, Tlingit, and Athabascan represent the five broad indigenous cultural groups in Alaska. The term *Alaska Native* was born out of political struggles for land and local public schools in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Originally a “myopic legal concept,”<sup>20</sup> it became a politicized term used by Native and non-Native activists. The term glosses a wide range of cultural and linguistic differences, but it also makes clear a politically oriented distinction between Native and non-Native interests in Alaska.

Throughout the last twenty-five years significant numbers of Alaska Natives have migrated from the rural areas into the urban centers. During the 1970s Alaska Natives were the fastest growing segment of the population in the Interior of Alaska. Many families settled in the Fairbanks area and reported that schooling and job opportunities were the primary reasons for moving to the city.<sup>21</sup>

Fieldwork for this study was situated in the Fairbanks area, but informed by visits to nearby villages as well as to Anchorage, Alaska’s largest city. Fairbanks has been and continues to be both an economic and a cultural crossroads for Interior Natives. Families and students are often in transit, sometimes from Fairbanks to Anchorage, but many times from a home village to another “neighboring” village. Alaska Native communities know this fluid or floating pattern of “visiting” friends and family well. However, the 1980 census reports had to be officially disputed to document the “floating” Native population. Now more widely recognized, this pattern<sup>22</sup> of floating refers to the fact that many Natives maintain residences in the village but spend several months of the calendar year in Fairbanks. Many Natives are living their lives in both rural and urban settings.

Like Weibel-Orlando<sup>23</sup> I was concerned with documenting a Native community structure that I knew existed, but that had not been formally discussed. To appreciate the range of Native institutions and activities in Alaska I had to look beyond the geographical boundaries of village and city. This community study includes the voices of rural and urban Natives, teachers and students, drop-outs and successful high school students. To hear such a variety of voices I had to examine a variety of contexts that both defined and sustained the Native community. Many of these contexts are located within institutional structures—schools and Native organizations like Doyon Regional Corporation and the human services agencies that comprise

the Tanana Chiefs Conference. Other contexts include Native cultural events such as the World Eskimo Indian Olympics (WEIO) and the annual Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) political meetings. Still other contexts are the homes, churches, workplaces, berry-picking patches, and the like where traditional subsistence activities occur or where life-cycle events take place.

Although this study examined many contexts, the analytic focus has been on Native students with particular attention paid to urban students. Much of the educational research in Alaska has focused on secondary students in the villages and Native postsecondary students in college settings. I hope this paper begins to address a growing concern for urban Native students as has been expressed in the following:

The urban Alaska Native student has received less attention than has his village counterpart. Data available on Native student achievement in the Fairbanks school system ... suggest that many of the problems and issues identified for rural Native students are equally applicable to urban Native students.<sup>24</sup>

What did such an examination of contexts and settings reveal about the current schooling experiences of Native Alaska's newest urban generation?

### IT'S OKAY TO BE NATIVE

To begin to answer this question one must be aware of how Native values and identity thread through schooling issues. As difficult "Native" issues surface, and sometimes explode at school, one of the most effective cultural strategies relied on to *initially* resolve ambiguity and ethnic conflict is the assertion that it is in fact *okay to be Native*. In this formulation being Native often means being different but it also means being "more." Sometimes being more refers to being bilingual and bidialectical.<sup>25</sup> Other times it refers to being keenly aware of the cultural differences between village and city lifestyles. And at other times it refers to coping with the emotional burdens of experiencing prejudice and stigma due to racial differences. Ultimately, it means being able to retain a sense of pride about one's home or natal culture(s) as one persists to succeed in urban and school settings. Listen as a Native teacher explains



that for many students being Native and attending school are two distinct and conflicting sets of experiences. Then she voices a common desire shared by all Native teachers in the study:

The [Native] kids drop out of school and say "I could go trap. I could go home [back to the village] and live. I could get the heck out of here. I don't have to be a part of this! I ain't a part of this; this ain't my school. I'm not going to have anything to do with ... [it]."

I wish they would realize that [this classroom] is a part of their school. It is a very big part of their life....<sup>26</sup>

This cultural ambivalence toward schooling among high school students has been well documented.<sup>27</sup> Listen further as a Native teacher talks about how early this ambivalence toward schooling and being Native starts:

I miss village life. I wish I could just go to fish camp, where there are no problems. Here [in town at school] there are problems. Gosh what do you tell the children? When my son came home from kindergarten and asked me, "Mom, am I Native? I don't want to be Native."

"Well why, son?"

"Because they always lose!"

You know I will never forget that. And I thought, my poor son, he's a black-headed little thing and can't be anything else but [Native] but he's realizing [the ambivalence, the stigma] at that age.<sup>28</sup>

From kindergarten to high school, and even into college, this ambivalence can endure for many Native students. Even if students themselves have not directly been involved in racial conflict, they are all too aware of the cultural and racial difficulties of previous Native generations within school settings. Students are able to recall family members kicked out of mission schools for not learning English quickly enough. Some students reported that their parents did not feel welcome in the high school and therefore refused to attend school-related activities. Clearly, being Native at school has been historically problematic.<sup>29</sup>

In the face of this living history of emotional strife and cur-

rent racial and cultural conflicts, how then do Native students persevere within the school setting? Listen to another Native teacher talking about her high school students:

I had a student come in and she said, "Man it's cold out there, and I have a parka [Native coat] but I'm not going to wear it." And I said, "Why's that?" and she said, "because I'm afraid people might laugh at me."

And you know I struggle with that too myself. And I think it's because we as minorities ... get the message from the dominant ... group of people that we are secondary. They don't directly say it, but that's the message. You know what I mean? So I even have second thoughts, but I did put my parka on this morning and I came to school. I try to get the message to the kids, "it's okay to be Native."<sup>30</sup>

This message can be and is demonstrated at school in a variety of ways: by wearing traditional Native clothing to school, bringing dried fish for lunch, requesting a Native-themed assembly, setting up an all-Native basketball squad, organizing a celebratory potlatch-like activity, and so forth.

Significantly, this message is also explicitly stated in face-to-face interaction. Numerous racialized incidents occurred while I was a participant-observer, illustrating that for some Native youth schooling is fraught with ambiguity and emotional and cultural strife. At times the phrase<sup>31</sup> seemed to ameliorate such strife, to begin to resolve conflict as if to say "that was wrong, now what can we do about it?" At other times the phrase was used to recreate a stronger sense of community, as if to say, "we're the same and they are different."<sup>32</sup> In spite of the conflicts and discomfort that schooling brings for Native students, the cultural response has been to counter such negative sentiments and incidents with an additive strategy. Often behind closed doors, Native teachers and staff reported that they spend a lot of time listening to Native students' concerns about fitting into the urban high schools, about personal struggles to achieve academically, and about coping with insensitive actions toward differences of being and living. Native teachers, the most successful Native students, and Native community members who worked with the schools reported that they have encouraged Native students through discussion by asserting that it is in fact *okay to be Native*.

However, these discussions and assertions occur within “a powerful silence.”<sup>33</sup> That is, they occur behind closed classroom doors, well beyond the eyes and ears of the wider schooling community of non-Natives. Consequently, there is less overall awareness of emotional difficulties, cultural conflicts, and student ambivalence. The nature of this powerful silence also reflects aspects of marginalized culture pushed to the side by schools and forced to find expression elsewhere. Irrespective of whether the broader schooling community sees it or not, asserting that *it is okay to be Native* has become a means by which a positive identity is affirmed in what can be a challenging setting.

### NAVIGATING THE CONTESTED DOMAIN OF NATIVE CURRICULAR MATERIALS

Perhaps more visible to both casual and professional observers are the public discussions and interactions which involve the contested issue of Native curricular materials. Many Alaska Natives feel that teaching a Native perspective would directly boost self-esteem, cultural pride, and encourage academic achievement. Many Natives and non-Natives want a Native perspective introduced in order to create a positive schooling experience for every student, but, not suprisingly, opinions vary about Native curricular materials both within and throughout the Native and schooling communities. Some teachers and educators are quite vocal about what should be taught and why. Significantly, Native teachers who were not necessarily embroiled in public debate about such issues did report devoting personal and private time to reviewing and often creating curriculum materials and pedagogies to address a cultural need. Clearly, there is a wide recognition and understanding that Native culture should have a more material and meaningful expression in schooling contexts; however, it is primarily Native teachers (although not exclusively) who try to incorporate coursework with a Native focus. One Native teacher states why:

I think [a Native curriculum] is important because [the Native students] need to, for one thing if they had something [more courses, more open discussions about Natives], it would make them feel good about themselves. You know, not being ashamed of who they are. Knowing their own heritage and not feeling like they're inferior to others. And I tell my students, “You know, those of you that come from the

bush, you know what bush life is like. Some of you know your language and therefore it makes you more, it makes you ... you know more stuff than people that were just in the city. You know what village life is like, you know how to hunt and trap and pick berries. And here those that were just here only know this one way." You know what I mean? It's two different ways of life.<sup>34</sup>

For some, Native courses and materials are a necessary means of instilling pride. For those who have Native ways and skills, recognition in a formal setting is affirming; for others without those skills it's an opportunity to become more familiar with traditional values. However, I found that in fact Native curriculum materials in Interior Alaska cut across a wide variety of schooling, community, and academic issues. Some of the materials included comprehensive curriculum guides, strategies for increasing parental involvement, developmental explanations for child performance, intuitive development for building self-esteem, how-to guides for initiating student groups and culture clubs, cultural and multicultural discussions and outlines, community involvement plans, cooperative learning techniques, learning styles theory, how-to guides for Native arts and activities, and drug and alcohol awareness programs. Much of this information comes from all over Native America and represents the effort of several Native organizations. Native teachers actively sought out this material, relied on some of it, and remained committed to gathering new information to inform their instruction.

Native teachers are concerned with issues of community and culture particularly as they intertwine with Native academic performance. The curricular materials and instructional information sought and gained have a dual role. It is thought both to enhance academic schooling experiences and to fortify Native identity in an urban setting. For example, a Native educator immediately handed me *Yesterday Still Lives ... Our Native People Remember Alaska* (1978). She stated, "We thought it was a such a good project we would like to do more." The first publication by the Fairbanks Native Education-Johnson O'Malley program, it was the product of five teenage Native students photographing, interviewing, and writing biographical sketches of Alaska Native elders in village settings. The piece is valued because its creation linked the multiple dualities of being Native over time and in and out of mainstream settings. The

piece bridged rural and urban experiences, the youth and elders, speaking and writing. This piece was the first of many I would receive from Native educators, which detailed for them some of the salient educational issues that focused on the additive nature of being Native in the city.

Native educators also reported that there were never enough opportunities to design projects such as the biographical sketches. When opportunities did arise, some were hotly debated before being implemented. For instance, some Native projects, particularly those that emphasized Native arts and crafts, were felt to detract students' attention from more mainstream academic work. Certainly Native arts and crafts are highly valued by Native community members, but the dispute centers on whether mainstream classrooms are the sites where youth should learn these skills. Many want Native youth to practice and understand Native skills and activities—basket-making, languages, trapping, and the like. On the other hand, it is feared that mainstream curricular efforts may trivialize and decontextualize Native skills and experiences. Listen as a Native professor provides commentary on a popular Native dance that has been taught in urban schools:

We have a problem [with] our students not coming in with the language skills and the knowledge of the culture. We have a problem when two thousand students learn to do this [motion dance]. Aangiyaanngiyaa!

You know that motion dance and you forget, just because they know how to do that motion dance does not make them to be Native person or people who have knowledge of the Native culture. That is what is kind of scary to see the children or young people who we know are Native, right? They have black hair and brown skin. You know, you stick out, you know. You're different.

Just because I learn how to do that and forget the meaning of those dances. Why did we have the Eskimo dances?

It was a time when in the middle of the winter, when you are not out hunting too much, maybe you do tell stories about your hunting feats that there is a purpose in it, but you are doing it in the motion dance, telling the people and ... if we lose the purpose and just become Hollywood, it is kind of scary.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the “hidden” discussions regarding one’s feelings and sense of belonging in school, these debates about curricular efforts are more public and often more contentious. Whether it is deciding on the thematic cultural focus of a Native preschool or determining whether high school students should learn about Native games, community participation is actively structured and encouraged school by school, issue by issue, and opportunity by opportunity.

As the discussions about Native curricular materials and courses continue, there appears to be room for compromise and resolution because a premium is placed on community participation from both rural and urban Natives and non-Natives.<sup>36</sup> From teacher to community member, many Natives are navigating the contested domain of curricular material. It is this widespread level of commitment that merits more attention. In particular urban Native teachers represent an important subcommunity<sup>37</sup> best able to articulate how the Native and schooling communities intersect and how it is that they as members of both are reshaping schooling experiences into additive ones.

### THE GROWING NUMBERS OF CULTURE CAMPS

While teachers work within schools, others are creatively utilizing sites outside of school to promote Native values and achievement. As mentioned before, aspects of Native culture that are pushed out by mainstream educational experiences can resurface in “safer,” albeit hidden, settings. Figuratively speaking, culture camps stand side by side with schools. Consequently, culture camps represent not just a safer setting but one that can provide a home for the development of Native culture.

In some of these camp settings, Native languages are used more frequently for opening prayers and the like. Likewise, Native science and environmental knowledge are passed on through techniques often unavailable in classrooms. Furthermore, opportunities to apply more traditional, communal responses to emotional strife and dilemmas aid in preparing Native youth for adulthood. The proliferation of culture camps throughout the state and the beginnings of an Athabascan tribal college have emerged in response to a long history of subtractive schooling experiences of Natives. These camps seek to make both urban living and schooling an additive process that enhances Native identity and living.

Well before the impressive and wide-reaching collaborative efforts of the Alaska Native/Rural Education Consortium<sup>38</sup> to document the indigenous knowledge systems of Alaska Native people, culture camps had sprung up throughout the state. During the last ten years some camps have been one-time events with a particular thematic focus, while others have persisted annually like *Sivunnigvuk* in Northwest Alaska. These camps are planned with a Native communal spirit often involving all generations. Some camps offer a brief respite from urban life; others are intensive retreats. At the heart of many camps has been the reliance on elders' experiences and traditional Native knowledge as a means to better understand the current problems and future directions of Alaska Native people.

More elders-in-residence programs and more culture camps are being planned and implemented in conjunction with school districts.<sup>39</sup> This strategy of designing and implementing culture camps involves many communities while cultivating a richer appreciation for Native expertise. The potential of this strategy for reshaping Native youth educational experiences rests deeply in the camps' ability to voice and celebrate cultural and educational issues and accomplishments in full view, not behind closed doors.

With a changing school environment and the existence of culture camps, Native students may enjoy more academic success, success like that of Enoch's—a high school senior who has two hometowns, Fairbanks and Anaktuvuk Pass, his natal village. He says that the worst part of going to an urban school is "the ignorance, the mindset that people have about others and ideas." He feels that having more Native teachers in the urban schools is important, especially since the recent Native political movements have "slammed home the truth of the idea that I am different for other people." According to Enoch, with regard to developing more Native classes:

To say it is of paramount importance does not fully stress the impending danger our culture is in. I would like to see more interaction between the elders and the youth to [preserve] our heritage, Native language classes, Native art classes and more classes that teach us about issues crucial to Natives.<sup>40</sup>

Enoch goes back and forth between Anaktuvuk Pass and Fairbanks. During the summer months between his junior and

senior years of high school he worked, read books, went to the movies, hunted, camped, and fished with relatives. He has decided to go to college and study business administration and management as well as the Inupiaq language and Alaska Native studies. However, in the upcoming summer, as if to prepare for the life-changing experiences of college he chooses not to "work so much" but rather to do "more hunting, fishing, camping, and visiting relatives."

The three strategies outlined in this paper have been a rich part of Enoch's schooling experiences. For Enoch and other Alaska Native students and community members, at the heart of being "more" are the unique cultural and familial experiences and values that are tied to subsistence skills and activities. At the heart of being more is the creation of personal and public spaces for learning and embracing Native culture and academic pursuits. This approach is in sharp contrast to the years of negative schooling attitudes when education was a subtractive process and when the psychological and cultural dichotomy of being either/or dominated both identity and academic participation.

In conclusion, Alaska Natives are reshaping schooling experiences in three significant ways: (1) there exists a willingness and strength to resist the pattern of dropping out of school and instead claim a place in school settings by asserting that it is in fact *okay to be Native*; (2) Native teachers are committed to seeking out and developing more accurate representations of a growing, unique, and at times embattled Native community; and (3) educational Native institutions like the camps and tribal colleges have emerged. Each of these strategies has dual or additive approaches to cultural, educational, and urban experiences rather than subtractive or cross purposes. Taken together, the Native community in and around Fairbanks seems to be promoting more academic participation in urban and school settings. I posit that, if supported by both the schooling and Native communities, this reshaping of culture will lead to higher levels of Native academic success. When rural roots are acknowledged, urban wings soar.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The reshaping of urban and schooling environments reveals cultural dynamics ripe for future work. Methods should focus



not only on microethnographic settings<sup>41</sup> such as the classroom, but also on macroethnographic settings that illuminate the multiple social and cultural networks<sup>42</sup> of Natives.

Being Native in urban schools is challenging. Research focusing on Native identity in schools may reveal those aspects of Native culture which remain critical but have been pushed out of mainstream education. In Interior Alaska, Native teachers themselves do not constitute a cohesive, monolithic community for several reasons (primarily because many of them are isolated, working in urban schools), yet their reflections and classroom approaches to learning may be rich areas of inquiry for better understanding student failure and success. What are some of the difficulties in redefining relationships and self-identity, and how do both teachers and students navigate these heady waters?

Broader comparisons among contemporary Native groups throughout the United States may illuminate key and enduring aspects of marginalized culture. In Alaska identity is heavily anchored in values, skills, and rights to subsistence. For other Native communities identity may be centered on the fight for federal recognition. For still others, a pan-Indian identity or the cultural growth and conflict associated with casino gaming may prove significant.

Finally this research area may clarify workable forms of multicultural education.<sup>43</sup> What remains to be seen and studied are those forums of cultural exchange that foster open discussions of all marginalized youth. For African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and similarly marginalized communities the legacy of school failure and the promise of school success are intimately tied to our society's solutions to racism and exclusion. These phenomena deserve scrutiny for as long as the United States remains a racially divided society.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Deborah Davis Jackson for her invitation to participate in the 1996 AAA Annual Meetings where I presented an earlier version of this paper for the panel, *Being Indian in the City: Reflections on Urban Indian Identity and Community*. I also thank Deborah Freedman Lustig for her collegial comments and suggestions and her supportive friendship. I would also like to thank the editors and anonymous readers who provided help-

ful comments on this paper. This work would not have been possible without the fellas, folks, friends, and family of Alaska, and to each of you I say "taku." The doctoral work from which this paper is drawn was supported with grants by the following institutions: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Association of American Indian Affairs, Institute for Intercultural Studies, University of New Mexico Albuquerque, the Doyon Limited Native Corporation, and Stanford University.

### NOTES

1. Several have summarized that the development of western schools in Alaska took place during five historical periods: the Russian period (1745-1867), the Early U.S. Period (1867-1900), the Emergence of the Dual System (1900-1917), the Territorial Period (1917-1959), and Statehood to the Present (1959-present). See Richard L. Dauenhauer, "Conflicting Visions in Alaskan Education" (Fairbanks: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, 1980); Kathryn Hecht, "The Educational Challenge in Rural Alaska: Era of Local Control," in *Rural Education in Urbanized Nations: Issues and Innovations*, ed. Jonathan Sher (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981); and Michael Krauss, *Alaska Native Languages: Past, Present and Future*, Research Paper (4) (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, 1980).

2. Over the years and in various disciplines several different terms have been used to describe the indigenous people of North America. Generally I use the term *Alaska Native* to refer to individuals and communities which are indigenous to Alaska. If needed or appropriate I will refer to specific tribes by name, e.g., Tlingit, Inupiaq, Yup'iq, and the like. I use the shortened form of *Native* as a more inclusive term, referring to both American Indians and Alaska Natives, or to all Natives (indigenous or not) in Alaska.

3. National Center For Education Statistics, *Characteristics of American Indian and Alaska Native Education* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995).

4. Representative of this large body of work is John A. Price, "The Migration and Adaptation of American Indians to Los Angeles," *Human Organization* 27 (1968): 168-175; and Price, "US and Canadian Indian Urban Ethnic Institutions," *Urban Anthropology* 4:1 (1975): 35-52; Sol Tax, "The Impact of Urbanization on American Indians," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 436 (1978): 121-136.

5. See, e.g., Judith Kleinfeld, *Alaska's Urban Boarding Home Program*, ISEGR Report #32 (University of Alaska: Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, 1972); John Collier, Jr., *Alaskan Eskimo Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973); and Jose Macias, "The Hidden Curriculum of Papago Teachers: American Indian Strategies for Mitigating

Cultural Discontinuity in Early Schooling," in *Interpretive Ethnography of Education at Home and Abroad*, eds. George and Louise Spindler (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987).

6. All personal names are pseudonyms.

7. Interview by author and personal correspondence, July 11, 1991; September 18, 1991; November 6, 1991; September-October 1992.

8. See Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, "'Black students' school success: Coping with the 'Burden of Acting White,'" *Urban Review* 18:3 (1987): 1-31.

9. Educationists have documented school programs, administrative configurations, and instructional styles related to dropping out. Some anthropologists have discussed cultural congruency, social mobility, and related issues to dropping out. All sources of information as well as interdisciplinary approaches are needed to understand the scope of this problem. See Donna Deyhle, "Pushouts and pullouts: Navajo and Ute school leavers," *Journal of Navajo Education* 6:2 (1989): 36-51; as well as Margaret LeCompte and Anthony Dworkin, *Giving Up on School* (Newbury Park: Corwin Press, 1991). Also see Henry T. Trueba, George and Louise Spindler, eds., *What Do Anthropologists Have to Say About Dropouts?* (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1989); John Ogbu, *Minority, Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Academic Press, 1978); and Ogbu, "Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 18:4 (1981): 312-334; Michelle Fine, *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). An important recent discussion is provided by Signithia Fordham, *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

10. National Center for Education Statistics, *Characteristics* (1995).

11. See, e.g., Peggy Wilson, "Trauma of Sioux Indian High School Students," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 22:4 (1991): 367-383; Richard King, *School at Mopass* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967).

12. *Fairbanks Native Association Needs Assessment* (Fairbanks: Fairbanks Native Association, 1983).

13. Carolyn Attneave, "American Indians and Alaska Native Families: Emigrants in Their Own Homeland," in *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, eds. Monica McGoldrick, John Pearce, and Joseph Giordano (New York: Guildford Press, 1982).

14. In the 1970s Labov and other sociolinguists provided ethnographic data to refute the belief that black vernacular or black dialect was inferior to standard English. This ethnographic approach (the ethnography of communication) provided data linking dialect differences to school failure. From this work many asserted that reading failure in the inner city was due to cultural and political conflict expressed in the classroom. Cultural congruency between teacher and student, curriculum and culture, and content and skills became the focus of reforms. This approach was also applied in Native American contexts. See Robert V. Dumont, "Learning English and How to be Silent: Studies in Sioux and Cherokee Classrooms," in *Functions of Language in the Classroom*, eds.

Courtney Cazden, Vera John, and Dell Hymes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972); Robert V. Dumont and Murray L. Wax, "Cherokee School Society and Intercultural Classroom," *Human Organization* 28 (1969): 217-26; Susan Philips, "Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom," in *Functions of Language in the Classroom*, 370-94.

15. See Margaret Szasz, *Education and the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1977); Guy B. Senese, *Self-Determination and the Social Education of Native Americans* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991); William G. Tierney, *Official Encouragement, Institutional Discouragement: Minorities in Academe—The Native American Experience* (New Jersey: Albex, 1992).

16. See National Center for Education Statistics, *Characteristics* (1995); Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, *Indian nations at risk: An educational strategy for action. Final Report* (Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1991).

17. For example, Mary Grantham-Campbell, "Successful Alaska Native Students: Implications 500 years after Columbus" (working paper presented at American Anthropology Association Annual Meetings, San Francisco, 1992); Grantham Campell, "To Walk, Talk and Write in Two Worlds: Cultural Identity and Achievement in Alaska Native Education" (paper presented at American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1995).

18. Michael DeMan, "Contemporary Rural Alaska and the Role of the Village Corporations," in *Alaska's Rural Development*, eds. Cornwall and McBeath (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 47.

19. Gerald McBeath, "Government-Assisted Development in Rural Alaska: Borough and Regional Quasi-Governments," in *Alaska's Rural Development*, 114.

20. Michael Gaffney, "The Human Resources Approach to Native Rural Development: A Special Case," in *Alaska's Rural Development*, 136.

21. *Alaska Economic Trends* (Juneau: Alaska Dept. of Labor, 1982). Also see *Fairbanks Native Association Needs Assessment*.

22. Research outside of Alaska shows that moving to urban areas may be temporary. Several different tribes outside of Alaska have exhibited a "circular" migration pattern to and from urban and rural areas. For early references see Sol Tax, "The Impact of Urbanization on American Indians," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 436 (1978): 121-136; Wesley R. Hurt Jr., "The Urbanization of the Yankton Indians," *Human Organization* 20 (1961): 226-231.

23. Joan Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.: Maintaining Ethnic Community in Complex Society* (Urbana University of Illinois Press, 1991).

24. *Fairbanks Native Association Needs Assessment* (Fairbanks: Fairbanks Native Association, 1983).

25. See William Leap, "American Indian English," in *Teaching American Indian Students*, ed. Jon Reyhner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 143-153; Jon Reyhner, ed. *Effective Language Education Practices and Native Language Survival* (Choctaw, OK: Native American Language Issues, 1990);

Michael Krauss, *Alaska Native Languages: Past, Present and Future*, Research paper (4) (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, 1980).

26. Interview by author and personal correspondence, November 10, 1989; November 22, 1989; September-October 1992.

27. For a recent article example, see Peggy Wilson, "Trauma." Also see above, note 9.

28. Interview by author and personal correspondence, November 10, 1989; November 22, 1989; September-October 1992.

29. See the following histories of Native boarding school experiences: Alice Littlefield, "The B.I.A. Boarding School: Theories of Resistance and Social Reproduction," *Humanity and Society* 13:4 (1989): 428-441; Sally McBeth, *Ethnic Identity and the Boarding School Experience* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1983). Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); Judith Kleinfeld, *A Long Way From Home: Effects of Public High Schools on Village Children Away From Home* (Fairbanks, Alaska: Center for Northern Educational Research and Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, 1973).

30. Interview by author and personal correspondence, November 1989.

31. Compare with other metaphors to describe Native educational issues. See Wendy C. Kasten, "Bridging the Horizon: American Indian Beliefs and Whole Language Learning," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 23:2 (June 1992): 108-119. Kasten states, "Some Native Americans, caught between their own culture and belief system and the mainstream world, have coined the term "stuck in the horizon" to describe their feelings of dissonance, feeling they are part of neither the Earth nor the sky." Another common and significant metaphor is that of Natives "walking in two worlds."

32. Not unlike points and observations made by Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

33. The term *silence* here is quite different than what sociolinguists documented in the 1970s (see note 14). See Lisa Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," *Harvard Educational Review* 58:3 (1988): 280-298. Also see, Deborah Jackson, "Urban Indian Identity and the Violence of Silence" (paper presented at American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings, San Francisco, 1996).

34. Interview by author and personal correspondence, November 1989.

35. Interview by author and personal correspondence, July 11, 1991; September 18, 1991; November 6, 1991; November 21, 1991.

36. Perry Mendenhall, "Bicultural School Organization and Curriculum," in *Cross-Cultural Issues in Alaskan Education*, ed. Ray Barnhardt (Fairbanks: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, 1982). For more insight on teaching and community in rural Alaska, see Ray Barnhardt and J. Kelly Tonsmeire, eds., *Lessons Taught, Lessons Learned: Teachers' Reflections on Schooling in Rural Alaska* (Fairbanks: Alaska Department of Education, 1988); and G. Williamson McDiarmid, Judith Kleinfeld, and William Parrett, *The Inventive Mind: Portraits*

of *Rural Alaska Teachers* (Fairbanks: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, 1988).

37. See Jose Macias, "The Hidden Curriculum of Papago Teachers: American Indian Strategies for Mitigating Cultural Discontinuity in Early Schooling," in *Interpretive Ethnography of Education at Home and Abroad*, eds. George and Louise Spindler (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987); Carol Barnhardt, "Tuning-In: Athabaskan Teachers and Athabaskan Students," in *Cross-Cultural Issues in Alaskan Education*, Vol. 2, ed. Ray Barnhardt (Fairbanks Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska, 1982). Also see Jerry Lipka, "Toward a Culturally Based Pedagogy: A Case Study of One Yup'ik Eskimo Teacher," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 22:3 (September 1991): 203-223; Lynn McAlpine, Alice Eriks-Brophy, and Martha Crago, "Teaching Beliefs in Mohawk Classrooms: Issues of Language and Culture," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 27:3 (September 1996): 390-413.

38. The Alaska Native Rural Education Consortium was formed under the auspices of the Alaska Federation of Natives and in cooperation with the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 1994.

39. Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt, "Alaska Native/Rural Education Consortium for Systemic Integration of Indigenous and Western Scientific Knowledge," Project Description and Program Proposal involving AFN, UAF and NSF, 1995-1996.

40. Enoch's excerpts and quoted material are from interviews by author and personal correspondence, May 6-13, 1988.

41. John Ogbu, "School Ethnography: A Multilevel Approach," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 12:1 (1981): 3-10.

42. Susan Lobo, "Is Urban a Person or a Place?" (Paper presented at American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings, San Francisco, November 1997).

43. Deborah Freedman Lustig, "In and Out of School: School Age Mothers in Urban California Negotiate Parenthood, Class, Gender and Race/Ethnicity," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Michigan, 1997).