



## Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogies

Yupiunringaitua/The Skirt I Refuse to Wear

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# YUPIUNRIRNGAITUA/THE SKIRT I REFUSE TO WEAR

Panigkaq Agatha John-Shields

## ABSTRACT

*The primary purpose of this chapter is to portray the transformative, educational journey of an Indigenous educator. Using an Indigenous way of learning in connection with the Yup'ik teachings of kenka/love and ellangeq/awareness the author describes the clashes and challenges that Western education brings about as it conflicts with Indigenous epistemologies. She shares how she transformed her way of learning and teaching in higher education through continuous reflection and transformation by using her own Indigenous ways of knowing. She goes on to show how these ways of knowing can transform higher education classrooms into culturally sustaining and revitalizing spaces.*

**Keywords:** Culturally sustaining; indigenous epistemologies; critical pedagogy; culturally responsive; awareness; indigenous pedagogy

*Taugaam ayagyuamta ciunerkaatnun kinguliamta qanruyun taugaam kiingan calissuute-karqerput. Ellangcarturluki, wangkuta nallumritaargemtenek augkunek ciuliamtenek elitellruaramtenek kinguvarrvikluki/As we work on securing our children's future, what*

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our elders taught us is our only tool. We need to teach and pass down what we know that we heard from our ancestors.

– Dr. Chief Kangrilnguq Paul John, Nunakauyaq  
(Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009, pp. 450–451)

## KITUUCIQA/WHO I AM

My Yugtun name is *Panigkaq*. I am named after my late paternal grandmother's cousin who is originally from *Kuigilnguq* (Kwigillingok), Alaska. I was born and raised in the Yup'ik community of *Nunakauyaq* (Toksook Bay), Alaska, located in the southwest coast of Alaska, 110 miles west of Bethel. I am the daughter of the of late *Kangrilnguq Aaquqsaq* Paul and *Anguyaluk* Martina John. I am the eighth out of nine children. I am the granddaughter of *Piiyuuk* Frances and *Ussugan* Abraham Usugan (maternal grandparents) and *Angayiq* Anna and *Qungurkaq* Johnny Kungurkak (paternal grandparents).

Together my husband, Sam and I have six children and four grandchildren. Our children are of mixed raced (Yup'ik and Black). Four of our younger children are bi-literate in Yugtun and English. My children and grandchildren's first language is Yup'ik. My children have had the fortune of living and learning about my Yup'ik language and culture from my hometown, as well as from participating in *Ayaprun Elitnaurvik*, a Yup'ik immersion charter school that we all were very involved in as a family. Our children's Western educational experience has been in Toksook Bay, Bethel, and Anchorage, Alaska, all of which vary from rural to urban educational contexts.

For my formal education, I received my bachelor's degree in Secondary Education with an emphasis in Math and Science. However, my educational career has been in language and culture revitalization efforts for over 17 years. I started as a Yugtun teacher and later became a principal at *Ayaprun Elitnaurvik* after I received my Master's in Educational Leadership. The last six years of my teaching career has been with the University of Alaska Anchorage. Currently, I am a Ph.D. candidate with a research focus on Culturally Responsive Teacher Education.

I am one of three Indigenous members in a majority Caucasian faculty at the University of Alaska Anchorage in the College of Education. I teach for Educational Leadership (EDL) where I supervise intern principals and also teach multicultural courses for the teacher education programs.

For four summers, I have had the privilege of being selected to teach at a fish camp made possible by a grant through the Alaska Humanities Forum, which partnered with the Calista Corporation and Lower Kuskokwim School District. The goal of this grant is to support brand new teachers to Alaska with a cross-cultural immersion experience led by Elders where youth and other culture bearers from the region take part as well.

## NUTEMLLARPUP/OUR WAY OF LEARNING

As the late *Miisaq* Frank Andrew, Sr., of Kuigilnguq summarized, “*Paitanka elpecenum yuuluqautekat*/My gifts guiding you toward a well-lived life” (Andrew, 2008, p. xxi). I tell my story of our way of learning through my journey and what I learned from my parents, Elders, and the community around me to guide us toward a well-lived life. Indigenous ways of teaching and learning are holistic. As Indigenous people, we are closely linked to our large families and community. The community connection is a critical part of our lives. Knowledge intertwines together to regenerate our Indigenous language and culture through working together and learning together (Suina, 2008). The traditional education is the oral foundation of a properly lived life (Andrew, 2008; John, 2009; Kawagley, 2006; Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009).

Indigenous people have had their own educational structures even though Western schooling was introduced to Indigenous communities a few centuries ago. Andrew (2008) and John and Fienup-Riordan (2003) explained how knowledge was learned in a *qasgi* (men’s house) and at home. All practical aspects of life were done in the *qasgi*: sleeping, working, eating, visiting, and telling stories. The topic of instruction focused on moral education, including observation and later, hands on instruction. Moral education covered *qanruyutet* (words of wisdom). Once the instructor felt a child understood the basic aspects of instruction and observation, the learner was given the opportunity to start hands on education (Andrew, 2008).

Kawagley’s (2006) and John’s (2009) models represent a holistic way of learning and being from an Indigenous worldview of education and considers a time of learning as continuous in the environment (Andrew, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Brayboy, 2008; John, 2009; Kawagley, 2006; Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009). *Yuuyaraq* (way of life) teachings are guides to healthy life expectations beginning from inside the womb to earliest

childhood, to adolescence, through adulthood and finally to being an Elder. These teaching are very similar to character building (Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009). Indigenous peoples had their standards, teaching strategies, discipline systems and assessments (John, 2009; Kawagley, 2006). John (2009) specifies the traditional teaching theoretical framework of Indigenous knowledge integrated in stories, warnings, words of wisdom, advice, directions of life, practices, social practices, abstinence, ways with words, and wisdom. The standards and rules they abided by followed the *alerqutet* (do's) and *inerqutet* (don'ts) (John, 2009; Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009). Expectations were held high and integrated with community standards and values as a guide to a successful way of life. Values and spirituality were the core of being and were a part of the way of life and connection to the world around us. They were shared through stories and advice (Barnhardt, 2005; Brayboy, 2008; John, 2009; Kawagley, 2006; Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009).

## KENKAKUN/THROUGH LOVE

*Tua-i wangkuta una kenka aturluku pikumta assirarkauguq ilaput tamalkuita umyuarrli-qutevkenaki kenekluki. Una-wa tua' kenka nunam qainganelngurnun atulriaruan canun tamaitnun quyinukacagauluku.* There will only be goodness if we exemplify Love in all we do with and toward all our peers, not with ill thoughts. Love is the utmost nurtured value practiced throughout the universe, across the globe, that is applied to everything. Dr. Chief Kangriinguaq Aaquqsaq Paul John (John-Shields, 2015, para 3–4)

*Kenka* (love) is the biggest value for Yup'ik people. Lucy Utuan Spark, an Elder from Bethel, told the story of her mother advising her during her pregnancy to love the fetus in her womb by talking to it (Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009). Her mother continued to advise her that she was to practice the love of her child throughout its upbringing. John's (2009) dissertation on dancing and its meanings illustrates *kenka* as part of music and dance. Her example was of how composers show their love for others through various songs, stories, and legends. The *Calricaraq* (Promoting Health and Wellbeing) program through Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation Behavioral Health in Bethel, Alaska, implements *kenka* as one of its values. The program has Elders as leaders and mentors with a few key people assisting them as they work with communities. The cycle includes *kenka* as one of the first three values the Elders have considered as a vital value to teach, starting with toddlers and beyond (Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, 2013).

## ELLANGEQ/BECOMING AWARE

The base word of *ellangeq* is *ella*, which is very significant. *Ella* could mean the weather, the universe, outside, our conscience/awareness, and the world (John, 2009). Everything with *ella* has consciousness and all relationships with everything you encounter are intertwined and co-exist. John (2009) defines *ellaka* as a sense of speaking of a person's awareness in first person, my awareness or consciousness. *Ellangcaq* is asking someone to acquire knowledge or awareness or to be instructed toward becoming aware. *Ellangcaartua* is putting effort to become aware. *Ellangengiinartua* is a gradual process toward becoming aware from a first person level. *Ellangumauq* is a description of who is already aware of self and the effect actions have on others. *Ellangenritua* is one who recognizes when they are not being aware. The level of getting to a person's awareness is done through *qanemcit*, *qulirat*, and *qanruyutet* (different genres of stories) (John, 2009).

As you see, there are many terms *ella* entails. For me, the term I find relevant for my work is *ellangeq* (becoming aware). As an educator, my goal is to first understand my own *ellangeq* to have a better relationship with the people I serve. *Ellangeq* could start from the womb. This is where the caretaker or other mentors talk to the baby inside the womb because it is believed that some *ellangeq* is present even in the womb (Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009). Learning and teaching continues throughout encounters with other people and as one experiences life's journey. *Ellangeq* is an important aspect of learning and is the integral part of character building for Yup'ik people. *Ellangeq* is similar to remembering your earliest recollection/memory. This awareness builds and helps shape character through life experiences and teachings as one evaluates and reflects from listening to *tegganret* (elders) and *ellalirturta* (mentors).

As part of our growth, reflection is an important part of the process of *ellangeq* that allows one to experience deeper learning. It is also our choice to learn and grow with the instruction we are provided by our teachers. We can accept it and grow or disregard it. As human beings, we create our own paths depending on whether we choose our teachings. In my academic work, I have used cultural proficiency self-assessments to reflect toward achieving improvement through an inside-out process (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006). This tool is for individuals or organizations to work toward culturally proficient instruction by focusing on individual behavior or organizational practice. The goal is that changes will help shift cultures of diverse organizations. The inside-out process of this model teaches individuals how to recognize others' values and feelings and encourage change with entitlement rather than creating feelings of oppression.

## ELLANGEQERRAALQA/MY FIRST RECOLLECTION OF BECOMING AWARE

My *ellangeq* experiences shaped me into who I am today. I believe I was about a year and a half when I was first aware. I can still vividly remember one of my first few *ellangeqerraaq* experiences I had with my mother and one of my many grandmothers. I was home alone with my mother in our big, two-bedroom home. I recall standing behind my mother at the same height as she was sitting down working on a grass basket. I came behind my mother and embraced her around her neck. I remember a sense of fear, but knowing I was in close contact with my mother, I felt safe. I realized my fear was coming from a brown, wind-tanned, wrinkly, elderly woman with streaks of gray in her mostly jet black hair. She was walking slowly toward us with a big smile on her face and piercing eyes. I then saw that her big, round eyes were filled with love for me. Little did I know at that time, she was one of my many grandmothers, who we called our *marilkaq* (a specific grandmother term for certain family relatives). I curiously wondered what our *marilkaq* was going to do. My mother was silently chuckling, knowing our *marilkaq* was going to show her love by cooing at me. (Cooing is understood by Yup'ik people as a form of bonding love with babies and toddlers.) Our *marilkaq* transferred her right side ivory ear hook with a beaded earring to her septum piercing. When she got close enough she shook her head side-to-side and said, "Ahhhh!" and startled me. I lost my awareness shortly after that. This example of one of my first *ellangeqerraaq* experiences was the beginning of character building in my worldview. After several experiences of that and learning from observation, I learned who my *marilkaq* was and later understood that type of relationship is a way of showing love. Today, I understand she was one of the many special grandmothers who taught me and showed love through teasing and cooing at me. As a grandmother, I am following that role and expressing my love to my own grandchildren through lots of teasing and cooing.

## PUUKAUTELQA/CLASHING OF MY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I grew up in a small, Yup'ik community where our home and the outdoor community always had adults watching over all children. Our parents and

our maternal grandmother, who we called *Al'a*, lived in our three-bedroom home with nine of us children along with my parents. As a daily occurrence, we had many other grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. who were always at our home to eat, talk, tell stories, sing and drum traditional *yuraq* (Eskimo dance) songs, sing church songs, or to visit. I learned through observing, listening, and doing things with the adults at home and in the community. Learning was about *yuyyaraq* (way of life), *nutemllaq*, and *piciryaraq* (traditions, values, and beliefs). This guidance and preparation was the foundation for us to become productive and contributing members of the community. This daily learning was through Indigenous knowledge by living and doing things together with our elders, mentors, adults, and peers in our lives. This was our daily education.

Formal Western schooling is another story in its ways of learning. Formal Western schooling is standardized. The way of teaching is academic. Learning goals are individualized with the objective of rising to the top so you can be successful on your own. At age four, when I began a Montessori preschool, my formal, Western schooling started, and the way of learning from the holistic approach changed quickly. The environment and approach was different in language, pedagogy, and discipline. I was also taught by subjects in a way that put everything into separate categories. This formal, Western way of teaching continued in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Elementary School, Jr. and Sr. High School and in college.

I felt very disconnected most of my schooling in these learning environments. I knew I was different from the Western standards and expectations. I also learned quickly to find a way to survive in this type of learning environment. I was curious and afraid to make a mistake. I knew I did not want to be “bad” in school. I did not want to disappoint my strict, White teachers that I vividly remember wearing skirts.

I learned how to navigate successfully through the educational system to avoid failure and to do well by getting A's in my schoolwork and sitting still while instructed. I succeeded and learned to survive formal education. I was colonized and trained to be a good, compliant student. I went as far as receiving my Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education in Math and Science and later my Master's in Educational Leadership.

One thing I am very grateful of throughout this learning experience was not letting go of my Indigenous knowledge. I did not use much of my Indigenous knowledge in my formal Western schooling, but deep in my heart I knew I somehow wanted to weave my Indigenous knowledge into the educational system as an Indigenous educator. Little did I realize,



Western schooling trained me to perpetuate that model, no matter how genuine my intentions were to create more culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) schools.

After I got my bachelor's degree, I automatically prepared myself to be that "teacher" from my primary years. I visualized how I would look as the strict, White teachers did in a skirt and dress shoes. I first felt the need to prepare and present myself as how my primary teacher looked. I went to a clothing store and bought my "teacher" clothes: blouses, skirts, and heels. However, the night before I started my first day of teaching, I started looking through my clothes to pick my wardrobe. That night, I Indigenized my way of thinking of myself as "the teacher." I could not convince myself to wear the skirt my colonized brain thought a teacher should wear. The skirt did not match my inner soul as an Indigenous teacher. I knew deep inside I had to follow my Indigenous way of teaching, even outward. That was my first realization that it was okay for my physical presentation to match my inner soul. I refused to wear the skirt.

That was my turning point as an Indigenous teacher. I came to that point by Indigenizing myself and accepting that it was okay to be me, the Indigenous educator, and do just as well the way that I am. I gave myself permission to pack away my skirts. I wore *qaspeqs* (traditional regalia) and accepted them as my professional wear to teach our people, our Yugtun language, and culture in a Western school setting.

## CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY

The population is increasingly diverse in the United States. There are 99 languages spoken in the Anchorage school district and only 44% of students identify as being White (Anchorage School District, 2016). Academic gaps remain between White and the Othered population in graduation rates, standardized assessments data, and dropout rates (Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, 2015). Paris (2012) defines Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a way of teaching that, "seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). In my own experience, my university students are working in schools that have many different languages spoken in homes than are spoken at school. They also come from many different cultural backgrounds that are fluid and changing as they

interact and change within society. The exciting challenge teachers have is to find a balance between delivering the required curriculum and including in their instruction what the students bring from home. Teachers need to learn to utilize their students' experiences in their pedagogy. This is a win–win situation for both the teacher and students in a diverse environment. Then students do not have to be assimilated in the dominant Western society, but instead gain more knowledge about themselves and others around them. Paris and Alim (2014) argue we must understand and foster our multilingual and multicultural global society and not focus our attention only on the White, monolingual, monocultural, and middle class society that we currently have today as our academic achievement norm.

Ladson-Billings (2014), the scholar who first created the theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy now recognizes that some educators have misunderstood and misused Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in their practice. To further understand the perspective of Paris (2012), Ladson-Billings (2014) supports the need for further research and implementation for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. This research is especially needed when we consider the growing diversity of today's global population. The final quote I include is the last message of my late father. It summarizes well the purpose of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. His words speak of not losing our language for the sake of the others, and an encouragement for others to preserve their language as well. This is my late father's parting message, five days before he left us here on earth.

*Waqaarameci tamarpeci yuullgutemni ellam iluani cakuciugraata. Tua-llu Agayutem yuliaqellermikut taqutellruuq ellam taugaam iquani piunrirarkanek, picunrirarkanek... Tua-ll' maa-i nutem qaneryaraput Yup'igni Yugtun katayunaitqapiaryaaqerput tua-i yuucimta mat'un power-aqngani angelriaruluku. Cali-ll' wangkuunrilngermeng cakucit camani-ll' acimteni tayima qaneryararkiucsesseng tuaten aturluku cakuciuuermeng tua-i elluarrluku tamana tamai qaneryararkiutvut ellam iqukliteltra ullagturallemteni katagpeknaku elluarrluku piurqumteggu quyanagsugngaluta.* /Greetings to all my fellow human beings throughout all races/cultures. When God created beings, He created all things with the intention for all living things to perish and become extinct in the end... Then as for the Yup'it, we absolutely cannot allow ourselves to lose our traditional spoken Yup'ik language because it is the most powerful tool we have as a people. Also, inclusive of the other cultures with their own spoken languages that are located on the opposite polar end of the earth from us, we will be thanked for our endless efforts to preserve and not lose our traditional languages as we approach the end of life on earth. In the end, we will be ever grateful for having worked tirelessly toward its preservation. (Late Chief Dr. Paul Kangrilinguq/Aaquqsaq John, interviewed on March 1, 2015, as translated by Jolene Arnaqulluk John)

## KITUKANIUTENKA ELITNAURILLEMNI/ ADAPTATIONS TO MY TEACHING FOR MORE CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PRACTICE

My late father, Dr. Chief Kangrilnguq John, stated that *Ellam Yuan* (Creator of the Universe) put each and every one of us on earth as different people on purpose. Human beings have been gifted different languages, and different ways of living and being. He emphasized that educators need to respect everyone's way of learning and living as each person's ways are a gift from the *Ellam Yua*. My conversation with him deepened my passion of guiding future educators toward improving their attitudes and behaviors to become better connected to their students.

As an educator for over 22 years, I have been trying to make things work for my students and people I work with. I find through my worldview, I feel that I have not made huge changes, but made small tweaks to my way of teaching. To be responsive to students, small adaptations are what it takes with all the standards and requirements we have to meet as educators (Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, & Stuczynski, 2011).

### *Knowing Self and Others*

Before making any plans I believe it is important to know who you are and where you stand to be able to work with others (Robins et al., 2006). As part of my life-long process as a Yup'ik learner, I also self-assess my own cultural proficiency by looking into my own background and the clash I experienced in Western schooling. This helps me to find how I fit into the course I am going to teach. I find ways to integrate my Indigenous worldview and experience in my classes that I know could help my students get to know me as well as find paths to connect through the topic in the classroom. To be culturally proficient, I also have to know my students to meet their needs in my classroom. The goal during my class preparations is to research and explore different teaching strategies that best work for my students. I do that by thinking of ways for them to share about their own life journey. I also want them to reflect in ways that will trigger awareness and prepare them for the pluralistic society in which they live and teach. I find my role as their instructor similar to that of the elders' as a *ellalirturta* (mentor/teacher/counselor) who nurtures, guides and learns with them as they also adapt and adjust to me.

### *Backwards Design*

After getting to know my students as individuals and the experiences they bring, I next study what concepts and learning goals I have for them. This beginning with the end in mind is called backwards planning and gives me a vision of what the overall goals of the class are. I look at the requirements and set the flow of topics based on the school and/or community events throughout the semester. I continue to reflect on what adaptations I need to make based on who my audience will be. In order to for my students to learn the most effectively, I plan my classes so there is substantial time for my students to co-construct through questioning, storytelling, guidance, and reflection. I believe my adaptation parallels how our Elders' taught to allow for reflection toward becoming a better being. I find this holistic approach is the best fit for the way I teach and to model for future teachers and principals. I want them to think of how their teaching and learning impacts all their students.

### *Quotes*

I start each class with a selection from *Qanruyutet Inruugut/Our Teachings are Medicine*. This book is composed of quotes and explanations in both Yugtun and English of Elder knowledge and explains how the words guide healthy living. Indigenous ways of learning are intertwined and connected holistically with life and I find that quotes help a person become aware in their own life journey depending on where they are. I try to pick sayings that fit the topic and the value for the week. For example, the quote by Josephine Enoch of Tuntutuliak touches on how love can overcome and change bad behavior toward improvement. "We can help one who is going through troubles by loving them" (Rearden & Jacobsen, 2009, pp. 136–137). I then connect the quote to a value, which I will explain in more detail below.

### *Values*

I choose selected Alaska Native values and quotes from Elders that relate to the topic to open each class. I choose common values that most Western students can understand to bridge the cultural gap between Indigenous peoples and my non-Native students.

The students are asked to give about a five-minute presentation on the selected value for the week. Students have a choice on their presentations; they can either base them on their own understanding and connection to their upbringing or choose and present about their own students' cultures. For my example, at the beginning of the class, I share the value of respect. I start off with respecting self can be shown through taking care of body and by being prepared to learn. I also touch on respecting others by not being disruptive in class and by listening and helping Elders. Lastly, I talk about how we are respecting the environment by keeping the school clean and taking care of the fish and animals. After sharing, I ask students to compare this value to their own upbringing and discuss how similar or different it is from the Indigenous value we are studying. I also encourage them to see how my Indigenous perspective of respect can easily be implemented in their classroom.

I use the values as a way to find the common ground between the students and myself. I highlight how we were all taught similar values by our parents and mentors but from our own worldviews. I find the values helpful toward transforming negative attitudes and that students sometimes exhibit behaviors by learning more about themselves and others. Values are one way to connect between cultures no matter what differences there may be. My hope is that teachers will use their understanding to lessen the cultural gap and impact their curiosity enough to want to integrate other minority populations' cultures and backgrounds into their classrooms. I also hope they find the Indigenous values edifying enough to implement into their own classrooms as a tool to get to know and connect better with their own students. In order to integrate with the requirement of various standards, values can be adapted in health and character building classes. They are also relevant to issues of school climate and connectedness, which schools in Alaska focus on and assess through an annual survey.

### *Yugtun Language*

As a Yup'ik speaker who grew up in a very Yup'ik, culturally rich, home environment, I find that to model being bilingual and having a strong identity in the dominant society is important. Sharing about myself also opens the opportunity for my students to build and gain trust. The first activity I include in my class is my Yugtun language to put them in positions of what a non-English speaker experiences in the classroom when they cannot understand what is going on. This experience hopefully gives them empathy

with English Language Learners. I also share the literacy background of Yugtun for students to see how a person's home language may cause transfer challenges to English orally or through literacy.

### *Yuraq*

I often *yuraq* (Yup'ik dance) with my students to have them experience a fun and holistic way of learning. For online classes, I sing for them and show them photos of dancing to discuss the importance and richness *yuraq* brings to the community. After their experience of *yuraq*, we then talk about the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional connections dancing entails. This allows for my students to experience my upbringing and importance of what my culture brings. After that, we discuss and brainstorm how *yuraq* connects to standards, and that they can be adapted into physical education, health, music, language arts, social studies, and math. After this, I ask them to keep in mind how their classrooms reflect many other cultures and rich backgrounds that can be learned from if they are included in classroom interactions.

### *Telling My Story*

Throughout the class, I tell my own experiences that are both positive and challenging in the effort to expose them to real life issues. Most of my students will be exposed to diverse student populations, so it is important for me to share my story for them to think about the Othered populations in their classrooms. By sharing my story, they learn about me and in turn think about their own stories and others they may come across in their classrooms. As the Othered population, I find telling real stories opens trust and sympathy for those that are willing to be more aware of Othered populations in their classrooms or work environment.

### *Assignments*

Aside from the reading materials that are required for the course, I attempt to include discussions or assignments that trigger reflection and inquiry of who they will be serving in their classrooms. I ask for reflection and observation of Othered populations other than their own. As educators, learning

about who you serve will only encourage more curiosity and willingness to adapt for your students. We must always be aware that our students will become our future leaders.

## CONCLUSION

In this narrative I have shared the beginning of deepening my awareness from my past experience. First, I reflected on my childhood growing up in the rich culture of my family and community. Next, I explored the effects of Western schooling on my identity and who I believed I should be as a new teacher. Finally, I shared how my acceptance and love for my culture and language has led to my current practices as a university instructor and researcher. Learning does not take place with one goal or one focus as Western educational models seem to support. Learning requires listening, observing, and doing, as well as using all senses from spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional realms of life (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). The Western educational system needs to adapt for both the Indigenous worldview as well as the Western worldview (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Brayboy, 2008) to assist all students with their success in the schools.

Most Indigenous people have been and still are colonized through Western schooling and societal expectations that make it difficult to change. For me to be a successful, Indigenous educator, I need to include my Indigenous worldview into my own pedagogy. Dei (2011) mentions the importance of decolonizing yourself to find yourself and to include your way of being into your work/education. There is a need to include my Indigenous perspectives to decolonize so I can make a difference for our fellow Indigenous people and better understand and learn the knowledge about the complex world we live in. What I learned at home since I *ellan-geq* (became aware) has enhanced my praxis and I will continue to learn for my lifetime, just as my father reminded me. I want to share my personal and professional knowledge with others to impact the future of our children, because the knowledge I gained up to today is not mine.

When I reflect back on my decisions in my personal and professional life, my Indigenous knowledge grounds my thinking processes. All of my formal education and Indigenous knowledge has enhanced my way of teaching. I am more successful and confident when I include my Indigenous knowledge and it is impactful to my students from all walks of life. I am continuing the process of Indigenizing myself as a Native

educator. This is my reflection and transformation. My history, experiences, and learning create the teacher I am today. As Elders tell us, “If you do not understand now, you will understand when you get there.”

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