

# Lena-m nasvitakut qaillun elitelaucianek

# Lena shows us how she learns

A New Vision for Indigenous Schools

Illustrated by Apay'uq Moore  
Written by Matthew Turner  
Translated to Yugtun by  
Mikic Aqvang' George



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If you are reading this message, this story is for you. If you want to lose yourself in the world created by the pictures of this book, this story is for you. If you find strength and direction in the words of Angayuqaq Kawagley, this story is for you. If you want more children to tell stories like Lena's, this story is for you.

Learn more, download an electronic version of this book, ask questions, or share your story at:

[www.LenaLearns.org](http://www.LenaLearns.org)

This story relies heavily on the work and words of Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley. The quotes cited in this book are from Mr. Kawagley's excellent book *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit*. Second edition, Copyright 2006 by Waveland Press, Inc. ISBN 978-1-57766-384-3

The book is still available in print and electronic form.

Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley was a Yup'ik anthropologist and educator born in Bethel, Alaska in 1934. He earned his bachelor's degree in education from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks in 1958 and received a PhD in social and educational studies from the University of British Columbia. He was an associate professor of education at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks until his death in 2011.



**This story is a real vision set in a fictional place.**

**It outlines a new approach to culturally  
integrating Indigenous education.**

**It is possible for every idea and practice told here to  
take place in an Alaskan Village right now.**

*This is a multidisciplinary, multisensory,  
holistic, and potentially exciting  
approach to education - schoolwork  
connected to the work and play of the  
community." (Kawagley, 98)*



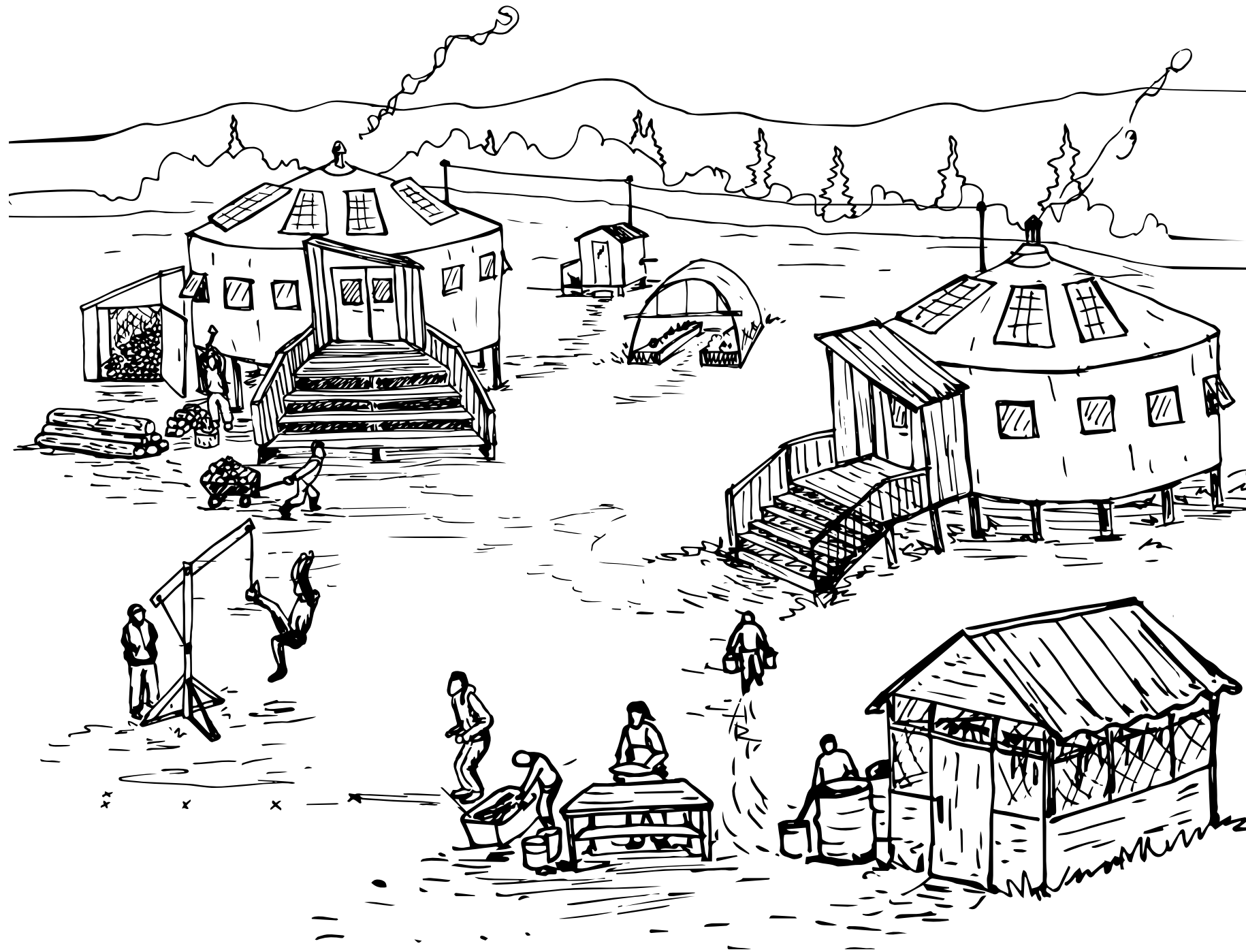
**Waqaa! Lena-augua. Nasvicugyaqamci qaillun elitellemnek nunamni. Nunamteni malrugnek elitnaurvigtangqertuq. Iliini elitnauryalartukut Nunamta Elitnaurviani. Illini elitnauryalartukut Yuuyaramtenek elicungarluta. Unuamek Aatama taguciqakut elitnaurvigmun Yuuyaramek elitnarvigmun.**

**Waqaa! My name is Lena. I want to show you how I am learning in my village. My village has two special schools. Sometimes we go to the Village School. Sometimes we go to Camp School. Today my dad is taking us to Camp School.**

The Village School is the conventional school building in every rural Alaskan village. Camp School in Lena's village is a separate facility, featuring large open spaces instead of walls dividing students into grades and classrooms. This arrangement more easily allows all generations to engage together in community learning and Indigenous ways of knowing.

*"Formal schooling can be coupled to the community in such a way that the natural learning that is already taking place can be validated in the same way as the formal learning that occurs in the school. Students can first learn their language, learn about themselves, learn values of their society, and then begin to branch out to the rest of the world. They may later make the choice as to what they want to do and where to live. Given such a foundation, they can fearlessly enter any world of their choice, secure in their identity and abilities and with dignity as human beings."  
(Kawagley, 87)*

Taking advantage of both the Village School and Camp School facilities allows for many more learning opportunities. Different groups can use the Camp School on different days or even different times of day. The Camp School can operate year round, allowing students and educators to take advantage of traditional summer activities for shared learning.



**Angelrianek elitnaurvingqertukut Yuuyaramek elitnaurvimteni.  
Ciuqlikacarmek makut elitnaurviit atuqerrallruat Mongolia-mi.  
Qasgitun ayuqsarpiartut. Assikanka neqlillerni uitalriatun ayuqekutelarqa  
elitnauliyalriatun cali.**

**We have big yurts for Camp School. They were first used by the Indigenous people of Mongolia. They also look a little like a *qasgiq*. I like them because it is like going fish camp and school at the same time.**

A *qasgiq* is a traditional community house made by the Yup'ik people. Sometimes it was called "The Men's House".

A Culturally Integrated school is one that is based on a shared approach to learning *and* living. The Camp School operates like a small model of the village. Students are exposed to many different technologies for living, both traditional and modern. They learn practical, hands-on skills that can be applied to the whole village as they become engaged tribal citizens.

*"I propose synthesizing the traditional with modern technologies to create a soft technology, reflecting a people at home in their own dynamic and technologically-enhanced environment, working as philosophical tenders of the earth."*  
(Kawagley, 96)

At Camp School, students learn about maintaining the generator, but also about using solar power for electricity, and wood power for heat. Instead of being connected to a Western-style sewer system, or even honey buckets, the Camp is using special bio-digesting toilets that convert human waste and food scraps into methane gas for cooking and safe compost.

Using yurts for the Camp School is another chance to learn about Indigenous design, in this case from Mongolian culture. They are structures that are sturdy enough to withstand Alaskan weather, but are portable too. Even a large yurt can be set up in a day. The structures are about about 25% less expensive than Western buildings. They are lighter, which means that they do not require expensive foundations to build upon, and can be moved and stored if necessary.

# Morning at Camp School

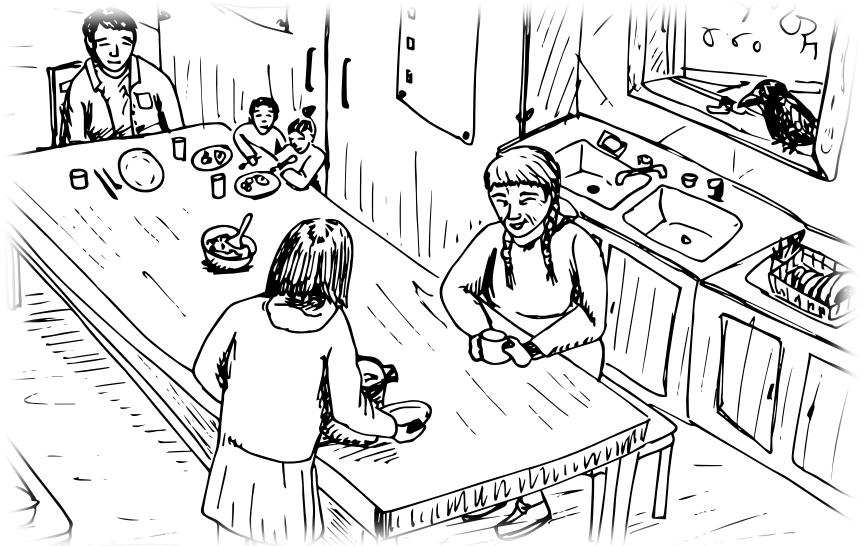


**We help the little kids hang up their coats.**

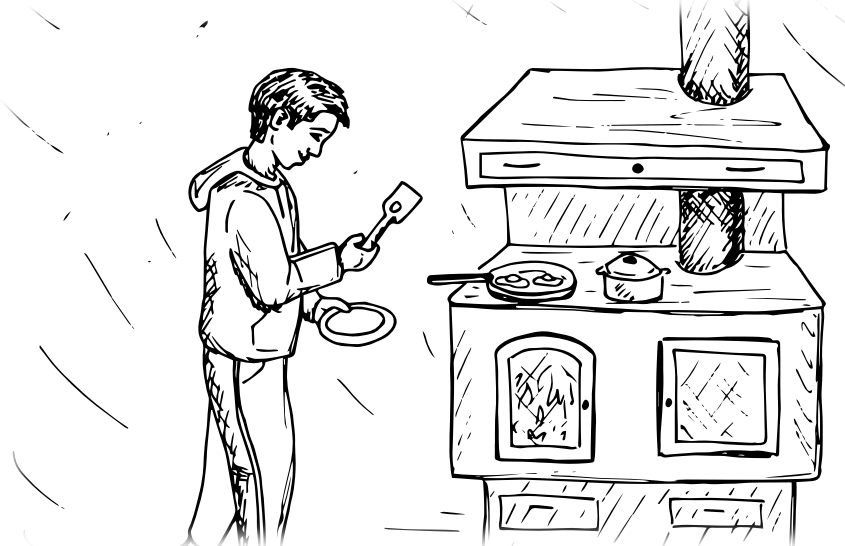


**After we clean an Elder always tells us a story.  
Elders only speak Yugtun in Camp School.**

*Yugtun* is the name for the Yup'ik language.



**I help serve the food.**



**We cook breakfast on a big wooden stove.**

**Unuaquaqan Yuuyaraq elitnaurvigmi uptelartukut ernerpak caarkamtenek.  
High School-at kaminiq kumartarkaugaqat'gu elitnauryalartut unuakuayarmi  
kaaminiaq kumarcararnaluku.**

**We start every morning at Camp School preparing for the day. The High School students have to come extra early when it is their turn to start the fire in the wood stove.**

The Camp School operates like its own little village. Students have roles at the Camp School that prepare them for roles they will have in their village later on. There's even a Camp School Council that elects students to make important decisions about the school, just like a tribal government does for the village.

*"[Students] enter school with language skills already in their minds and the beginnings of an understanding of how they interact and are part of a family. They have the basic qualifications for success required of any student in the world who wishes to become a successful hunter, banker, scientist, teacher, leaders, or renowned thinker." (Kawagley, 99)*

Students learn about the requirements and costs for running and maintaining their Camp School. They learn about caring for the generator, purchasing fuel, and using alternative energy. They learn to appreciate the costs of tools and the value of people's work.

For every element of the Camp School - from the food coming in to the waste going out - the students examine how their choices have consequences and how they align with their values.

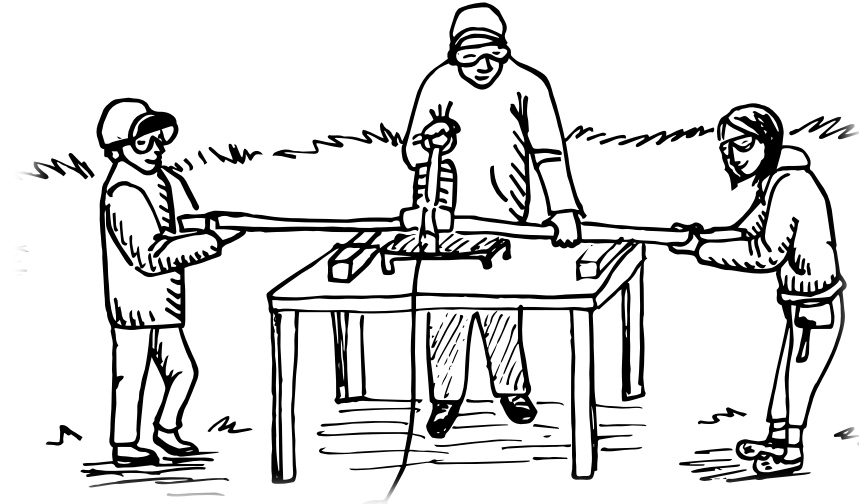
Students learn to ask themselves, "How do the modern ways of village life relate to the Old Ways, and to my traditional values? Are there ways of doing things that are more in keeping with our values, our needs, and our environment?"



# My Teachers



**This is Brooke, my science teacher. She teaches online.**



**Other people in our village teach special classes. Moses helps us learn construction.**



**Maggie is taking classes to get her teaching certificate.**



**Sometimes I get to teach too! I like to help little kids with reading.**

**Maggie makumiunguq elitnauristenguluni-llu kanginaurutnek ikayuraqluku-llu Brooke-aq kanginaurutnek elitnaurista. Iliini Brooke-am elitnaularakut, iliini-llu Maggie-m. Iliini elitnaularakut Yugturllainaq.**

**I have two science teachers! Maggie lives in my village and Brooke is online. Sometimes Brooke will teach us, and sometimes Maggie will teach a class. Sometimes Maggie will teach the whole class speaking in Yugtun.**

In a culturally integrated school like Lena's, many people both inside and outside the village play a role in her education:

**Para-Professionals** like Maggie are community members who manage the classrooms. They do not have a teacher certification but may be working toward it. They may also be able to deliver all or most of the lesson Bilingually or completely in Yugtun. They work very closely with the Teachers of Record to plan and deliver lessons to the students.

**Teachers of Record** like Brooke are certified educators. They can live in the village, or serve remotely. They help coordinate what is being taught to be sure that the curriculum meets the State standards, which is necessary for state funding. The focus of their work is supporting the Para-Professionals to teach the students. Having some Teachers of Record working off site can be cost effective and allow the District to hire educators who are top experts in their field.

**Community Educators** like Moses are local people who can share their traditional and subsistence knowledge with students. They can be part-time workers who teach students as needed.

*"The Yupiag explanations of natural phenomena must be explained in Yupiag terms, and not just in Western terms...Let the teacher, students, elders, parents, and bilingual and teacher aides determine in what ways the modern explanation adds to the Yupiag explanation and understanding." (Kawagley, 119)*



**Maggie qanertuq, "Unuamek iqvakegtarunaq-qatartuq ayakcarniartukut piyualuta at'sat nauviktukaitnun. High school-at yuvriqatarait at'sat (naunraat) allamicetun angtanayukluki. Wiinga ikayularanka mikelnguut naqurluki cali allakarturluki at'sat.**

**Maggie says that today is a good day to go berry picking, so we all hike to where the best berries grow. The high school class is checking if the berries are as big as they were last year. I help the little kids count and sort berries.**

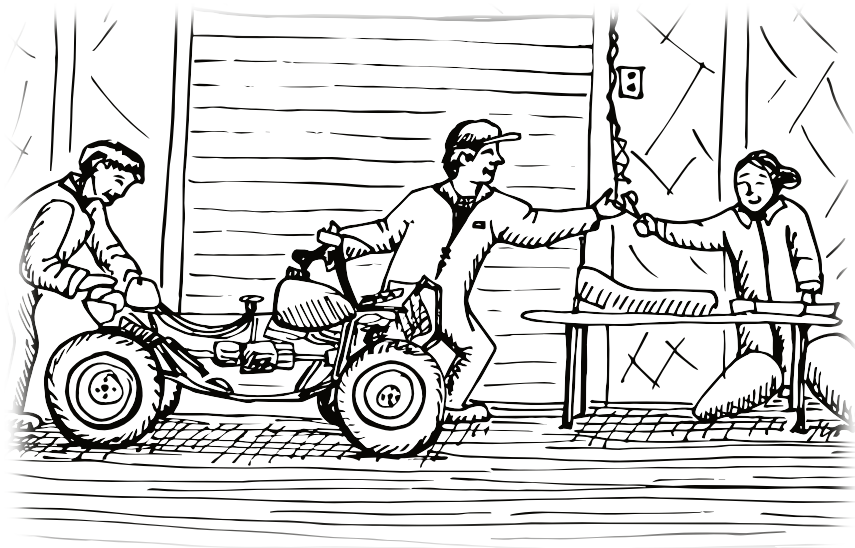
The seasonal activities of an Indigenous subsistence lifestyle do not usually conform to a school calendar. The whole school system needs to be flexible to the seasons and the environment.

Because the Camp School is in operation during the Village School year, students and educators can take advantage of seasonal opportunities like berry picking or moose hunting without disrupting the Village School calendar.

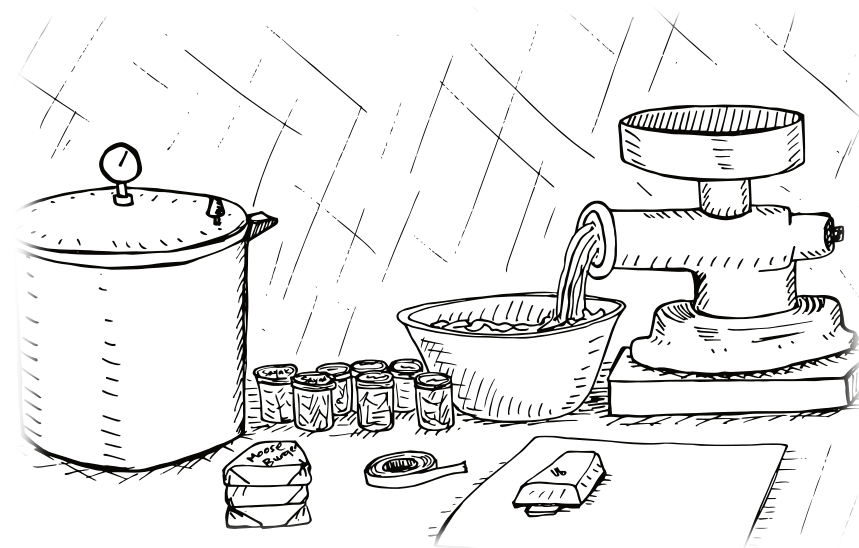
The Village School and the Camp School coordinate their lessons and activities whenever they can. The Village School often takes a theme that can be used across all grade levels. In this example, students from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade are learning different aspects of berries and berry picking, from the biology of the plants, to mapping plants and soil types, to learning about other plants, like medicinal plants.

*"Native people have traditionally acquired their knowledge of the world around them through direct experience in the natural environment, whereby particulars come to be understood in relation to the whole." (Kawagley p. 75)*

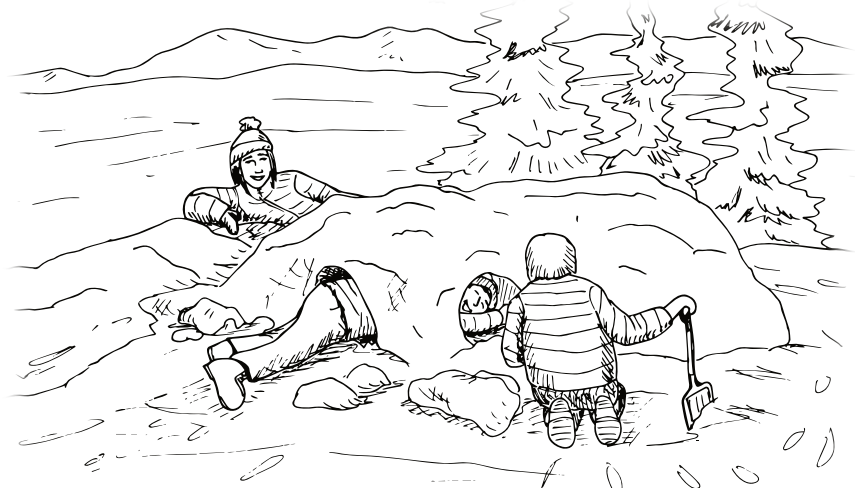
# My Yup'ik Life Skills Classes



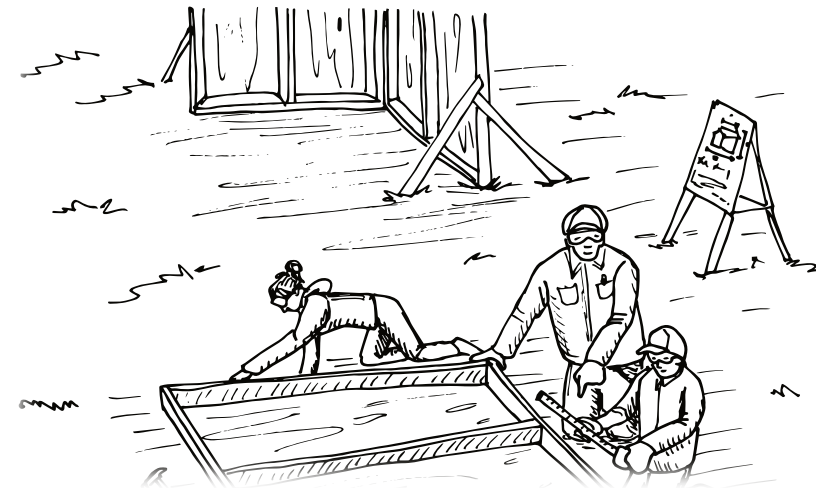
We saw a Honda engine being taken apart and then put back together again.



We learn how to can fish and make moose burgers.



We made a snow shelter for Winter Survival class.



My class built a smoke house that can also be a fish rack.

Ataucirkumek High School-ami Yugtun Lifeskills-amun pillrukut tuai-llu nasvilluta Honda-m engine-aranek caliaqellratnek. Caa tamalkuan augallruat engine-amek tuai-llu atam elliluki elicungcarluki qaillun kitugcinernek Honda-nek.

One time we went to the High School Yup'ik Lifeskills class and they showed us the Honda engines they were working on. They had to take them totally apart and then put them back together so that the engines would start again.

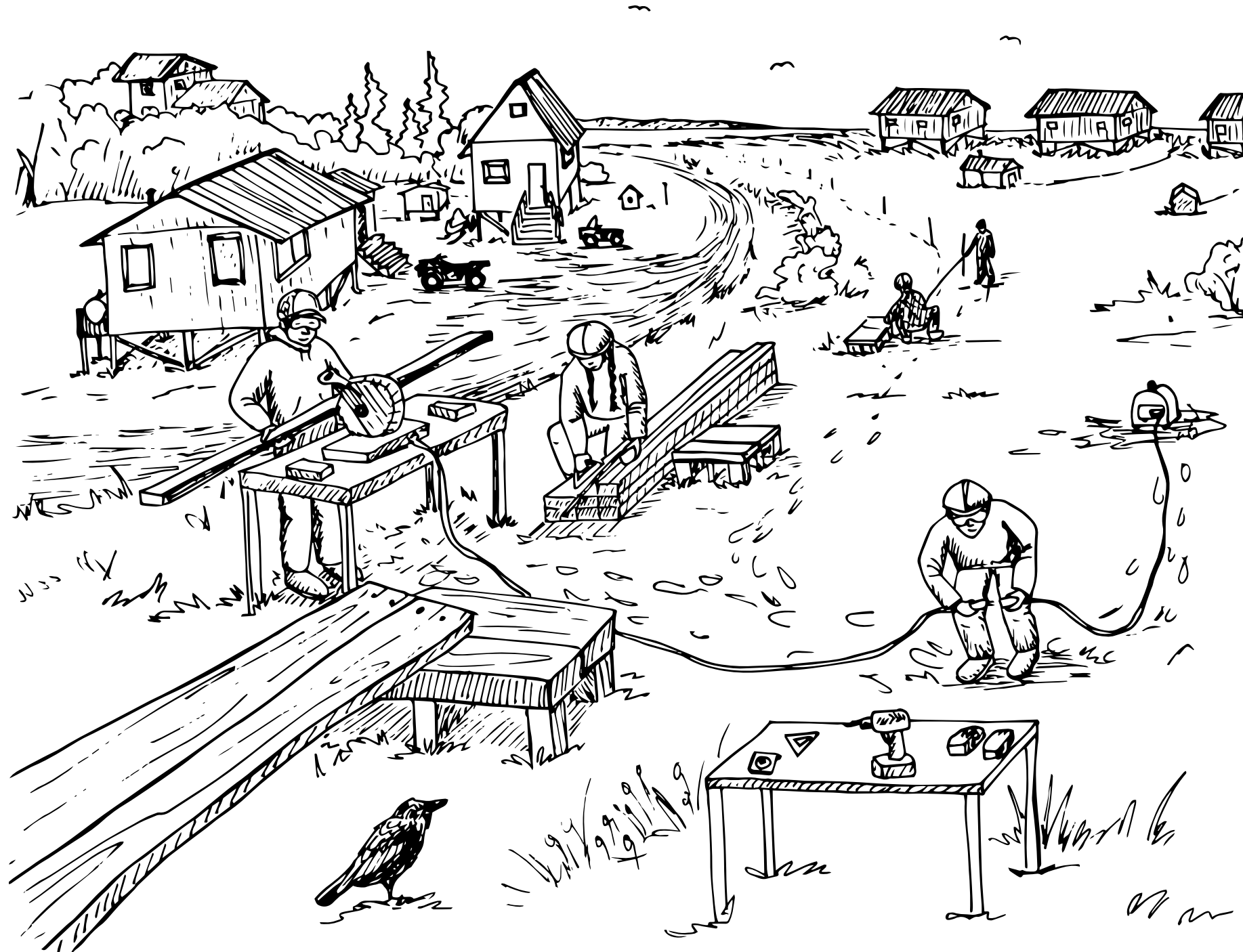
Yup'ik Lifeskills Standards are courses that help nurture a healthy and engaged tribal citizen. These are hands-on classes where young people practice the skills that they will need to live a successful life in their village. They are:

- Cultural Heritage** (with classes like: Yup'ik Language and Cultural Expression)
- Daily Living Skills** (with classes like: Subsistence, Survival, Health and Wellness)
- Citizenship Skills** (with classes like: Tribal Citizenship and Community Projects)

Students take part in classes in each of the three areas. Credits learned in Yup'ik Lifeskills can provide an alternative graduation path. For instance, a student might earn school credit for a moose hunt when she can demonstrate her knowledge of gun safety, moose biology, food preservation, and sharing the meat with others.

*"All learning should start with what the student and community know and use in everyday life." (Kawagley, 119)*

Practical Indigenous skills contain Common Core Standards. For example, Winter Survival class obviously teaches survival skills, but also important science lessons about seasonal change (meteorology), heat and insulation (thermodynamics), and how the body reacts to cold (biology).



**An'ngaqa naaqutet (math) credit-angciquq nunamteni board walk-alilriit ikayurluki. Akinglartuq-llu! Nangniulriit elitnaurvigmi ikayullruat imirillratni.**

**My brother is getting his math credit working on the community boardwalk project. He is getting paid, too! His senior class helped apply for the money for the project in Tribal Citizenship class.**

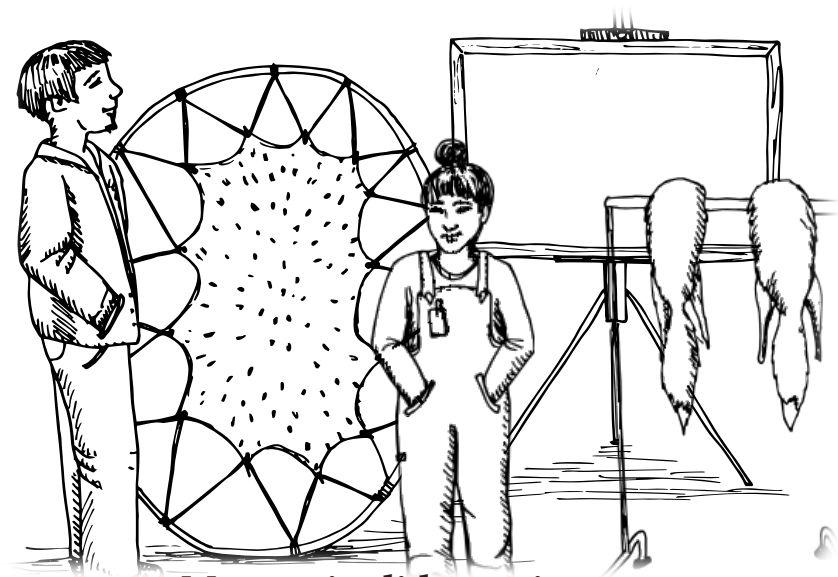
The community and the school work closely together. The village thinks of the school system as a resource for ideas and energy for positive change. The school depends on community businesses and the tribal government to provide meaningful opportunities to work and learn important skills.

Through Tribal Citizenship classes, young people learn the power and responsibilities that they have as Tribal Citizens to determine their way of life, and how tribal government works.

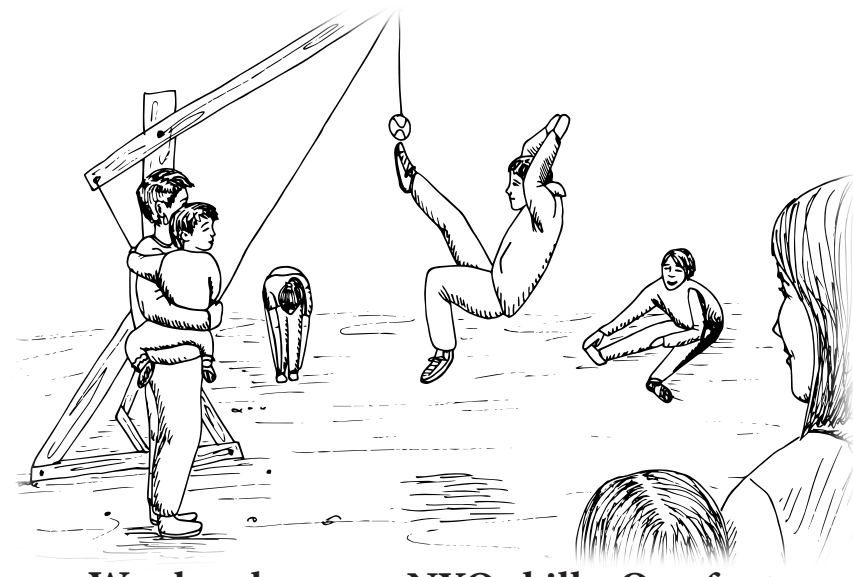
*"It behooves us as indigenous peoples to learn ways of both knowing and doing, so that we can help to develop a caring consciousness and appropriate technologies that are kind to our being as humans to the spiritual and natural world in which we live." (Kawagley, 99)*

Work Study programs allow older students to earn money working for their village while also earning school credit and learning important skills. Work Study students can transition directly into full-time employment once they graduate.

# Skills and Knowledge Days

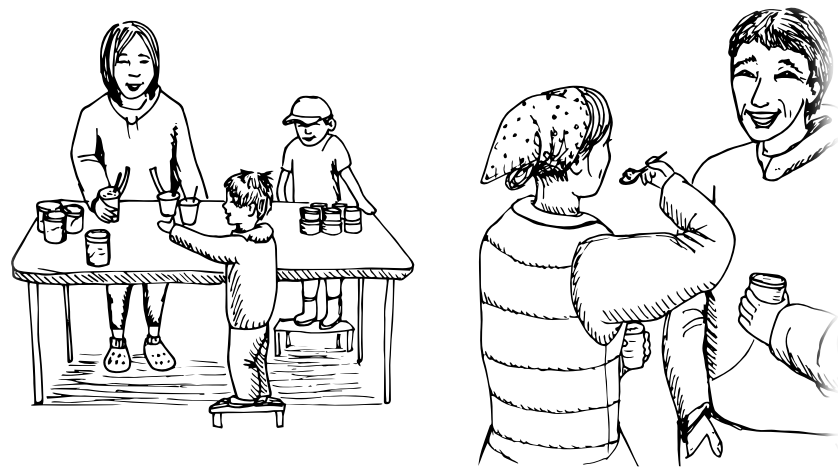


**My cousin did a project on trapping and tanning fur.**

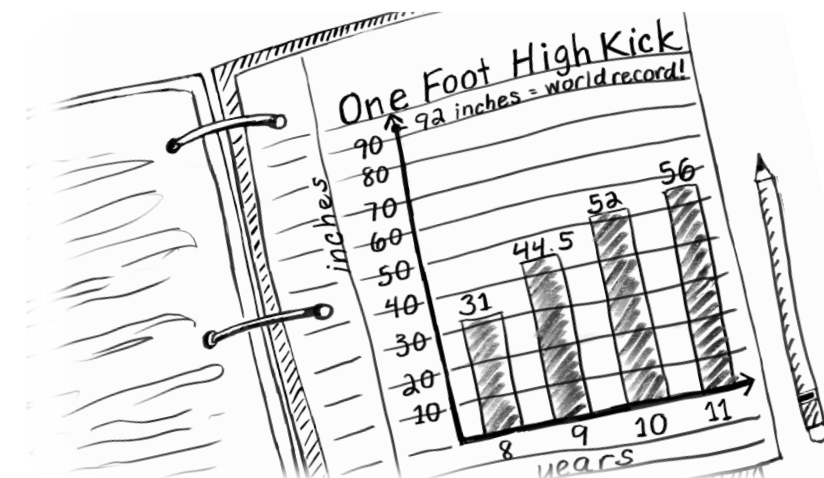


**We also show our NYO skills. One foot high kick is my favorite.**

*NYO stands for Native Youth Olympics.*



**We share the food we learn to make and preserve.**



**We have to make a graph of our NYO progress each year.**

**Ernengqelartukut assilrianek nasvitqatarqamteki elitnauristeput, ilaaput, wall' nunalgutput elitellemtenek cali cayugngallemtenek. Ukut erenret elitnaurvitun ayuqsuitut.**

**We have special days when we show our teachers and family and the whole village all the things that we have learned and can do. These days don't even feel like school.**

In Lena's school, assessments are not thought of as "tests" but are seen as opportunities to demonstrate what students have learned. They serve as a way to understand how well students are prepared to live successful lives in their community or wherever they choose. Assessments are also opportunities for teachers to see how well they are reaching their students.

These assessments can take many forms. They can also allow for a single activity to be assessed for more than one subject. For instance, Lena is earning credit in Cultural Heritage through her participation in NYO, while also earning math credit for keeping a chart of her achievements.

In another example, Lena earned credit in Daily Living Skills for a moose hunt that her family went on. She took pictures with her phone of each step of the hunt: preparing for the trip, catching the moose, and the harvesting and sharing of meat. Then she used the pictures to tell her teacher the story of her experience. She might also earn credit in Language Arts if she writes a story about the hunt.

All school districts in the United States must test students using a common assessment. These assessments are required for school districts to receive federal funding. In Alaska these tests are developed by the state and given to every student in Alaska. These tests focus mainly on reading and mathematical skills, and are usually administered by computer.

School leaders also have the option to develop their own unique ways to assess how and what their students are learning. These assessments can be based on the knowledge and skills that are important to their home community and culture. The assessments can also be done in a way that more closely aligns to Indigenous ways of demonstrating skills and knowledge, such as through projects, storytelling, or art.

*"The task is to carefully reconstruct and redefine ourselves by replacing missing pieces to engender a new Native identity, its infrastructure built around valued Native traditions" (Kawagley, 96)*



*"Self-esteem and self-confidence will rise as the students deal with things that they know about and that are part of their life... Not only will students' attitudes improve, but also the family will come closer together and improve their interpersonal relationships."  
(Kawagley, 98)*



**Ernerpak caarkalirrarlua utertelleq ilamnun assilartuq. Angayuqagma qanruqularagnga cam iliini-ku anglirikuma nunaka aulukciqniluku. Qanrut'laragka cukangnaqesqevkenakek! Quyaunga cali mikelngullemnek elitnaullemni!**

**It is good to come home to my family after a busy day. My parents always tell me that one day I will grow up and be responsible for the village. I tell them to have patience! I am happy just being a kid at school!**

*"We must control education and give it a direction to accomplish the goals we set for it, strengthening our own culture while simultaneously embracing Western science as a second force that can help us maintain ourselves with as much self-reliance and self-sufficiency as possible." (Kawagley, 96)*

## More about this Book

This story is a real vision set in a fictional place. It is set in an imagined Yup'ik village, but it could just as easily been set in any rural Alaskan Indigenous community. It is possible for **every idea and practice in this story to take place at this moment and time**. The tools and knowledge a community needs to achieve this vision are available right here and right now. All that is needed to make this vision real are people with the will to challenge the current model of education.

This story is the product of many conversations over many years with Alaskans who share a common belief. The belief is that solving the issues facing Indigenous Alaskan communities requires a new path forward, and that path can be found by tapping into Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. For this is the strength of the people whose roots run deepest here.

This story was written while living and working among the people of the Yupiit School District.

This story came to you from a GoFundMe campaign. It would not be possible without the belief in the words and images found here from people who share a conviction that culturally integrated education is the best path forward for Indigenous communities. I am deeply indebted to this group for providing the energy to move this project from an idea to reality. I am humbled by their gift and grateful for their patience as this idea took root and grew.

## Toward Culturally Integrated Education

There is a lively and necessary dialog among Alaskans as to what the “best” approach to educating Indigenous children should be. This book is based on the assumption that there should be a better, more inclusive balance between the Western education system and Indigenous ways of learning. There are many communities and school districts in Alaska that share this assumption. Progress towards truly integrating Indigenous language, learning, and, most critically, an Indigenous worldview, into the Westernized educational system is moving slowly.

We can identify many different systems, attitudes and beliefs, and other barriers that can hold back progress towards culturally integrated education. This book identifies a few key principles for culturally integrated education and proposes practical and available solutions to move forward.

**An authentic Indigenous education must be centered on the land and the community where the child lives.**

All children first begin to learn from the immediate world around them. In a culturally integrated education, we must understand that this worldview lies at the center of not just the child's education, but of their spiritual development.

Even programs designed to increase opportunities for rural Alaskan students often begin by removing selected students from their villages. While these programs provide “enhanced learning”, they also imply that the important things one needs to learn in order to be successful in the world must be learned outside of the village.

This is also true of “homegrown” teacher training programs, where the focus is on helping Native Alaskans receive the college education required for teacher certification. These programs still require village educators to leave their communities and support networks for extended periods of time to get their credentials. Instead, we can approach teacher training as

an apprenticeship, where emerging educators are supported in their schools, working and learning at the same time.

**Learning is best done by doing.**

Project-based learning is not a new concept in education. In Indigenous education, this is the way that learning was done for thousands of years. State-run school curricula are typically designed around classroom and textbook learning with rigid assessments to evaluate success, instead of project-based learning and outcomes-based assessments, which are more aligned with Indigenous ways of learning.

Project-based learning helps weave the education system into the community. Young people learn practical skills and perform important services for their community, helping them not just gain skills and knowledge for themselves, but also helping to improve the quality of life for everyone in the village.

Project-based learning allows for more young people to show achievement. Because much project based learning can happen outside of the classroom, this approach can offer an alternative track for those students who do not adjust well to conventional classrooms. A young mother can earn school credit by demonstrating knowledge of infant nutrition and early childhood learning. A student can earn credit for demonstrating knowledge of moose hunting and food preparation while engaged in traditional subsistence activities for his family.

**Learning happens everywhere, not just in school.**

“Education” has become narrowly defined by what happens at “school” and is therefore perceived as the sole responsibility of the state-run system. The school facility and the activities that happen within it are viewed as separate from village life, not integrated.

Creating a facility separate from the state-built school begins to create a community ownership of the education system. Engaging community members at all levels for sharing skills and knowledge begins to change

the idea that education is the responsibility of professionals.

**Language, values, skills, and worldview are best taught by the people in the community.**

Instead of the conventional classroom where a certified teacher is required in each classroom, this model shows how certified teachers can support local educators to work directly with the students. The certified teacher makes sure that the lesson plans meet state standards, and assessment of the students' progress is authentic, and that all the necessary documentation reaches the proper authorities. Having more local educators allow more classes to be taught in the Indigenous language, while also nurturing more local people into becoming certified educators.

Removing the barrier of certified teachers being required to live in the village would greatly increase the number of potential candidates for the role. Further, in some cases a teacher of record could provide support to more than one educator at a time, reducing the number of certified educators needed to run a high-functioning school system.

Schools can also take advantage of the knowledge and skills taught by local people. Finding easy ways to reimburse local people for their time in sharing their knowledge and practical skills is essential to engaging community knowledge at every level.

**We must evaluate the education of our children in measurements that matter.**

It takes a great deal of money to keep a school running. Without funding from the state and federal government, it is unlikely village schools could exist. To receive that money, a school district must show that students are learning. Currently schools must use measurements that do not reflect the values, skills, and even the realities of Indigenous life. Alternatives to these assessments must be developed that reflect the student's learning of the skills, knowledge, and values that will help young people grow to lead a successful life in the village, or along any path they choose to follow.



"In the past, Native people tended to view formal education as a hinderance to traditional ways, but now they must look at it in a different light. We must control education and give it direction to accomplish the goals we set for it, strengthening our own culture while simultaneously embracing Western science as a second force that can help us maintain ourselves with as much self-reliance and self-sufficiency as possible." (Kawagley 96)

## *About Agray'ing*

Alaska's Bristol Bay Region has been home my entire life. My art is a direct product of the saturated Yup'ik values of my youth and the guidance it has offered me into adulthood. Having the incredible blessings of being raised around fluent Yup'ik language and family who lived the old ways and have entered the new, offers a perspective that carries incredible responsibility to share and teach with art. Though my hands hold the pen, I know my artwork is guided by the thousands of years of ancestors and carries a duty to our future generations. Quyana Ellam Yua cikiutevnek. Thank you Creator for the gifts you give.

## *About Matthew*

Without ever becoming a “teacher” I’ve spent my career in and around public schools across Alaska. Working first for the State of Alaska, then the Alaska School Board Association, and then the Alaska Humanities Forum, I have been blessed with mentors and friends that have helped to shape me into the person I am today.

I have learned so much from the conversations and observation from being invited into the lives and communities of the people of Alaska. I hope in some way this book gives something back.



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