

**Transference of Indigenous
Knowledge in Aesthetic Appreciation
of Western Art**

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**Masters Project in Cross Cultural Studies
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“There is a good deal of evidence that learning is enhanced when teachers pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to a learning task (Bransford, 2000).”

Introduction

Through my course of study for this degree I have developed my own definition of an Indigenous Knowledge System: The Native way of knowing is made up of a balance of human/environment interaction and spiritual consciousness. Being aware of the inner and the outer world at the same time, and knowing how they work co-dependently.

The “modern materialistic and technomechanistic worldview,” puts man above all else functioning independently and in competition with the rest of the world around them. This competition creates turmoil between the inner and outer worlds and prevents them from being able to exist harmoniously. The elements of harmonious living, as stated in the article, *Alaska Native Education: History and Adaptation in the New Millennium*, by Augayuaq Oscar Kawagley come as a system of education, governance, spirituality, economy, being, and behavior. There is a balance of all of these, providing technology that is necessary for sustaining a level of lifestyle that emerged from this balance. This balance gives the Indigenous World an acceptance of space within the confines of time, they do not need to control the space or the time but instead exist within it, and their existence within space and time give a more holistic and cooperative approach to knowing and understanding (Kawagley, 1999).

A Native Knowledge System is circular in its reasoning. The framework for their knowledge system comes from their respect and connection to their environment and the interdependence that grows from that connection (Kawagley, 1995). The “body of knowledge” develops over time and is built on knowledge that is passed from generation to generation providing an independent way of life for all those within the individual cultural community (Johnson, 1992). *Wisdom of the Elders* by David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson (1992) reinforces this concept with each of the “Sacred Native Stories of Nature,” pointing out the Native

connection to nature and the reality of one of the most significant differences between Western and Indigenous cultures. Western culture will not change to fit in with the environment. Instead, they change the environment to fit their needs, and are destroying it in the process. The Native culture sees their place as outsiders, respects the system as it exists, and understands as an outsider they must adapt to their environment, to change their ways to insure the sustainability of their environment.

“The predicament of the traditional shaman and the modern scientist might be compared to that of the proverbial troupe of blind men who, after each has been permitted to touch a different area of the same elephant’s anatomy, proceed to pontificate—
“ethnocentrically,” strictly on the basis of each man’s circumscribed experience—on the underlying “truth” of elephantness (Suzuki, 1992).”

What I Expect to Do

I expect to develop a culturally appropriate and theoretically sound approach to teaching Aesthetic Appreciation of Western Art, using information learned about Indigenous Knowledge systems in my master’s studies and readings for this project combined with Lev Vygotsky’s socialculturalism theory and his Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP). The course will start students at their knowledge level, include cultural connections to the lessons, introduced new concepts through vocabulary (word-thought), and bring the student forward to a solid understanding of Western concepts of art. Examples of Native art will be used to initially introduce concepts, Elders will be used to share cultural techniques and help make cultural connections, and hands on learning will be used to stimulate the learning of aesthetic concepts.

Where the Idea Came From

The idea for this project came from a personal experience I had when my son was moving back to Dillingham with his new wife and children. We were excited to have him home from the Air Force in one piece, and starting on his bachelor’s degree. I had many exciting conversations with my daughter-in-law, as she was getting ready to come to Alaska for the first time. One of the major topics of conversation was the uniqueness of living Dillingham and the importance of family. I explained that Dillingham is a small community and that life here is what you make it. Spending a great deal of time with your family is an important part of living here. A few weeks after their arrival, I discovered an obvious miscommunication stemming from a

differing definition of family. I have lived in Dillingham for a long time and my definition of family includes my immediate family, my extended family, and some people that we consider family. Therefore, our family unit is very large and offers many options for activities and social gatherings. My daughter-in-law's definition of family is quite different including only her, my son, and their two children. This small grouping offers very few options for activities and social gatherings. Her disappointment was obvious; living in Dillingham was not what she thought it was going to be. As I reflected back on our conversation I realized I had made many incorrect assumptions. We had used the same word but the picture we saw when we used that word was distinctly different. I realized I could have made the transition much easier and more comfortable for all of us if I started from her knowledge root/base. I could have built onto her definition of family by adding my definition and over time come to understand each other.

Basic Theory

The basic idea for my project was inspired as I have previously described and then formalized by some of the theories and ideas of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theories of Development provided a starting point for my project and an introduction to four concepts that give structure to my idea: social origin of mental functions, unity of behavior and consciousness, mediation, and psychological systems (Eun, 2008).

According to Vygotsky, "society is the bearer of the cultural heritage without which the development of the mind is impossible." Acknowledgment of the cultural and social impact on learning opens a door for the development of culturally appropriate curriculum and gives me the opportunity to start the student from their vantage point and move them forward, giving value to what students already know and letting me use that foundation to add building blocks of information. The method is the opposite of a more traditional Western idea of first tearing down what the student knows only to replace it with a more assimilated knowledge base. Vygotsky acknowledges the importance of prior knowledge of situations, culture, and family environment in the development of learning. He further maintains the importance of their link to cognitive development and the importance of individual perception when making sense of the lesson being taught (Dahms, Geonnotti, Passalacqua, Schilk, Wetzel, and Zulkowsky, 2007).

One of the critical parts of my project is the development of "hands on" components for developing an aesthetic appreciation for art. Vygotsky's emphasis on development through

interrelationships during learning both with a mediator (e.g., instructor, elder, classmate) and individual functions of the student (e.g., perception, memory, thinking) provides insight into the importance of these types of activities to enhance student learning and build on prior knowledge (Haenen, Hubert, and Job 2003).

What is Art and Creativity

As I work to bring two worldviews together in an expanded understanding of appreciation of Western Art I must first find the definition(s) that best suits this convergence of knowledge.

Beginning with the definition of art, all art is an important means for expressing personal and cultural creativity and symbolism (Fair, 1985), I have two ideas that cross between cultures, symbolism and creativity.

The idea of symbolism begins the student's journey in this course and the first step to concept convergence of Indigenous and Western concepts of art. "Many perhaps all, symbolic systems are implosive, and therefore must be experienced from within (Collins, 1973)." Getting students to look within and see the cultural symbols in their local art and lifestyle will act as a significant pivotal point for knowledge transfer. Students can embrace the cultural experience and later reflect on the ideas of cultural and artistic symbols in Western Art.

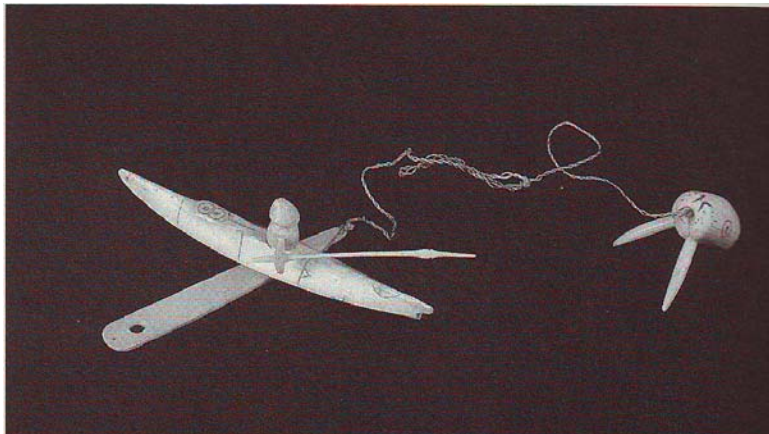
As we look to creativity we must first look again to definitions, "the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form (Encyclopædia Britannica eb.com)," we look at an action that speaks only to the ability to create, but what does it mean to create, "To bring into existence; to invest with a new form..., to produce or bring about by a course of action or behavior, to produce through imaginative skill, to make or bring into existence something new (In Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2010)." This definition seems almost contradictory to the conformist, outcome oriented society we live in today; but offers a door for understanding and insight that again crosses cultural barriers. "The construction of material things requires the genius of individual expression, the influence of many people, the intervention of memory and collective tradition, and often, the need to make an honest living doing what one does best. There must be a context to an object... (Fair, 2006)." It is this genius and context that students will explore in this class giving them appreciation for the value of traditional artifacts, art, history,

and knowledge, and offering them insight in how both concepts can exist and (Fienup-Riordan (Ed), 2005) have value in a single piece of art, in the works students produce for assignments.

Finding Focus

The focus will be on breaking down some of the barriers Indigenous students face when studying abstract concepts of Western art, imbedding the ideas into relevant context and finding meaning in their villages and traditional ideas (Battiste, 2002). Students living in villages with limited exposure to Western art and architecture as contained in a textbook used for this subject can be intimidated and feel confused and as if they “don’t belong” because they perceive themselves to be missing so much of the prior knowledge needed to be involved in the learning process. Activities will be designed to show students the art that is all around them, make them realize how much they do know, come to appreciate their local art from a cultural, historical, and Western prospective, and use this root/base knowledge as a point of transfer to a better understanding and appreciation of Western art.

Examples such as below can be used to bring out the historical as well as cultural values of traditional art.



*Model of a Walrus Hunt,
IVA 5700 Jacobsen
Collection at the
Ethnologisches Museum
Berlin, Germany.*

“in those days when artists created their crafts they variably revealed their psyche to the public. This creation that includes a carving of a seal reveals what the hunters often experience as he hunted out in the ocean. This spear, which is an instrument used to kill these animals was also crafted and placed on it and the paddle which the hunter used to reach the distant places he intended to go to weather in stormy or calm weather was also crafted, this object represented what the hunter wanted so much to reveal to the public (Fienup-Riordan (Ed), 2005).”

Using student work and local content will also help to break down barriers. In the pilot of this course in spring of 2007 students were given the following assignment: Choose something from

your community that is symbolic or is significant to your community or way of life. Choose a type of sculpture that you can use to create a representation or replica of what you have chosen. The class will work cooperatively to create individual sculptures. When the sculptures are complete you will share your work with the class using the following as a guide:

- a. Name your piece.
- b. Describe your piece.
- c. Give your feelings about the piece. (e.g., it reminds me of, it makes me feel good, it makes me feel sad)
- d. What significance would this piece have in your community or culture?

(The examples used in this paper are used with the students' permission.)

The following was turned in:



Bay Guides by Steve Wassli

The student explained that this was a sculpture of two markers that sit on the Dillingham side of "The Bay," (body of brackish water at the convergence of the Nushagak and Wood Rivers in Dillingham, AK). That description prompted a response from the on-lookers, "one is missing." The student continued to explain that when you are on the Clarks Point side of "The Bay" and the tide is low you look across the bay and find the two markers and then you move your boat into a position that lines the markers up so that they appear to be only one. That is the

start of a channel that will take you through the bay when the tide is low, and to make sure you stay in the channel you have to make sure that you are only ever seeing one marker. This example and resulting student discussion transitioned easily to introduce many artistic and conceptual topics in Western Art.

A second student offered a beautiful example of landscape architecture, when she observed a local simple dwelling that had been recently moved (human/environment interaction) come to life when nature got involved. This was a great lead in to a discussion of Landscape Architecture.



Winter Cabin by Trevona Olson

It is these works, done by the students themselves, that create the bridge for Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge to move between cultures and at times meet to create an understanding and appreciation for living in two worlds, learning in two worlds, and retaining self identity and worth.

Literature Review

“Developing curriculum and pedagogy cross culturally involves a series of dilemmas, particularly when the very context, the culture, and the language of the community, is in transition. The process of knowledge reconstruction, developing authentic pedagogy, and meeting the often-differing standards of the community and the school is fraught with contradictions. Similarly, issues associated with local and situated knowledge, with transferring knowledge from one context to another (community to schooling), and with the problem of equivalence (that is, treating transferred and translated knowledge as if it had the same meaning) are some of the issues that curriculum developers, teacher educators, and principals must face when embarking on such school reform projects. We do not supply answers to these problems but only our experiences.” (Lipka, 1998)

Delivering a course that both respects existing cultural and artistic knowledge and provides an avenue for Native students to transfer that knowledge to a Western perspective is the primary objective for my project. Transference of Indigenous knowledge requires reaching Indigenous students at their starting point in the learning process (determining what the student brings to the table), finding their root/base knowledge (finding common cultural ground to use for knowledge transfer), and transferring that knowledge root/base to a Western Prospective while keeping the traditional knowledge intact (the student now possesses two pieces of interconnected knowledge). Theoretically Lev Vygotsky exemplifies this through his social constructivist ideas. Vygotsky’s emphasis was on the social and collaborative nature of learning and believed that all learning was a product of cultural/social interactions and integral to community. Conceptually, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the student’s potential for learning, provides direction for incorporating traditional ways of teaching (with elders, observation, and cultural context) and provide an avenue for the transference of prior knowledge into the zone of new concepts.

Methodology for transference of knowledge for Indigenous students in the area of Aesthetic Appreciation for Western Art will focus on three elements:

1. Establishing significance of learning by framing concepts with cultural worth (Barnhardt, 2005) (Lipka, 1998) (Kawagley, 1995).
2. Respecting the Indigenous knowledge base and using it as a building block for expanding knowledge (Kawagley 1995, Lipka 1998, Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005).
3. Developing a method that is both culturally appropriate (Kawagley 1995) Kawagley, Norris-Tull and Norris-Tull 1998), and theoretically sound (Au 2005).

Establishing Significance of Learning

To make learning significant for Indigenous students it must be relative to their cultural experiences. Student's should start with what they already know from family, community, and everyday life. In order to capture student's attention first put the ideas into their prospective. Once the student understands the material presented has value for the student and their community, and is reflective of their traditional ideas and worldview "the Indigenous student (as with most students) will then become more motivated to learn," and open to the Western concepts being presented (Lipka, 1998) (Barnhardt, 2005).

Traditionally the way Native people look at the world is through the eyes of nature with the concept of survival in mind. Indigenous ways of learning are traditionally experiential in nature and holistic in their approach. Learning is a social process (i.e. observing elders and other community members and being part of the group to acquire concepts) and is included in almost every aspect of daily living. This is in direct contrast to a Western compartmentalized, competency based approach, and can make learning in a Western educational institution uncomfortable and intimidating for Indigenous students (Kawagley, 1995).

An article written by Carol Barnhardt, *Athabaskan Teachers and Athabaskan Students*, and based on a project conducted in 1979 that videotaped the interactions between three Athabaskan teachers and their students, identified methods incorporated by these local Indigenous teachers in a classroom setting, were notable, and assist in establishing significance. Differences in teacher style were subtle and sometimes hard to detect, however, the idea of "tuning-in" to the students, although contrary to the traditional Western role of the teacher, to set the pace seemed to set the entire tone in the classroom. Students moved the teacher forward assuring the teacher did not move ahead until the students were ready. Teachers "Tuning-in by Listening" were spending more time listening to the students, keeping instructions simple, and providing time for students to work while the instructor acted as only a resource when needed. "Tuning-in to Individual Students," documented the teachers working with individual students, working at their level (i.e. sitting with them or kneeling next to them, not hovering over them), focusing on individual and small group activities, and working with individual strengths and weaknesses (Barnhardt C. , 2006).

“Most all Indigenous peoples, and in particular, those who have suffered the impact and effects of colonization, have struggled to access education that acknowledges, respects and promotes the right of Indigenous peoples to be Indigenous—a right that embraces Indigenous peoples’ language, culture, traditions, and spirituality,” (The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education, Fall 1999).

Respecting Indigenous Knowledge

It is vital in the development of any culturally appropriate course that the Indigenous student is given the opportunity to embrace the significance of the aspects of their own culture before moving on to embrace Western concepts (Battiste, 2002).

Western ideas that learning is based on a certain measure of information that can be standardized and tested for competency creates a barrier to respecting the existing knowledge of Indigenous students. The current educational model supports the idea that in order to ensure a specific body of information is learned in the compartmentalized and decontextualized format of Western education, prior knowledge that does not fit into the system has to be essentially unlearned. This is usually done by de-valuing Indigenous knowledge, and excluding it from the learning process and creating the perception that it is something irrelevant and unnecessary to becoming educated. Connections to community, environment, and family are usually left out of the Western educational model. This process makes learning even more difficult for the student, having removed any point of reference for starting the process and leaving students feeling inadequate and confused (Smith, 1999) (Kawagley, 1995).

There is resistance to the inclusion of traditional ways of knowing into the curriculum, seeing the addition of this culturally based type of education as problematic when it comes to standardized testing. Admittedly, there are problems authenticating interpretations and there is a need to “have built-in checks.” In Jerry Lipka’s article, *Transforming the Culture of Schools, Yup’ik Eskimo Examples*, he offers no solutions, but he points out the advantages of preserving the Yup’ik Holistic approach to learning, and sees attitudes changing. He sees the resulting collaboration within the schools and with local entities creating a “richer working environment” and he sees the process “moving beyond the possible and into the practice,” (Lipka, 1998).

Gerald Vizenor's idea of "Survivance" provides a way to better understand current needs for respecting traditional ways and values. Survivance means more than just survival, "It means redefining ourselves, and raising our social and political consciousness. It means holding on to ancient principles while eagerly embracing change. It means doing what is necessary to keep our culture alive." The disruption of traditional teaching and learning methods by elders and other cultural knowledge holders by the Western educational system has created a challenge in providing a learning environment for, "Embracing change while holding on to our philosophical center," (Tayac, 2005).

It is evident that most Native communities today live in two worlds, Native and Western, and that they are not fully submersed in either, and it will be necessary to recognize cultural differences and find value in them, as well as recognize that we must set our preconceived ideas aside to be able to move forward and avoid cultural conflict (Barnhardt R. , 2006).

Current curriculum and content are based on one type of learning. In Deloria's article, *Higher Education and Self Determination*, she says that the system was dumped on the Native people with no warning. The system did not evolve from any kind of need or understanding. Suddenly it was there and the Native people were forced to live with it. It put Native people into culture shock. As they are bouncing back they will be able to emerge from the western educational system with new knowledge that they will need to combine with their traditional knowledge to meet the challenges of today's ever changing world. The western way of knowing has had a tremendous impact on the Native world today; much of it has had negative repercussions. But western knowledge will be important to Indigenous survival, because it will take the knowledge of both worlds to put things back together (Deloria, 1991).

Culturally Appropriate and Theoretically Sound Approach

"When we learn to relate to each other and teach in a culturally considerate way, we benefit not only those with whom we work but we benefit ourselves as well. We are all cultural beings, and accelerating changes in the makeup of the world around us makes that fact an increasingly obvious and inescapable aspect of our daily existence (Barnhardt R. , 2006)."

Establishing a Starting Point (determining what the student brings to the table)

The challenge in creating a course that both respects existing cultural and artistic knowledge and provides an avenue for Native students to transfer that knowledge to a Western

prospective is creating learning experiences that support, explain, communicate, and evaluate art from two distinctly different worldviews. As previously stated, evaluating and measuring what a student already knows presents difficulty from a cultural stand point because testing (*i.e. pretest*) is not an effective tool (Lipka, 1998) (Battiste, 2002). Traditionally, Western pedagogy is competitive in nature and has students deliver information prematurely. Teachers are looking for answers before the student is academically ready to offer accurate information. Learning is moved forward through the identification of error (*i.e.* 60% of the students gave an incorrect response to question “A” so the instructor will design a lesson to emphasize that information versus only 20% of students give an incorrect response to question “B” so the instructor will move past that objective because 80% of the students have mastered it) The difficulties with this type of learning is that it is highly competitive, some students will excel, some will become competent, and some will fail thus establishing the traditional Bell Curve. This model does not fare well for traditionally based learners. In a culture where your ability to accurately deliver what you know means survival the 20% that do not grasp an objective or the number of students that fall low on the Bell Curve could face much more serious consequences than failing a test (Gilmore, 2002) (Gilmore, 1992).

Native ways of knowing and learning are not competitive, but rather are respectful of the individual's capacity to learn, how they learn, and the base from which they will build their knowledge. “Indigenous pedagogy” values experiential learning, independent learning, observation, listening, and minimal instruction and intervention (Battiste, 2002). It will be important when evaluating “what the student brings to the table” that the methods used are comfortable and culturally appropriate, *i.e.* group activities, experiential learning, and hands on activities.

Language and language symbols are also significant in understanding Indigenous (or any other cultural group's) perceptions. “The role of language in perception is striking,” (Vygotsky, 1978). Given the impact of worldview on the development of language/vocabulary you should look to the “word-thought” (the idea that comes to mind when a particular word is used) already established and add the Western concept. This will allow the student to add cultural breadth to their appreciation for Western Art while preserving cultural identity and a sense of accomplishment. “The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech

and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge (Vygotsky, 1978).” Ensuring the proper transition of “word-thought” is an element essential to knowledge transference, and gleaning that information from each student will present a significant challenge.

Finding Root Knowledge (*finding common cultural ground to use for knowledge transfer*)

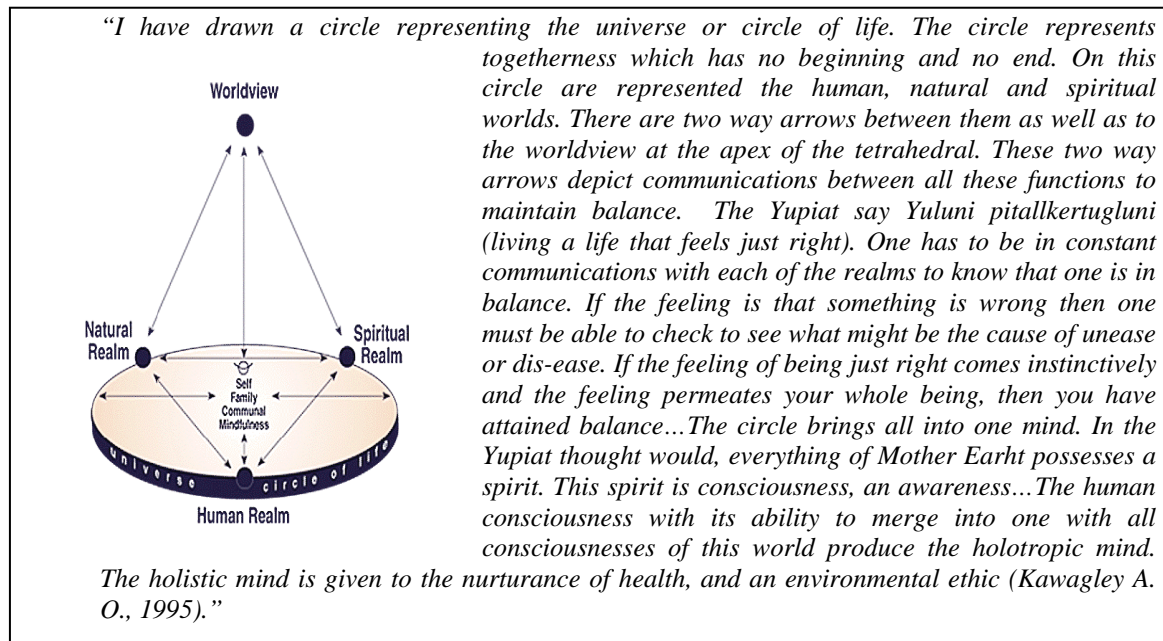
Looking for their root knowledge requires exploration of their belief system. Cultural awareness and inclusion in course development and implementation are vital. Finding ways for students to discover their root knowledge is critical and the base for building Western concepts.

When you look at space it is relative to all that is around it, to the movement of time, and to our movement within that time, all of which will ultimately affect the space, or in some instances our perception of that space. These concepts exist within art, and they exist within the Native world. Western concepts of space are created by following rules and “mapping” things out to artificially create space that exists without time. This gives Western culture a sense of control (although false) over their space and time. The Native world simply accepts space within the confines of time, they do not need to control the space or the time but instead exist within it. Indigenous people have had their own view of the world for a very long time. However, Western educational structures have blurred that view with the belief in a “mono-educational” system. Students need to move past the Western concepts and first find their place as a “participant-observer” in the learning process (Ascher, 2002) (Barnhardt R. a., 2005) (Kawagley A. O., 1995).

To reach a student’s root knowledge you must let the student take advantage of all their local resources, and help them to recognize the “creative force flowing in and around them at all times.” Students should synthesize information they gather from interaction “with the natural and spiritual worlds,” their communities, and their family to keep the learning in balance, to help the students prepare for what is to be learned (Kawagley A. O., 1995). Indigenous knowledge is not limited to books, articles, and journals, it is embedded in their songs, their ceremonies, and their artwork, and is alive in the stories that the elders tell as well as in the activities that they perform everyday (Battiste, 2002).

The idea of balance and interconnectedness is an essential component to helping students identify their base knowledge. Finding a connection to the consciousness of Native ways of learning through what is around them and bringing that into balance with the more structured

way of Western learning can be a serious challenge. However, the importance of balance to Indigenous ways of knowing and learning can not be overlooked and are best illustrated in Kawagley's tetrahedral framework.



The balance and connection to their root/base knowledge will help the student better appreciate the introduction of new ideas, and help them to put those new ideas into perspective. The student will make the new concepts part of whom they are, broaden their ideas, and open their mind to what is being presented. But to ensure that balance is maintained new ideas must come to them naturally and with respect to what they know and who they are (Kawagley A. O., 1995).

Transferring Knowledge

Transferring knowledge is defined, for the purposes of this project, as taking new knowledge (Western concepts) and transferring them as additional knowledge building on the previously established root or base knowledge (finding common cultural ground to use for knowledge transfer). This process will be based on the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. Originally developed by Lev Vygotsky, the sociocultural theory envelopes the idea of learning as a social process. Vygotsky rejects the idea of standardized testing as a measure of intellectual development and instead holds that a more comparative approach would be effective. Vygotsky contends that social interaction is the basis for learning and limits to learning are dictated only by the person doing the teaching. Vygotsky calls this the Zone of

Proximal Development (ZPD), “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers,” (Vygotsky, 1978).

The ZPD offers a multitude of opportunities to improve course development for Indigenous students by providing:

- Opportunities for more interactive activities
- Flexibility
- The ability to respond to individual learners needs and stages of learning
- Recognition of elders and other community members as valuable contributors to the learning process
- An opportunity to move away from standardized curriculum and assessments
- Assistance for students to develop as individuals while building skills and knowledge
- Students with multiple opportunities for growth by taking on difficult activities that they would not be able to do without assistance (Au, 2005).

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory supports the ideas of traditional ways of knowing and learning. It emphasizes the role culture plays in human perception and development. Vygotsky believed essentially our language and culture (our social constructs) form the window through which we view the world and form our understanding of reality, and act as a partner in human development (Au, 2005) (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky sees the impact of culture on learning outcomes – What do you want the student to know when you are finished? If we focus on a more social-constructivist approach, we will be able to accommodate all styles of learning among the Indigenous population, while building on the socio-cultural core of the students (Au, 2005).

Incorporating an Indigenous epistemology found in Indigenous ideas, histories, ceremonies, and pedagogy such as learning through observation, authentic experience, and/or learning through enjoyment are critical to creating an effective transference of knowledge. Creating a careful balance between old and new information; insuring cultural respect; using the world the student lives in for examples and assignments; and using Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, student oriented “word-thought,” and vocabulary as the building blocks for gaining

new knowledge will provide students with a course of study that accepts students for who they are, respects students for what they know, and stimulates students to understand the value of knowledge from every culture (Battiste, 2002) (Barnhardt R, 2006).

The Process

I began my project in spring 2007 with a pilot course, and in the Fall 2007 used what I learned from the pilot to develop a new THR 200X, Aesthetic Appreciation for Art course. I delivered this course to a cohort of 12 students, 90% Alaska Native, required to take the class as part of a program that would ultimately lead them to a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work.

The Fall of 2007 class offered a unique experience. I was able to work with students face-to-face for two weeks, one week at the beginning of the semester and one week at the end of the semester. Throughout the rest of the term the course was delivered using traditional distance delivery methods. This gave me the opportunity to get to know my students well, learn from them about their culture and communities and gain insight to their personal worldviews. Additionally, the distance component gave students an opportunity to access local resources for developing course projects.

The first week we held class at the Rasmussen Library, in one of the small conference rooms. The setting was small and intimate and conducive to developing a good relationship with my students. Below is described one of the lessons that took place during the first week we were together.

Sample Unit

The objective of this lesson, from a cultural prospective is to transfer cultural knowledge of local and traditional art to Western concepts. From my experience, the Alaska Native students that I teach have a natural understanding of arts and humanities but little exposure to Western applications of these concepts. My goal was to start with what they knew, use culturally appropriate examples, and apply Western terminology and concepts to those examples The students would then transfer that knowledge to Western pieces of art. Once the students had the knowledge base, and realized that they have had some basic understanding of these concepts for

a long time, they would be less intimidated by Western art, and better able to apply the concepts easily, and bring this new experience into their worldview.

(The examples used in this paper are used with the students' permission.)

I started my lesson by having an Elder in the class (Elizabeth Flegal) to comment and share with students as the project developed. This proved to be a vital part of the project as her encouragement and contributions helped the students make connections between the two art forms. Elizabeth used her beading several times as she contributed to the class discussions, and provided me with a “library” of readily available traditional art examples.

I started the lesson by showing them an example of a painting done by a Native artist and giving them the following assignment:

- Assignment: Answer the following questions about this work – Does it improve quality of life? Does it stimulate your senses? Does it provide a message? If yes, what is the message?

I gave them only a few minutes to respond, but used their responses to prompt discussion and model answers to these types of abstract questions. We then discussed “What is Art?” as a class. Students then worked to develop their individual definitions of art. These are some examples:

- *“The definition of art is a way for an individual to express his/her feelings in order to get a reaction from the viewers. There are many forms of art, i.e. painting, drawings, the surroundings of a home, a house/building, literature, music, movies, theatre, and food. The art presented can have many different meanings, but the most important meaning is the one to the artist.” (Natasia Levi)*
- *“Art to me is an expression from an individual put into paint, picture, architecture, etc. With those expressions by individuals, it tells a story about nature, feelings and emotions at that moment and forever in a piece.” (Samantha Holmeberg)*
- *“Art is drawing a picture using a pencil or paint brush, it is also painting a picture. Creativity is thinking of an object and documenting it in words or in a picture.” (Duane Lincoln)*
- *“To me art is something that a person wishes to express, that a person is passionate about.” (Martha Simon)*

The class then worked on the introductory hands-on assignment:

- Students had to create their own paint (egg tempera) and with it they had to create their own painting.
- As I introduced the paint making we talked about the making of baskets. I brought in several examples and discussed the dying of seal gut or straw for the designs. The purpose of making the egg tempera was to show them how, before technology, creating paints was done with natural substances, and the process was similar to what Native artists did to create dyes as well as facing similar challenges.
- Once the paint was in process I began the discussion on the painting they were going to create. The painting had to be about something in their life. It could be a portrait, or a representation of an important event. It could be about their village or their traditions. Whatever they choose, it had to be important to them or their community.
- When they were done they had to make a presentation of their artwork. The presentation had to include:
 - A name for the painting
 - An explanation of what the painting was about
 - What was important about what they choose to represent
 - How it made them feel when they were painting it, and now that they are looking at it
- I also instructed the class, that after each presentation to be prepared to comment on each work. How did others works make them feel?

The creation of the paints was an interesting challenge. The paints dry very fast and students can't take too much time trying to perfect them. Also, if students don't make enough it is hard to match the color. As the students were working Elizabeth looked on and just kept smiling. She commented several times on how wonderful it was to see them working so hard to make these paints. She related the matching of colors to her beading, and shared stories with the students about challenges she had faced with her projects. One could see that the students were encouraged by her interaction.

The next day, the paintings were dry and the students were ready for presentations. This was the most enlightening experience of the entire project. The stories the students told were touching, and their artwork was amazing. Elizabeth commented after each presentation, and the students took great pride in their work.

Following are examples of student work:



I'll Follow You

“My Mom, who is now eighty three years old, has a new mode of transportation. It takes her too many of her favorite fishing spots on the frozen river near her fish camp.

My Mother is going ice fishing on her new snow machine, up-river from her camp which is five miles away from our community.

This reminds me how much I love her. It was easy to do as far as painting. It was easy to remember and picture because this event happens quite frequently.” (Duane Lincoln)



Breaking the Cycle for My Children

“My painting shows, with the different colors, that the cycle which I am trying to break has been within my family for at least four generations. The layers go from the white center, to yellow, to blue, and then to yellow again. The break in the cycle is both green and red, green signifying being able to change which is surrounded by red signifying hardships and sorrows of the change that affects the center as well as the other layers of generations. The four hearts on the side represents my four children whom I love with all my heart.” (Nastasia Levi)



Tradition

“My piece represents my tradition. One side of the girls face is sad because some of our people quit our traditional dance because we were told that it was evil. This one represents my personal experience. With much respect to my Grandpa, he told my mother that when he was drumming he experienced some dark spirits coming out of the ground so my Mother told my Sisters and I not to practice our dancing. So we missed out some. That affected part of my self identity. On the other side the girl is smiling because dancing is much alive today. And today I am the one that can tell my children they can enjoy their tradition.” (Martha Simon)

Martha noted: “To create our own paint using eggs and creating colors sounded like such a chore...I felt frustrated because I could not make my desired black color. As I was going through the process I was thinking, man the artists back then had to have time, patience, and creativity.”



My Loves

“...I put the earth, wind, fire, and water in the corners to represent my surroundings. I drew a circle to represent the circle of life with my husband on one side and I on the other. At the top is food that my family enjoys gathering and providing for us. The top half of the circle are children, ages: 13, 9, and 3. Within my children’s boxes are the things that remind me of them. On the bottom are my husband and my marriage with representations of our house, school, a boat, love and our strong communication. (Samantha Holmberg)

When the presentations were finished I presented a PowerPoint on Western European painting. The students responded as I had hoped. They were interested and attentive, making references to their own work, their own responses to art, and they could relate to the aesthetic value as well as the cultural value of each piece we discussed. They could also relate in a way I

had not anticipated, they understood the artist a little better. They discussed how hard it was to paint and some of the challenges the artist must have faced, such as creating just the right color while he/she was working on these pieces.

The distance format was delivered on Blackboard and with the use of telephone audio. We worked during distance class sessions to help overcome problems with project development, and were able to share examples using the internet. Actual presentations were not done until we were together on the last week.

The last week we were in a much larger room located in the Student's Activity Center (Wood Center). The larger room was not as conducive to the more social setting I had hoped for and hindered some of the relationship building I was looking for. Each student presented their work during the last week, we watched dances, heard songs, looked at PowerPoint's that taught us about individual communities, and admired art projects of all kinds and at the end of the week students turned in their portfolios for evaluation. Below is a list of units and introductory lesson:

Course Outline and Hands-on Introductory Activities

I have divided this course into eight units: hand drawing, painting, sculpture, landscape architecture, architecture, literature, music, and dance. Each unit starts with a hands-on activity that will serve as an introduction to the unit concept from the students' perspectives. The unit will include a presentation of additional art work from the Native perspective and vocabulary from the Western art perspective; building from there by adding more Western concepts to the process. Each hands-on activity is either done in a group setting or shared in a group setting, with contributions from Elders in the classroom to add to the students' learning experience, build on their knowledge base, and ensure cultural appropriateness.

The following is the unit outline with the hands-on introduction activities:

First Class

In your own words respond to the following questions:

- Define art.
- Define creativity.

- What does art mean to you?
- What does creativity mean to you?

These definitions should evolve throughout the class, and this activity will be revisited at mid-term and at the end of the class. Students will add evolving definitions in a different color print at each interval.

Sketch

Look around at your environment and find something you would like to sketch. Make a sketch of what you choose. Remember, you will not be graded on artistic ability. Then go to the internet and find a piece of art that shares something with your sketch. Bring the sketch and the found artwork to class.

You will work in pairs to compare your sketch to the art work from the internet. Share with your partner the reason you chose the item you did, and explain how your sketch and internet art are the same, and how they are different.

Reflect on this experience and write a short response including the comparison of your sketch to your internet art.

Painting

1. Create your own egg yolk tempera paint, using the recipe provided.
2. Use something important to you to create a painting that expresses an idea or emotion.
3. Describe your painting. (Examples of this are in the sample lesson)
 - a. Name your painting
 - b. What does it represent?
 - c. What symbolism did you use to tell your story?
 - d. Why was it important to you?

Sculpture

Choose something from your community that is symbolic or is significant to your way of life, be sure to ask permission to replicate this item if necessary.

(A short introduction to types of sculpture and some technical terms will be done through a PowerPoint using examples of Native art. The Elder in the room will be asked in advance, to share some examples of their own work they may have and its importance.)

Choose a type of sculpture that you can use to create a representation or replica of what you have chosen. The class will work cooperatively to create individual sculptures. When the sculptures are complete you will share your work with the class using the following as a guide:

- a. Name your piece.
- b. Give your feelings about the piece. (e.g., it reminds me of, it makes me feel good, it makes me feel sad)
- c. What significance would this piece have in your community or culture?

Landscape Architecture

Walk about your community and take pictures of the landscape where you see that man has made changes in nature. Pick two of your favorite pictures to share with the class. Explain how the changes to the landscape affect you emotionally, and how the landscape affects the surrounding environment.

Architecture

Walk about your community and take pictures of the significant structures. Use the photos you take to create a PowerPoint that tells us about your community.

- a. What functions do the structures serve?
- b. Do they have any cultural significance?
- c. Do they have any visual appeal? Why or why not?

Literature

The Elder will be asked to share a story with the class. Students will do a one - two page reaction paper: How did the elements in this story combine to create a reaction in you? What drew your attention? What is your emotional response to the work, and what causes that reaction?

Music

This assignment is your choice. Analyze a traditional song, compose music of your own, or research a specific form of traditional music. Bring your music to class.

You will perform for the class or bring a recording (if you are researching a specific form of traditional music bring a sample of that form) and provide commentary: What was this piece of music intended to communicate to the listener? What did this piece of music communicate to me? The information can be from you and/or something you acquire from an interview, or research. However, please give credit to the source of your response.

Have fun with this. Find music in your heart as well as your head, and be sure if you are sharing a traditional song that you have gotten from someone to secure permission to share the song.

Dance

Interview an Elder in your community about dances of the past. Use some of the following questions to guide your interview:

- a. What are some of the traditional/old dances you used to do?
- b. What purpose did they serve?
- c. What do you think they represented from the past?
- d. Were there specific steps you had to learn?
- e. What kind of music did you use for this dance?

You may add as many questions as you would like to learn as much as possible about the traditional/old dance.

Then ask the Elder to teach you this dance. Be diligent in learning the meanings of the specific movements. Also, be sure you ask permission to share this with the class.

When you have completed both with the interview and learning the dance, summarize your interview, and share your dance with the class.

Developing Lessons

Developing individual lessons can be challenging. In order to implement the process for knowledge transference each time the course is delivered different lessons must be created. Unit content is dependent on the makeup or the students in the class, the villages they are from, and their cultural background. Some examples may be transferable to the next class, but it will take time to build a library that is adequate for meeting cultural needs for the diverse student population in college classes.

Remember to explain to students that they should ask permission to share any cultural information that they obtain. Some students may understand this concept, but for those that do not it needs to be made clear that the pieces of art and culture that they will be using in class are the property of the people they are getting it from, and they need to acknowledge that and secure permission for anything they use in class. Including bibliographic information such as, the person they received the information from, the date(s) they conversed, and the cultural context (*i.e. Yup'ik wedding dance*) can be used. Following is a course development worksheet to help with the process.

Course Development Worksheet for Aesthetic Appreciation of Western Art

When starting the unit consider finding an Elder or respected member of the community to be part of the class. If students come from multiple communities do not worry, it is my experience over the past 11 years of working in many different college and high school setting in villages across the Bristol Bay Region that Elders are amazingly adapt to working with students and are quick to create a bond with students through their cultural and extended family connections. They provide a vital piece to each unit by offering encouragement and contributing examples and insight that the instructor may lack. These cultural ideas help the students to make more concrete connections to the concepts.

Step 1: Establishing a Starting Point (determining what the student brings to the table)

Unit Title/Content _____

Unit Introduction – This activity needs to be social, incorporate the entire group, and prompted by something culturally appropriate. Students should feel free to speak amongst themselves as well as addressing the class. Have specific questions or instructions to guide the students but be sure to avoid content terminology.

Example: Start the lesson by showing the students a piece of sculpture (pick a piece that will stimulate discussion) done by a Native artist. Let them look at the piece for a few minutes and then give them the following assignment:

Answer the following questions about this work – Does it improve quality of life? Does it stimulate your senses? Does it provide a message? If yes, what is the message?

After students have had some time to think about their responses, prompt a discussion. During the discussion time provide the students with something that will occupy their hands, perhaps pencil and paper for sketching, or clay for molding. Then, use these objects for two purposes, first, they will relax the students and create a culturally comfortable environment; second, for students that don't feel comfortable expressing themselves verbally they have a medium for expression, and provide an opportunity to prompt them with questions about their work to assist them in contributing to the discussion. Be patient, don't rush the conversation, allow extended wait time for responses.

You can also use this discussion time to introduce one or two basic Western Art concepts that are simple and essential to the unit introductory assignment in step two. Be cautious when doing this, do not let these concepts dominate any part of this activity, *i.e. in a sculpture refer to the student's clay work that was provided for them to keep their hands busy – You could ask the student – “That is an interesting piece you are working on, what would you call that”? Listen carefully to the student's response (be sure to allow enough wait time) – then add – “in Western Art they call that a Full Round Sculpture could you imagine why”? –again let the student respond, if they don't move on. My experience tells me they are responding internally.*

- a. Cultural prompt to be used:

- b. Western concepts to be included:

Step 2: Finding Root Knowledge (finding common cultural ground to use for knowledge transfer)

Introductory Activity – This activity gives the students an opportunity to explore art in their lives, and express themselves culturally and artistically. This activity requires the introduction of a few simple Western Art concepts and some simple terminology, to guide students, and to help them realize their own wealth of knowledge as they work on their project. This is best done using examples from Native Art.

The following is an example Introductory Activity:

Sculpture

Choose something from your community that is symbolic or is significant to your way of life.

(A short introduction to types of sculpture and some simple technical terms will be introduced as PowerPoint using examples of Native art. The Elder in the room will be asked in advance, to share some examples of their own work they may have and its importance.)

Choose a type of sculpture that you can use to create a representation or replica of what you have chosen. The class will work cooperatively to create individual sculptures. When the sculptures are complete you will share your work with the class using the following as a guide:

- a. Name your piece.

- b. Describe your piece using the technical terms introduced in the PowerPoint.
- c. Give your feelings about the piece. (e.g., it reminds me of, it makes me feel good, it makes me feel sad)
- d. What significance would this piece have in your community or culture?

The instructor is looking for two things from this activity to keep the unit moving forward.

- 1) Using students “word-thoughts” and cultural vocabulary (*begin filling in during unit introduction/discussion generated by the cultural prompt and directed by the instructor*), continue to identify the “word-thoughts,” ideas that are generated through the use of a particular vocabulary term or phrase, when the term or phrase is used again by the instructor it will generate a reference point for the student, and cultural vocabulary usable during this lesson. List them as they come up in the both step one and step two, then add the Western counterpart.

- 2) Examples of student work that can be used in conjunction with the introduction of Western Art pieces and concepts. These are pieces that can be used in PowerPoints to compare to Western Art or as a means for illustrating concepts and terminology.

The elements derived from the student's work in step 1 and step 2 will be needed to create step three.

Step 3: Transferring Knowledge (Taking new knowledge (Western concepts) and transferring them as additional knowledge building on the previously established root or base knowledge by finding common cultural ground to use for knowledge transfer.)

This is the point where concepts converge and the Indigenous student is able to expand their knowledge in Aesthetic Appreciation of Western Art. I found the most effective way to do this is create a series of slides that starts with the selected students work, introduces a piece of comparable Western Art, and then moves to more examples of Western Art alone. As illustrated below:



Full Round Sculpture:

Free standing, sculpted on all four sides, surrounded by empty space on all four sides.

Student Work created by Steven Wassiley for
THR 200X, Aesthetic Appreciation of Art,
UAF, Bristol Bay Campus



Full Round Sculpture:

Free standing, sculpted on all four sides, surrounded by empty space on all four sides.

Brown Bear by Alfred "Twillie" Gosuk of
Togiak, AK, from the collection of Susan
Thames



Full Round Sculpture:

Free standing, sculpted on all four sides,
surrounded by empty space on all four sides.

(Home Page, 2006)

Between 1923 and 1933

Stone statue

H. 163; W. 251; D. 90 cm

© photo RMN, Sophie Boegly, Pinon

(Musee d'Orsay, 2006)

Word thought and vocabulary become vital at this point. Be sure to use student word thought first when introducing the piece of Western Art, and then switch to the Western terminology. When my students were presenting one of their assignments a student used the following quote: “My piece represents my traditions,” (Martha Simon, 2007). The word thought “My piece represents...” can be used to introduce ideas of symbolism. Once the students become comfortable with the concept, substitute the word thought with the correct Western term. The students will continue to use the word thought. This is a good teaching opportunity, simply asking what the word thought means in the Western concept?

Evaluating Student Work

For evaluation use the introductory activities and have students expand the experience to incorporate Western concepts introduced in step 3, for example, in the sculpture assignment it is possible to add the following instruction: Describe your piece using technical terms introduced in the PowerPoint.

Student Portfolio's

I am including some samples of work from the class from the spring of 2007. Although the activities do not fully represent all elements I would use in teaching the class again, they do show the amazing understanding the students developed during this learning process.

This project was an amazing learning experience and these student artifacts were point for knowledge transference. I was able to use these examples to expand on the development of a class that effectively teaches Western Appreciation of Art concepts to Indigenous students while respecting their cultural knowledge and keeping it intact. I have also discovered the enormous wealth of information I still need to learn, and realize this is a project that will never be finished, but will grow and change as I learn from each experience with a new class. *(See Appendix)*

Conclusion

The struggle of Indigenous people to live in two worlds and have access to an education that respects their Native ways of knowing and learning and offers an opportunity to grow without losing their identity is ongoing. However, education in the Western sense is inevitable in the lives of Indigenous people around the world and although it has been the “major cause of the decline of Indigenous knowledge,” it also has the potential to provide what is needed to prevent its extinction (UNESCO, 2009).

The central purpose of this project was to identify an effective method for providing a culturally appropriate and theoretically sound way to teach Western Appreciation for Art to Indigenous students. The idea was to enable students to take ownership of their learning and find a way for Western concepts to connect to their Indigenous consciousness, thus bringing decontextualized Western educational methods into balance with the holistic and humanistic elements of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. Additionally, providing a more respectful education for Indigenous students as well as broadening the cultural ideas of all students. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory can offer a point at which to begin this journey of change, and his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) offers a path to follow to implement these changes to make education for Indigenous people constructive instead of destructive (Au, 2005).

The added effort and time for developing culturally appropriate curriculum can meet resistance from the traditional teaching community. Lesson preparation can be more labor intensive and not necessarily time efficient, compared to a more traditional Western approach. These lessons cannot be written on notebook paper that will yellow with age as the edges wear out from use as the years to retirement tick away. These lessons are not stagnant; they are alive and evolving with what the students know and they use the student's knowledge as a commodity to enrich development and implementation of each course.

As Indigenous people find their way through the matrix of living in two worlds educators have to be willing to step outside the traditional Western box and look to the wisdom and knowledge held as a treasure inside our Indigenous students and find ways to use that knowledge and wisdom as a corner stone for learning.

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Appendix