



Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools. Alaska Native Knowledge Network (University of Alaska at Fairbanks). Anchorage: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998. 24 pp.

Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers for Alaska's Schools. Alaska Native Knowledge Network (University of Alaska at Fairbanks). Anchorage: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1999. 19 pp.

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For over 30 years now, a few anthropologists have been dedicated to teacher training for American Indians and Native Alaskans. Training native teachers from the village or the region within a context that respects traditional knowledge increases the likelihood that villages will keep a teacher longer. Moreover, having nonnative teachers learn about the local culture and immersing them in a meaningful cross-cultural experience broadens their teaching encounter, helping them become an educational asset to the community.

Alaska presents one of the most challenging settings in this regard. Nonnative teachers, fresh from university training, arrive at remote villages to encounter a culture and environment that confounds, problematizes, and often nullifies their role. Without the cross-cultural tools to reflect on their "location," in both the larger and the local sense, educators can do more than just be alienated and ineffectual; they can do a lot of harm. Such teachers do not stay long.

One of the most innovative locations for combining theory and practice in credentialing native teachers and in providing cross-cultural training for all teachers has been the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. This is largely because of the visionary leadership of Ray Barnhardt. Ray, who received the Spindler award last year, has had an important influence on teaching, learning, and educational administration in Alaska and internationally through his work with the World Indigenous People's Conference on Education.

Contained in these two publications is some of the condensed knowledge and experience of 30 years working with and learning from native people. No authors are listed, but the approach reflects the theoretical clarity that is consistent with Ray's anthropological influence. Particularly, the emphasis on administrators, as well as teachers, acquiring an openness to alternative worldviews hearkens back to some of his



earlier writings: "Herein lies the potential of anthropology for educational administrators—to break through the conceptual myopia of the 'insiders' point of view and provide a framework and methodology for looking at the interaction of the components of an educational system from a holistic, integrative perspective" (*Anthropology and Educational Administration*, Ray Barnhardt, John H. Chilcott, and Harry F. Wolcott, eds. [Tucson: Impresora Sahuaro, 1979], p. xviii).

The emphasis in both of these books is on teachers becoming aware of native worldviews and designing alternative curricula reflecting such knowledge. However, the weight of responsibility for breaking out of ethnocentrism is not placed solely on teachers: "To the extent that we teach the way we are taught, university faculty and others associated with the preparation of teachers should participate in cultural immersion experiences themselves to develop the insights and sensitivities they intend to impart to their teacher candidates" (*Guidelines*, p. 18). The recommendations extend out to the larger educational community and implicitly to the larger society. These books make it clear that recommendations for teachers are "equally applicable to the preparation and practice of school administrators and should serve as the basis for revitalizing all educational leadership programs" (*Guidelines*, p. 19).

Such works as these are unique in affirming the paramountcy of sense of place and in acknowledging the (local) knowledge of elders as a revitalizing force in schools and in teacher training. The reader finds none of the empty and bankrupt jargon about helping students acquire the technological mastery and aptitude to compete for careers in the global marketplace (with the exception of one absentminded cliché about "thinking globally and acting locally"). Furthermore, these books ask educators to reflect on the consequences of adopting any new technology. Here, a refreshing critical stance is applied, encouraging students to "identify appropriate forms of technology and anticipate the consequences of their use for improving the quality of life in the community" (*Alaska Standards*, p. 6). The focus is on fostering intellectual and social growth that is not in collision with the traditional culture's emphasis on history, language, oral tradition, and the local environment of the community.

Too often in the past, educational standards were constructed by people aligned with values that clashed with or did violence to traditional communities. In the rare instances when native students actually succeeded in meeting these imported goals, they were pushed to leave the village and seek "individualized" opportunities far away. This only produced a heartbreaking history of alienation for both the student and the community, which suffered the loss of a valuable young person. The guidelines in these two books, if actually followed, could have a profound healing effect on Alaskan schools and communities. However, they also have significant



prescriptions for all schools and could serve as a potent template for broader discussions about culture and community. These would be excellent books to discuss and debate in all foundations courses and could serve as a centerpiece for the construction of a culturally appropriate curriculum for all schools. For those of us who have worked in cross-cultural settings, these books are so clear and well written that they seem to be without contention; they simply contain visionary common sense. The only criticism that might be expected is that "the devil is in the details." Nonetheless, these books can provide vision to guide educators through a sustained and creative engagement with diabolical obstacles.

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