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*Focus on Middle and High School Issues*

## **The “Eye of Awareness”: Probing the Hidden Dimension of Bilingual Education**

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### **Abstract**

Cultural values are the hidden dimension of bilingual education. They are invisible. They are hard to pin down. They are delicate to deal with. For this reason, many bilingual programs allow them to remain hidden. As ethereal as cultural values often are, they subtly influence the academic outcomes of bicultural students. In Alaska, the Bering Strait School District has sponsored and piloted a two-pronged cultural awareness program for Eskimo students and their non-Eskimo teachers. The first prong is a series of 36 weekly bulletins designed to alert teachers to some of the contrasting cultural values that can help promote student achievement in school. The second prong is a course for high-school students that teaches them how to recognize and cope with contrasting cultural values so that, instead of culture clash, they can experience culture comfort. The course content is of such high interest to students that they are unaware that they are taking part in an intensive language development program.

### **Double Struggle**

Some of the causes of the lower-than-average rate of language and academic achievement by Native American students— isolation, limited English, health problems— have been known for some time and are being addressed by a number of different programs. These programs have produced modest increases in student achievement in recent years, but there seems to be broad agreement that they have not reached the goal stated in the 1988 Bilingual Education Act, namely, to provide students the opportunity "to learn *successfully* in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to *participate fully in our society*" (italics added; Title VII Regulations 20 USC 3283).

Several recent and ominously titled studies dispel any lingering doubts about the academic success or wholesome socialization of Native American students. There is, for example, the Pulitzer Prize-winning series published by the Anchorage Daily News in 1988, entitled *A People in peril*. There is also the major study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education that appeared in late 1991 with the title *Indian nations at risk*. Most recently there is the American Medical Association study (Resnick, 1992) of 14,000 Native American teenagers that, behind a bland title— *American Indian and Alaska Native youth health*, confirms the pervasive spread of hopelessness among adolescent Native Americans.

Parents, students, teachers, and administrators in Native American school districts have for several years realized that success in school, particularly during the years of adolescence, is determined as much by subtle

cross-cultural forces as it is by carefully planned instructional objectives. Students may achieve adequate English-language skills, for example, but still find themselves suffering an anguish born of culture clash.

Since cultural values, for the most part, operate in the subconscious, students—and their teachers—rarely conceptualize the cause of cultural discomfort and, consequently, even more rarely verbalize it. Thus, if the typical American child is "struggling through the jagged landscape of modern childhood" (*Time*, 1988), then the Native American student is experiencing this struggle on two fronts, one societal, one cultural. Emotional discomfort of this kind to varying degrees hinders effective learning in the classroom and wholesome participation in society.

### Figure 1

#### *When Cultures Meet: The Psychological Options Which Occur in a Cross-Cultural Encounter*

[image not included]

Figure 1 illustrates the psychological reactions that are possible when people of different cultures meet. If enough acculturation has taken place, the meeting of cultures leads smoothly to psychological harmony. If this ideal has not been met, the inevitable result is tension. The tension may range from mere discomfort to severe anguish. When it occurs, however, the subject instinctively seeks escape. The escape can be personally harmful: denial, lashing out, flight, suicide. Or the escape from the tension can be healthy: understanding what is happening, being able to laugh at what is happening, or adapting to what is happening.

Just as the school alone cannot maintain a minority language much less restore one, neither can the school alone address or respond to all the cross-cultural tensions that students experience. A question, nonetheless, remains: how can schools serving Native American students help alleviate the discomfort of culture clash that becomes an impediment to education and to wholesome integration into society? One Yup'ik Eskimo teacher described

[the clash] of . . . cultural values as the 'invisible clamor.' This on-going, often subtle struggle between cultures is an extreme source of tension and pain within the community and the school. In order for the school to truly meet the needs of the community it was built to serve, this 'invisible clamor' needs to be unveiled and heard. (Henze et al., 1990, p. 51)

## Research Trends

Over the past two decades, bilingual education in the United States has shown not only remarkable horizontal growth, but significant vertical growth, or maturation, as well. Both researchers and practitioners have developed increasingly more effective language teaching methods and burgeoning collections of culturally relevant materials. Showing a similar vertical growth in maturity—though far less in horizontal implementation—is the research related to cultural values in Native American contexts. Over roughly the last two decades the literature in this field has matured through three overlapping yet distinct phases. The

early writings on cross-cultural values in the context of education were predominantly *analytical*. These mostly theoretical studies led into a second phase of research which can be characterized as “diagnostic-prescriptive” with a still strong emphasis on theory. The third and current wave in the literature can be described as therapeutic with an emphasis on praxis.

## The Analytical Phase

The Native American values literature of the early 1970s was characterized by theoretical explorations of basic questions (Dodge, 1972; Aheneke, 1974). Many of the early studies were in a philosophical vein (Malan and Jessor, 1959; Rohner, 1965; Baker, 1970; McDonald, 1973; Bunge, 1978). Some of the first psychological studies appeared during this phase (Bryde, 1971; Barnett, 1973; Tennant, 1976). Researchers of Native American education began to seriously probe learning theory (Cazden, 1971), learning styles influenced by culture (Kleinfeld, 1975), and information processing characteristics (Cattley, 1980). Finally, during this phase some researchers began to document and analyze the behaviors of teachers in Native American classrooms (Kleinfeld, 1970; Collier, 1973).

## The Diagnostic-Prescriptive Phase

From the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, the weight of research began to shift from analysis to issues (Barnhardt 1977, 1982, 1988). Some authors began to explore strategies for removing barriers to effective Native American education (Ross and Brave Eagle, 1975) and for incorporating traditional values into the educational process (Pingayak, 1976). Still others focused on the teacher in the cross-cultural classroom and the implications that contrasting cultural values hold for the teacher (Payne, 1977; Mitchell and Watson, 1980; Reyhner, 1981). During the late 1980s, the shift from theoretical to practical strategies began to take place (Cuch, 1987; Finley with Kleinfeld, 1988; Coburn, 1989).

## The Therapeutic Phase

Since the mid 1980s the dominant research on values in Native American education has turned to “medicine,” practical ways to reduce that student discomfort which is caused by a mismatch of cross-cultural values. During this phase, researchers began depth-analysis of cross-cultural communication (Scollon and Scollon, 1980) and of the ways that communication affects learning in Native American classrooms (Foerster and Little Soldier, 1980). Some authors emphasized preventive measures (Lockart, 1981; Gingras, 1989), while others advocated culturally appropriate behavioral changes (Lazarus, 1982; LeBrasseur and Freark, 1982). Practical tips for teachers began to appear first in brochures (Jacobsen, 1984; Kaplan, 1984; Thompson, 1984), and later, in more extensive book form (Gilliland with Reyhner et al., 1988). Case studies of teaching behaviors continued (Kleinfeld, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c; Pingayak, 1990) and detailed recommendations for cultural appropriateness in Native American bilingual programs began to appear (Henze et al., 1990). In harmony with the trend of this third phase in private research, the U.S. Department of Education announced in June 1991, that it was “redirecting research efforts toward a focus on successful approaches and techniques.” (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, June, p. 47).

## Applying the Research

One Native American school district in Alaska<sup>1</sup> has sponsored and piloted a program to isolate, clarify, and teach contrasting cross-cultural values in a novel way in order to help *teachers* become sensitive to

differences in those cultural values that can affect the teaching-learning process and to teach *students* how to identify and cope more comfortably with contrasting cultural differences. Throughout the program students learn in an almost transparent way the advanced language skills they need to process complex concepts. Both the methodology and content of the program are broad enough to be applicable—with some adaptation—to other Native American contexts.

The core research reviewed above suggests that since the very word “values” triggers an emotional and often defensive response, any presentation of values in an educational setting must be both delicate and positive. For a program of cultural-awareness building in a Native American context to be successful, it should ideally respond to several other important criteria:

1. The values chosen for treatment should be cultural, not moral, religious, familial, tribal, or personal.
2. The values chosen should be those that relate to promoting positive interaction and wholesome discourse between people of two different cultures.
3. The values chosen should be broad enough to be manageable on a high-school level and still be applicable in general terms to the Native American context at large.<sup>2</sup>
4. Since values by definition connote worth, the terminology used to describe even highly contrasting values should always be positive.
5. Inasmuch as the teaching of values has not yet been typecast, a developing program can and should explore innovative delivery systems for both teachers and students.
6. The inherent quality of the cross-cultural program should be such as to invite its permanent integration into the district’s curriculum and teacher training program.
7. The content of cross-cultural training for students and teachers should respond to the needs perceived and identified by the population to be served.

Adopting these criteria, a program can teach cross-cultural values in a way that can begin to respond to some of the needs that many bilingual or bicultural programs simply do not currently address. A workshop sponsored by the Alaska School Boards Conference in 1988, for instance, identified 39 specific barriers that Native students encounter in the schooling process.<sup>3</sup> Here are just some of the perceived barriers:

1. lack of self esteem;
2. lack of cultural understanding by the educator;
3. lack of appropriate curriculum;
4. lack of opportunity to develop language skills;
5. schools not reflecting the cultures of the community;
6. lack of mutual understanding of each other’s differences;
7. lack of understanding about the changing world;
8. lack of ability to communicate between parents and teachers;
9. lack of socialization between teachers and community;
10. lack of spirituality;
11. lack of acceptance of curriculum that focuses on local culture;
12. lack of formalization of bilingual curriculum;
13. need for more teaching methods and content that are appropriate; and
14. conflict of changing values.

These are only 14 of 39 needs identified in that workshop. With little or no adaptation, all 14 are applicable to most Native American education programs. Furthermore, these 14 barriers are of the type that can be

addressed to some extent in an effective program of cross-cultural education. Each of these barriers, for example, is being addressed by the “Eye of Awareness” program in the Bering Strait School District.

## A Unifying Theme

The “Eye of Awareness” is an ancient Eskimo symbol that emerges from the mists of unrecorded history. For hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, this circle with a dot in the center has played a central role in Eskimo imagery (Fitzhugh, 1988, p. 262ff). In Eskimo languages it is called the “Eye of Awareness” since it is meant to remind people that they have the power to see beyond the visible plane. The circle has also been interpreted as a “hole” that beckons people to enter the spiritual world.

The “Eye of Awareness” was chosen as a unifying theme for both the student and teacher components of the cross-cultural training program because it is an ancient and authentic Eskimo image. It is a simple, yet vivid symbol of the power of spiritual insight. Since training in cross-cultural values is intent on things of the spirit—self-worth, happiness, success, respect, love—the “Eye of Awareness” serves as a particularly appropriate theme.

Although this theme serves Alaskan Eskimo cultures well, other Native American cultures might find a theme rooted in their own heritage to be more suitable. The Plains Indians, for example, have powerful symbols in the Circle, the Medicine Wheel, and the Sacred Shield.

### Figure 2 *Examples of the “Eye of Awareness.”*

[image not included]

The four symbols to the left are from *The graphic art of the Eskimos*, by Walter James Hoffman, M.D., an extract from the report of the U.S. National Museum, Washington, D.C., 1897, Plate 77. The symbol on the right is in the author’s possession as an etching of an artifact from St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea.

[image not included]

## The Core of the Program

In suggesting ways to help “unveil the invisible clamor” of conflicting cultural values, writers over the past 20 years have identified a wide array of cultural contrasts which, they submit, should be taken into account in the education of Native American students. Although many of these cultural values tend to fuse, overlap, or shift in real situations, it is helpful for pedagogical purposes to examine them in their “isolated state.” Consequently, the “Eye of Awareness” program isolates 36 values which stand in more or less stark contrast when viewed from either the Native American or the European American perspective. For teaching purposes these 36 values are further categorized into four subsets as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
***Cultural Contrasts Between Eastern-Oriented Traditional Native American Cultures and Western-Oriented, General American Society***

<b>WESTERN GENERAL AMERICAN</b>	<b>MIND SET</b>	<b>EASTERN NATIVE AMERICAN</b>
Apart from Nature _____		One with Nature
Logical _____		Intuitive
Literal-Scientific _____		Symbolic-Poetic
Word Power _____		Action Power
Commit to the Future _____		Will Not Commit to the Future

**DEALING WITH ONE ANOTHER**

Efficiency _____		“Face”
Animated _____		Reserve
Privacy _____		Publicness
Public Welfare _____		Personal Welfare
Sharing by Law _____		Sharing by Custom
Nuclear Family _____		Extended Family
Youth-Oriented Society _____		Elder-Oriented Society
Strict Child Rearing _____		Relaxed Child Rearing
Competition _____		Cooperation
Individualism _____		“Otherism”
Public Recognition _____		Public Restraint
Defend One’s Rights _____		Avoid Personal Conflict
Primacy of Authority _____		Primacy of People
Allegiance to Symbols _____		Allegiance to People
“Instant” Friendships _____		Slow-Forming Friendships
Response for Others _____		No Response for Others

**TALKING TO EACH OTHER**

Direct Communication _____		Indirect Communication
Vigorous Body Language _____		Subtle Body Language
Rapid Verbal Exchange _____		Slower Paced Speech
Loud and Clear _____		Soft Spoken
Dislike Silence _____		Esteem Silence

English-Language Roots	_____	Non-English Roots
Strong Kidding	_____	Weak Kidding
Social Flattery	_____	Avoid Social Flattery

**FORCES AROUND US**

The American Dream	_____	Current Reality
Consumerism	_____	Conservation
Private Property	_____	Common Property
Task Oriented	_____	Person Oriented
American Time	_____	Oriental Time
Novelty	_____	Stability

If training in these cross-cultural values is to have the desired, positive effect, it is essential that the trainee maintain an awareness of several important presuppositions, namely: (1) the cultural values counterpoised in Table 1 represent cultural leanings, tendencies, and proclivities not cultural imperatives; (2) culture being what it is, no individual within a particular culture will manifest all the culture’s values in their pure form; (3) wherever cross-cultural contacts have occurred, the processes of acculturation will have eroded the near total cultural dominance that prevailed before cross-cultural contacts began; and (4) an individual’s general cultural values preferences are not static, but can shift, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or willy nilly, depending on the situation, depending on one’s ability to recognize and shift values according to their cultural appropriateness, and depending sometimes on something as prosaic as what one had for breakfast. As much caution as these four caveats advise, the cultural contrasts presented in Table 1 are nonetheless *real*. An understanding of these contrasts can help promote the ability, however basic, to deal with people in culturally more appropriate ways (Saville-Troike, 1978). This cultural flexibility is the key to avoiding culture clash and the discomfort or outright pain which can arise from it.

## The Delivery System for Teachers

Among non-native teachers of Native American children there is often the assumption that Native American students—except for apparent physical differences—are not unlike other students in the population at large and that Native American students share the same discourse system as those students whose roots are in the dominant, mainstream society. This prevalent assumption “can lead to misinterpretations that may be harmful for students” (Henze, 1990, p. 64).

School district administrators are generally aware of the consequent need to provide cultural orientation for teachers who are new to Native American schools, but any one of three obstacles generally thwarts the delivery of substantive training.

1. **Lack of time and money.** With all the administrative orientation that must be given to teachers new to a district, there is seldom little if any time left during preservice sessions to provide teachers with any consequential cultural orientation. Furthermore, the harried nature of preservice training and the

preparation for the opening of school provides a less than ideal time for a leisurely though serious inquiry into cultural traits.

2. **Lack of an appropriate syllabus.** Until recently, few materials have been available to allow a coherent and in-depth exploration of Native American values in light of their educational implications. Creating or adapting such a “course of study” for new teachers has understandably been beyond the scope of most districts’ priorities.
3. **High teacher turnover rate.** It is not rare, at least for rural school districts in Alaska, to experience an average annual teacher turnover rate of 20-25 percent. If the average teacher spends only a few years in a district, whatever training the district provides will generally focus on classroom instruction rather than cultural speculation. On the other hand, the high turnover rate is another weighty reason to search for a simple, effective method to help new teachers develop an awareness of significant cultural differences.

To overcome these three obstacles, the “Eye of Awareness” program delivers the cross-cultural training for teachers in 36 colorful, four-page bulletins. During their first year in the district, new teachers receive one bulletin each week. The bulletins are packed with insights, information, anecdotes, reviews of relevant literature, and “communication alerts,” and are attractively designed and illustrated in a way that is inviting to the reader. Whereas a book on cross-cultural awareness might lie unread on a busy teacher’s bookshelf, a weekly four-page bulletin lends itself to easy and enjoyable reading and to the probability that the information in it will be absorbed rather than skimmed. The compact format of the information also lends itself to discussion in teacher lounges and school staff meetings.<sup>4</sup>

### **Figure 3** *Sample Title Page of Bulletin No. 8.*

For visual variety, the bulletins are printed on different colored paper—yellow, pink, blue, goldenrod, or lavender

*[image not included]*

Delivering 36 bulletins to teachers over a 36-week time frame not only gives them a book’s worth of content in an easily digestible portions, but it likewise encourages them in a manageable way to put some new aspect of cultural relevance into practice each week.

Thus, the “Eye of Awareness” bulletins find a way around the three main obstacles that most districts face in attempting to provide cross-cultural awareness training for new teachers. No new time slots or training funds need be found. No new training course need be developed (although some customizing of the bulletins would be recommended if they were to be used in other locales). With relatively little effort, training through bulletins can be provided to new teachers each year. Districts, of course, have the further and highly desirable option of following up on the content of the bulletins in more personalized staff meetings or workshops throughout the year.

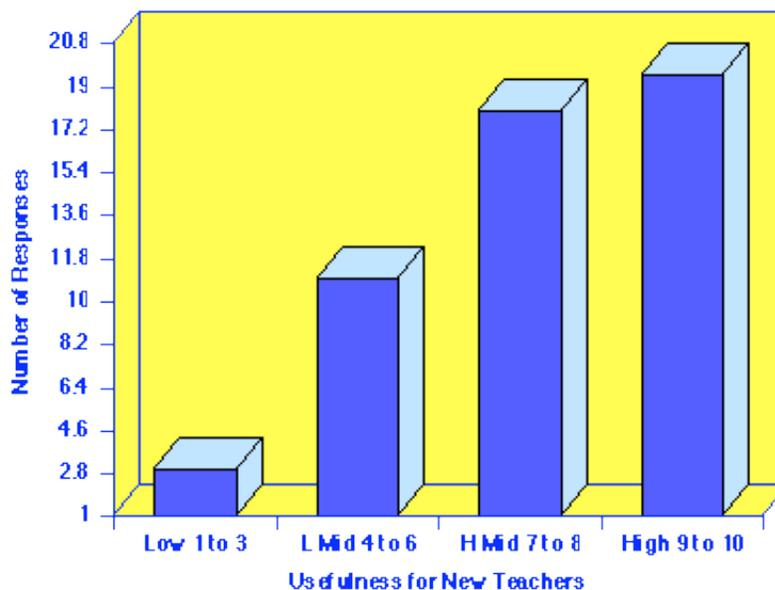
## Response to the Bulletins

The bulletins were first published and used in the Bering Strait School District during the 1990-91 school year. Seeking to evaluate the bulletins on as broad a base as possible during the pilot year, the district distributed them to all personnel: teachers, both new and experienced; administrators; classroom aides; even village cooks and maintenance personnel. They were also sent to a select group of ten cross-cultural professionals outside the district for independent review.

A 15-item questionnaire was sent to all district personnel who received the bulletins. Respondents completed and returned 142 questionnaires. A detailed analysis of the responses can be found in the evaluation report of the independent evaluator.<sup>5</sup> The responses to most items on the questionnaire follow the pattern indicated in Figure 4, namely, an average positive response of eight on a scale of one (negative) to ten (positive). A confirmation of this average response was found in Item 9, in which respondents were asked to list up to three adjectives describing their reaction to the bulletins. Of the total 341 adjectives listed, 276 (82 percent) were positive. That the bulletins were providing useful insights to the majority of teachers emerged in personal comments such as, “Perhaps it is human nature to avoid new and strange ideas, but the discomfort passes and soon what is left is a new awareness,” and “I wish the publication had been available nine years ago when I started teaching in rural Alaska.”

**Figure 4**  
***Response Pattern to the Question, “To what extent do you think these bulletins would be helpful for teachers coming to a village for the first time.”***

*(Low responses indicate “Not Helpful.” High responses indicate “Very Helpful.”)*



Professional reviewers of the bulletins from outside the sponsoring school district responded mainly with personal observations. A cross-cultural literacy expert in British Columbia wrote, "The gathering of such a wide variety of relevant material in small useful chunks is a brilliant stroke ...and key, I believe, to the usefulness that the bulletins will have." A cross-cultural counselor wrote, "I find the 'Eye of Awareness' bulletins very, very interesting. The content lends itself to very compelling reading. You have put together some information that I had not given much previous thought to. For example, the Eastern influence. Hmnnnn..." As a final example, a linguist with thirty years experience in rural Alaska observed, "It is exciting to see cultural differences presented in a positive, instructional way. The format is excellent. You have managed to get a lot of excellent material into each issue. The potential impact for good coming out of this project is great."

Using the cumulative research of the past 20 years and packaging the results in a novel delivery system, the "Eye of Awareness" bulletins seem to provide a way of helping most teachers, particularly those new to Native American students, become aware of some of the cultural differences that can affect a student's achievement in school. The range of responses to the evaluation questionnaire indicate that the bell-shaped curve has not lost its validity. Across a range of teachers, some 10 percent on the high end need no cross-cultural training because of an innate sensitivity to cultural differences; another 10 percent on the low end need no training since it will ultimately make little difference in their thinking or behavior; the remaining 80 percent, however, will benefit from the training to various positive degrees along the great arch of the curve.

## **The Student Delivery System**

Bilingual education programs traditionally teach students to "code switch" (Ramos, 1976; Hakuta, 1990). Rarely, however, do they teach them to "values switch" (Tennant, 1976). Until the criteria outlined earlier in "Applying the Research" are successfully addressed, the complexities of "discourse" or "values switching" can seem daunting. Yet, the ability of students to succeed cross-culturally in school or in life depends not only on their I.Q., but also on their ability to adopt or at least accept the appropriate, underlying cultural values at work in any particular situation. Whether, for example, someone in a personal exchange is judged to be "rightfully assertive" or "overly pushy," is often determined as much by a transparent and underlying cultural value as by an individual personality trait.

Behavior that is perceived to be positive because it is rooted in a cultural value generally leaves the observer feeling at ease. Behavior, on the other hand, that is interpreted as a personal affront is characterized by negative labels ("inconsiderate," "offensive," "discriminatory") and leaves the subject in a state of uneasiness or mental disarray. Whether a person is at ease or in pain in a cross-cultural situation depends to a large extent on that person's ability to "values switch."

For Native American high-school students the contrasting cultural values which collide in their world are the same as those presented to non-native teachers in the "Eye of Awareness" bulletins (see Table 1). But, while teachers approach cultural awareness from a "Western General American" perspective, Eskimo or Indian students approach it from an "Eastern Native American" perspective. This difference in perspective is incorporated into the delivery system for students.

## **The Curriculum Squeeze**

As the realm of knowledge continues to explode exponentially, so do the demands on most district curricula. Finding a slot for a new course often calls for gentle persuasion and measured patience. In all cases the

process is best approached gradually, first in a few schools as a pilot project, later in others as a permanent “elective.” If the student course has the inherent quality called for by Criterion No. 6 (see “Applying the Research”), both students and teachers will be willing, perhaps anxious, to incorporate the course into the official district curriculum.

A question, however, remains: where does a cross-cultural values clarification course best fit in the curriculum? Although the answer to this question may vary for other districts, the Bering Strait School District found that the course fit most conveniently into Alaska Studies, a two-semester, five-class per week, required sub-course of Social Studies. By reducing some of the time devoted to teaching the complexities of the Alaska Native Land Claims Act, two classes a week became available for the “Eye of Awareness” course.

The language development emphasis of the course will be explained, but it should be noted here that when the course is taught as a component of Social Studies, it *adds to*, rather than displaces, any existing language arts instruction.

## Teaching Methodology

Since the realm of cross-cultural values clarification is an entirely new subject for the majority of teachers who will be asked to teach it, it is important to provide them with a guide that is clear and comprehensive and that contains all of the teaching tools that they will need to teach the course effectively. Hence, the “Eye of Awareness” teacher’s guide contains the following elements:

1. **The Introduction:** a 25-page orientation to the origins of the course, an explanation of the less apparent student needs, which the course addresses, an overture to the “Eye of Awareness,” a highlighting of the main themes of the course, a series of pedagogical considerations for working with Native American students, some suggestions on methodology appropriate to dominant Indian and Eskimo learning styles, and, finally, the course bibliography;
2. **The Lesson Plans:** the course itself consists of 40 one-page lesson plans, each of which has six components: a lesson theme statement, abbreviated statements of what the students will learn in the lesson, suggested methods to achieve the goal of each statement, supplementary “tips” on how to process the lesson content, specification of the language and communication skills to be learned in the lesson, and, finally, a choice of several possible follow-up activities; and
3. **Supplementary Materials:** every lesson plan includes one overhead slide and, generally, two handouts. The overhead slide can alternately be used as a handout. All of these materials are supplemental and allow the teacher a wide range of flexibility in processing the lesson content with the students.

Throughout the introduction and the lesson plans there are constant reminders that, in keeping with preferred Native American learning styles, “acting out is better than talking over.” A dominant value in general American society is verbalization. This is a communication style of talk, lecture, and sound in the air which leaves most Western Americans quite comfortable. Native American cultures, on the other hand, prefer what might be called the Eliza Doolittle principle promoted in the musical production of *My Fair Lady*, “Don’t say the words. Show me!”

## Language Development Emphasis

The “Eye of Awareness” course promotes an approach to language enrichment that not only takes cross-cultural differences into account but also puts them center stage. The approach goes beyond the typical verbal techniques of English as a second language (ESL), or the physical involvement strategies of Total Physical Response (TPR), or the immersion process of High Intensive Language Training (HILT). This course starts with the *students*, with where they are personally and culturally. It then proposes and processes crucial questions that they want to and need to think about because they relate directly to their personal well-being.

Both the quality and quantity of vocabulary needed to process the “Eye of Awareness” lessons are of a college-level challenge. Words like “fluctuate,” “equilibrium,” “ostracize,” “incongruity,” “propensity,” and “relegate” occur with such frequency in the lessons that some of the first pilot teachers of the course requested that a glossary be added to the teacher guide. But they did *not* ask that the vocabulary be watered down. Nor did the students. One student, in fact, approached his teacher after class and said, “This is pretty heavy stuff!” The teacher reported that he said it with a smile on his face and a gleam in his eye.

By addressing the “pulse of life beneath the skin of events,” as Donald Barr so warmly phrased it, the “Eye of Awareness” course draws students so deeply into what they are discussing, that they are hardly aware of all the new language they are learning in order to discuss it. As a method for promoting language growth, this natural process might be called “Total Human Response” (THR).

## Student Response to the Course

External evaluation data regarding the correlation between the “Eye of Awareness” course and global academic achievement is not yet available. Such data could not, in any case, predict future results of the course after only two years of preliminary piloting, first in three schools, then in six. Other types of evaluation data, however, are available and confirm the personal, positive response of students.

First of all, students became keenly aware of what cultural comfort is and where their cultural comfort lies. Analyzing the 36 contrasting values presented in Table 1, 31 Eskimo students plotted on an eight-point scale the area of their generally preferred cultural value. The global results of weighting their values are presented on the graph in Figure 5.

## Questionnaire Responses

Students in six schools in grades ranging from 8-12 completed a nine-item questionnaire. Responses from 78 students were tabulated with the following results.

1. **Student reaction to the purpose of the course.** Most responses were broad or cursory ranging from the single word “awareness” to “learn more about our culture and other cultures.”
2. **How new to the students was the material presented?** The majority of students (63 percent) noted that most of what was taught in the course was new to them. 39 students (50 percent) were at the top end of the scale in the 7-9 point range.
3. **How much did the course help the students understand cultural differences?** Fifty-four students (69 percent) plotted their increased cross-cultural understanding at the upper end of the scale in the 6-9 point range.
4. **How much did the course help students feel more comfortable talking about cultural differences?** A majority of 46 students (59 percent) said that they felt more comfortable discussing

cultural differences. On the other hand, 32 students (41 percent) rated their comfort on the low end of the scale. This indicates that simple increased awareness of cultural differences need not in itself lead to immediate or total comfort with those differences.

5. **Did the students change any behaviors because of insights they learned in the course?** Here the majority shifts to the low side as 55 students (70 percent) noted with candor that they did not change very much behavior as a result of the course. Almost 25 percent said that they changed nothing at all. This honest response confirms that although understanding cross-cultural differences can increase comfort in coping with those differences, this comfort does not guarantee substantial or immediate behavior change. Such change requires dedicated effort and generally occurs slowly over longer periods of time. It should be noted, however, that even a small amount of behavior change can have inversely proportionate positive effects, as, for example, when a teacher because of an insight into a cultural difference adopts the habit of just a single more appropriate behavior, namely, doubling the amount of time a Native student is given to respond to a question.
6. **To what degree do the students feel more comfortable shifting cultural values depending on the situation?** This question is a follow-up to the previous one. In response to it, five students shifted from the lower to upper end of the scale, a slight indication that there is some increase in the comfort level when students are able to “values shift” according to the cultural demands of a situation.
7. **In processing cultural differences in the course, to what degree did the students learn new ideas and new vocabulary to express those ideas?** A majority of 43 students (55 percent) were on the high end of the scale (6-9) in indicating that they had learned many new ideas and the words to express them.
8. **To what extent did the students feel they wanted to take part in the classroom discussions?** Most students, 46 of 78 (59 percent), in response to this question rated themselves on the lower end of the scale. It remains to be determined whether this is due to a cultural preference for listening rather than speaking, to the complexity of some of the topics processed, or to individual styles of teaching which tend more toward lecture than toward discussion. Or, possibly some combination of the three. What the response does suggest to future teachers of the course is that student participation needs to be actively promoted.
9. **Would the students like “to learn more about culture and psychology?”** Although this was the first time in the course that the word “psychology” was used, 51 of the students (65 percent) put themselves in the upper end of the scale between 6 and 9, indicating that they would like to learn more about the kinds of topics they studied in the “Eye of Awareness” course.

### **Figure 5** *Cross-Cultural Value Preference Profile*

On an eight-point scale, 31 Eskimo students plotted their “culture comfort” for each of the 36 contrasting cultural values. The numbers on the Y-axis indicate the total number of responses in each preference category. Gridline 4 at the center of the X-axis indicates equal comfort with either of the contrasting values. Responses to the left of center represent preference for General American Western values. Responses to the right of center represent preference for Native American Eastern values.

Although, as could be expected, these Eskimo students demonstrate a significant degree of acculturation to mainstream U.S. cultural values, the graph in Figure 5 shows a perhaps unexpected tilt toward more

traditional Native American values.

*[image not included]*

A comparison of the graph patterns across the six participating schools shows marked differences between student levels of positive and negative response. Some schools show a dominance on the high end of the scale across the whole questionnaire, while others show a flat pattern. This would seem to indicate different levels of interest, competence, or enthusiasm on the part of teachers presenting the course, a pattern of irregularity that might be corrected by better preservice training and in-service monitoring of the course.

## Summary

The “Eye of Awareness” program for both teachers and students is an experiment in probing the hidden dimension of bilingual education: the underlying and often conflicting cultural values which permeate any cross-cultural program. The program is distinctive not so much for the research it reflects as for the manner in which the results of the research are communicated. For teachers, the salient insights and suggested communication alerts are transmitted through simple yet thought-provoking weekly bulletins. For students, the same insights into cross-cultural values are presented very concretely but from their own perspective.

The main intent of the bulletins for teachers is to help them understand and respond to cultural differences in a way that will make them more effective teachers of Native American students. The main intent of the course for students is to help them “learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction [and of cultural values, we might add] is English and to participate fully in our society.”

To accomplish this, the “Eye of Awareness” program addresses the “pulse of life beneath the skin of events.” It presents cultural values not as “right or wrong,” not as moral imperatives, but as “comfortable or uncomfortable,” as life-supporting imperatives.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Bering Strait School District with offices in Unalakleet, Alaska, serves 15 village schools with three distinct Eskimo languages and cultures: Inupiaq, Central Yup’ik, and St. Lawrence Island (Siberian) Yupik.

<sup>2</sup> The terminology used in the research, in federal legislation, and in publications of Indian and Alaska Native organizations suggests that processing cultural contrasts on the broad level of “Native American” is not only feasible, but also advantageous.

<sup>3</sup> Group cites barriers native students face. *Alaska Education News*, Alaska State Department of Education, January, 1988, pp. 1 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> Although the selection and analysis of contrasting values in the “Eye of Awareness” program is based for the most part on research and the author’s experience, all content was reviewed, approved, and enriched by the Bering Strait School District’s ad hoc Research Advisory Committee consisting of the district’s bilingual

coordinator and six Eskimo advisors representing the three Eskimo languages and cultures served by the district.

<sup>5</sup> Harry Berendzen, *Interim evaluation report: Second project year: Bering Strait cross-cultural language program: Grades 10-12*, Appendix B, Berendzen Associates, Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 24, 1991.

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