# YUP'IK IMMERSION IN AN URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

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Accepted by the School of Education Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date of Defense

December 6, 2024

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family. My wife Jaime, and my children, Olivia and Max, have been through so much with me over these last eight years. I've missed countless family game or movie nights, weekend trips, etc. They know this journey has been important to me, and they've supported me along the way. Now that I am done, I dedicate my time to them!

I also want to dedicate this to my parents, Robert and Judith Locke. Neither have a college degree, yet both instilled in me and my younger brother, Shane, that education is so important and to always do our best. In fact, my father gave me a beautiful globe when I started my teaching career, and at the base he had the following engraved: "No man can truly be free without compassion, courage, and education." These were his words. My parents let me explore the world by being an exchange student in Switzerland, traveling to Africa as a high school graduate, studying in Québec while in college. They allowed me to be the world traveler I have become, and I cannot thank them enough as these travels have truly shaped who I am today.

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international conference on minoritized and Indigenous languages in Brazil. Taking his advice, we met up there and I was introduced to another IU academic, Richard Henne-Ochoa. The rich conversations I have had with these two gentlemen, then and over the years, have truly shaped my positionality, outlook, and ideas toward research and how it impacts us, our students, and our communities.

My journey toward this doctoral degree started twenty years ago, when I was a master's student at the University of Minnesota. This experience in their Second Languages and Cultures program not only opened my eyes to research and academia but showed me the bridge between theory/research and the work of practitioners, and how both need one another to truly make a difference. I want to acknowledge my former University of Minnesota professors, whom I now consider colleagues and friends, Dr. Diane Tedick, Dr. Martha Bigelow, and Dr. Tara Fortune. It was through their teaching, leadership, and mentoring that I decided to one day pursue a doctoral degree. It has been an honor to include these three women in our Yup'ik immersion grants in ASD over the past six years. Martha Bigelow has also served as our grant's external evaluator, and has visited our program multiple times, becoming intimately familiar with the staff, students, and parents. Her perspective, as a researcher herself, has been invaluable to the success of this program and of course, my dissertation. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge Dr. Donna Clementi, who has been my professional mentor for over 25 years. She has been pushing me and challenging me all this time and has been a champion for me to write this dissertation.

I also want to share my deep gratitude with my current and previous supervisors. Dr. Jennifer Knutson was my supervisor when I started this journey. A Ph.D. herself, working in a public school system, she encouraged me to pursue my doctorate and even agreed to serve on my committee as an outside member. Luckily Jennie is still a colleague and can hopefully refer to

me as “Dr.” before she retires. My current supervisor, Dr. Dianna Beltran, has been nothing but a champion for me along the way. Another K-12 educator and administrator, she’s been my “accountability coach” for the past three years. Her persistence has truly kept the fire lit for me to see this through.

Most importantly, I want to thank the Yup’ik community of Anchorage, as well as throughout Alaska, for welcoming me into their world and trusting me with this doctoral research. When I was given a Yup’ik name, in an impromptu naming ceremony by a Yup’ik elder, I was brought to tears. The summer before our Yup’ik immersion program started, I was surprised and honored to be given the name *Qeyaakaq*, the Yup’ik name of our inaugural teacher’s (Lorina Warren) grandfather. His Americanized legal name was Joseph Friday, and he was considered a “language warrior,” which is why I was named after him. No matter what I do, I will never be able to fully live up to my given Yup’ik name and I remain honored and blessed to be able to support and continue to support Alaska Natives and their fight for language reclamation, revitalization, and preservation, across our beautiful state.

The elder who performed the naming ceremony, Ayaprun “Loddie” Jones of Bethel, has been a dear friend of mine ever since, and has helped to guide me and my work with Indigenous language revitalization, and I cannot thank her enough for supporting me and my work, and giving me her blessing to do so. And of course I must certainly acknowledge Lorina Warren, as well as Kathleen Tunuchuk, and Louise Hoover, our first three teachers in the program, and Darrell Berntsen, principal of College Gate Elementary, an Alaska Native himself, of the Sugpiaq and Aleut tribe of Kodiak. Quyana!

*"Language is identity. Language is history.*

*Language is culture. Language is education.*

*And language is a bridge between the past, present, and future.*

*Language is vital to the efficacy of Indigenous beings, it gives is the knowledge of our ancestors."*

- *Marcus Briggs-Cloud, Muscogee Nation, United Nations Youth Caucus*

*"The incursion of Western society has brought about many cultural and psychological disruptions to the flow of life in traditional societies. Indigenous peoples have become subservient to the Western system and are confronted with new social structures that they do not always find compatible with their needs."*

- *Angayuqaq 'Oscar' Kawagley (1934-2011), Yup'ik Scholar*

## Land Acknowledgement – Anchorage School District

*Honoring Dena'ina Land*

We acknowledge that we gather here today on the traditional lands of the Dena'ina People of Upper Cook Inlet. For thousands of years, the Dena'ina People have been and continue to be the stewards of this land. ASD is committed to diversity and inclusion, and it is with honor and respect that we recognize all Indigenous people who live and learn in our community.

# Abstract

Brandon Todd Locke

YUP'IK IMMERSION IN AN URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

This qualitative research study examines the development and implementation, and ultimately the impact, of an Alaska Native Indigenous language (Yup'ik) immersion program in the city of Anchorage, Alaska. This research looks at how local entities perceive the development of the program and its language revitalization efforts: specifically, examining the overall community impact and sustainability. This program is the first and only Alaska Native language immersion program in Anchorage, which is open to any student regardless of race, ethnicity, or background. Given this rarity, the study examines the perceptions of value (culturally, linguistically, educationally, financially, etc.) of the program and the impact of the Yup'ik immersion program on the ASD community. Specifically, this study explores the impact of the Yup'ik Immersion Program on the ASD community and the Yup'ik community in Anchorage and beyond. Participants include educators, administrators, parents/family members/guardians, community (consortium) partners, elders, and government officials (local, state, federal). The study utilized multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, grant evaluation reports, and related documents. Thematic analysis was informed by critical theory, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and Indigenous ways of knowing, with a particular focus on the Yup'ik worldview. Key findings that emerged from the analysis include the following themes: challenges, the benefits and value of Native languages and cultures, program strengths, and funding.

*Key Words*

*Language immersion education, Indigenous languages, language revitalization, Yup'ik, Alaska Native education, Indigenous program sustainability, Native language funding*

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Serafin Coronel-Molina, Ph.D., Committee Chair

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## Statement of the Problem

Minority languages, in almost every part of the world, are threatened with extinction (Tsunoda, 2005). Language endangerment and erosion is viewed as a tragic phenomenon on a global level. Yet, it is in the circumpolar North that these losses have been especially poignantly felt (Lincoln, 2003). In fact, in January of 2018, the Alaska Dispatch News reported that "Alaska Native languages are in a 'linguistic emergency' and most are predicted to be extinct or dormant by the end of the 21st century, unless action is taken to save them" (Zak, 2018) That said, Alaska is still today home to the highest percentage and sixth largest overall population of Indigenous peoples in the United States, constituting roughly 16.4% of the state's population, and 23% of its school population (Barnhardt, 2001). According to Fortune and Tedick (2008), Indigenous immersion is a distinct category of immersion education, and in the United States, is especially developed for Hawaiian. Furthermore, Wilson and Kamana (2008) state that Hawaiian is the sole Indigenous language of Hawai'i, and, like all Native American languages, is severely endangered. They go on to say that "the current endangered status of Native American languages is relatable to a long history of U.S. conquest of Indigenous peoples and subsequent forced assimilation" (p. 36). While there are definite historical differences between what occurred (both culturally and linguistically) between the Hawaiians, compared to American Indians and Alaska Natives, both latter groups can gain perspective and learn from the Hawaiians in terms of language revitalization through the establishment of Indigenous language immersion programs.

In 2017 the Commission on Language Learning of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (AAAS) released a document entitled *America's Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century.* The full report focuses on five capacity-building goals, followed by a variety of specific recommendations. Recommendation #4 indicated the need to provide targeted support and programming for Native American languages as defined by the Native American Languages Act (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017).

Consequently, in late spring of 2017, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Indian Education, announced a new grant offering known as the *Native American Language Program,* or NAL@ED. The purposes of this grant opportunity included: 1) support schools that use Native American or Alaska Native languages as the primary language of instruction; 2) maintain, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans and Alaska Native to use, practice, maintain, and revitalize their languages, as envisioned in the Native American Languages Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 2901 et seq.); and 3) support the Nation's First Peoples' efforts to maintain and revitalize their languages and cultures, and to improve educational opportunities and student outcomes within Native American and Alaska Native communities (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The Anchorage (AK) School District (ASD) took advantage of this funding opportunity and submitted a proposal that was funded as a 3-year federal grant. ASD received approximately $1.3 million to design and implement a Yup'ik immersion program, starting with kindergarten in the fall of 2018. The program started in August 2018 with 30 students who spend half of their school day learning in English (math and English language arts) and the other half learning in Yup'ik (science, social studies, and Yup'ik language arts).

U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), along with former U.S. Senator Al Franken (D-

MN), were instrumental in establishing the Native American Languages (NAL@ED) grant funding, as part of ESSA, the "Every Student Succeeds Act." Murkowski, who has been a long-time supporter of public education, as well as language education (her own children went through one of ASD's Spanish immersion programs), stated in a September 2017 press release: *"Native languages are the common thread that binds indigenous peoples' present to their past, to their cultures, stories, dance, and ways of knowing. Native American and Alaska Native students have better outcomes when they attend Native language immersion schools and programs. But in far too many communities, these languages are in danger. I'm grateful for the wisdom and advice of the many Native language revitalization experts throughout Alaska who helped to craft this new program. I am also pleased to see the strong and innovative partnerships between these school districts, tribal leaders, and Native organizations and look forward to seeing the results of these grant funds in action"* (Murkowski, 2017).

**Image 1:** U.S. Senator (AK) Lisa Murkowski visits the Yup'ik Immersion Program at College Gate Elementary, August 2018.

(Photograph courtesy of Senator Murkowski's Office)

Regardless of the consortium of community partners, the publicity, the community interest, or the political "rights" of the Alaska Native peoples, as with many things in modern times, much comes down to funding, and the notion of supply and demand. Although we set the target enrollment high (50 kindergarten students in two different classrooms), we ended up with an enrollment of 30 (15 students per classroom). The federal grant that funded the initial three years expired September 30, 2020, program, which allowed for the program to continue through the first cohort's first grade year. ASD applied for and was awarded a second 3-year federal Native American Languages grant in 2020, which expires September 30, 2023. This grant was for $860,000, considerably less than the first grant, but will allow the initial cohort of students to complete their 4th grade year. One of the challenges of these grants is that the grant cycles run from October 1-September 30 each year, which do not correspond to the ASD's academic year calendar. In the fall of 2024, when this dissertation was being finalized, ASD received notification that we were awarded a third Native American Language grant, funded from October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2027, which will allow us to develop and expand our program through the middle school grades.

Beyond these grants, there is no guarantee that the Yup'ik Immersion Program can and/or will continue, based on a significant deficit of state and local funding. This begs the question of the value of an Alaska Native language program in a public-school setting. Additionally, should the program continue beyond grant-funding, who will fund it and how will this funding be justified? It should be noted that all of ASD's language immersion programs have been at risk in recent years of being cut due to major budget shortfalls and insufficient state funding. This point will be explained later in this dissertation.

Fundamentally and politically speaking, this program should be funded locally, beyond the grant. As Hermes, Bang, and Martin (2012) point out, "language revitalization is pushing education beyond former iterations of culturally relevant curriculum and has the potential to radically alter how we understand culture and language in education" (p. 381). However, if grant funding is the main option for launching innovating programs, what is the ongoing funding and implementation plan for programs such as the Yup'ik immersion program? Furthermore, could it be a model for additional Alaska Native languages (Inupiaq, Athabaskan, Tlingit, etc.) to follow suit, utilizing local, state, or federal funds, in conjunction with community partnerships, etc.?

Native American and Alaska Native Indigenous languages are in jeopardy of extinction. Efforts are being made across the United States, including Alaska and Hawai'i, to revitalize these languages. With Hawai'i as a model, other regions, and states, namely Alaska, are following suit, searching for a grassroots effort to develop, establish, and maintain language immersion programs representative of the State's twenty official languages. Potentially considered a national trend, in some cases this is a last stake's effort to revive and revitalize so-called "dying languages." The question is where and how do Indigenous and Western societies meet to determine the future of such Indigenous languages? Who holds the ultimate power and control? What is the sustainability plan past the current federal funding?

## Purpose and Significance of Study

This research study explores the journey to establish and implement an Alaska Native language (Yup'ik) immersion program in the urban setting of Anchorage, a modern city of approximately 350,000. Most of Alaska's Native population lives outside the city of Anchorage. While Anchorage is very diverse, both ethnically and linguistically, the Alaska Native population is relatively invisible. With a long and successful history of language immersion options within

the Anchorage School District (ASD), there has never been an Alaska Native language immersion program offered. Because of a large federal grant (NAL@ED $1.3 million over 3 years), ASD launched its first Indigenous language program in the fall of 2018, modeled after its existing six language immersion programs (German, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, and Spanish [two programs]). A variety of community partners, namely the Alaska Native Heritage Center, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, and Cook Inlet Native Head Start, were built into this grant forming a sort of consortium. This study looks at how these entities, and a variety of stakeholders, perceive the development of a Yup'ik immersion program in an urban setting.

The grant project was designed to respond to the unique educational needs of Alaska Native students in the ASD. "As urban people culturally rooted in small village life, ASD's Alaska Native students experience great tension between their cultural heritage and the large public-school format in this middle-sized, highly diverse city. Cultural dislocation coupled with a host of other social issues such as poverty and transience, pile on to confront many of these young children as they enter public school as kindergarteners." (Anchorage School District, 2017, p 2.).

The Anchorage School District is not new to language immersion programming. In fact, the first immersion program (Japanese) within ASD began in 1989. Since that time, language immersion programs have been launched in Spanish, Russian, German, and Mandarin Chinese. The Anchorage School Board recently approved the proposal to establish a French immersion program, which will begin in the fall of 2019. However, a huge void has existed in terms of Alaska Native language learning opportunities. The announcement of the NAL@ED grant provided the spark to needed to finally implement an Alaska Native language immersion program. The next decision to make was to settle on which language.

In 2014 the State of Alaska's House Bill 216 was signed into law, officially recognizing twenty official languages within Alaska. The reality is that there are over 100 languages (variations and dialects) in Alaska, so selecting Yup'ik was somewhat controversial. However, Yup'ik is the most prevalent Alaskan language in terms of number of speakers as well as in the quantity of printed and published materials (Locke, 2018). According to the United States Census Bureau (2015), Yup'ik has the second greatest number of speakers (19,750) after Navajo, which has close to 170,000 speakers. Regardless, the selection of one language over the other twenty languages, was a political and cultural gamble. Compared to Hawai'i, with only one language (and culture), the 20+ languages and cultures of Alaska are varied, diverse, and each very proud. This said, given the prevalence of Yup'ik and the fact that it is one of the top five ELL (home) languages spoken by students in the Anchorage School District, it made sense to select Yup'ik as the choice language for the NAL@ED grant. There were additional reasons for selecting Yup'ik in Anchorage, namely the newly established preschool pipeline for ages 0-5 through both the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) and the Cook Inlet Head Start (CINHS). In fact, one of the strengths of this new program is the various partnerships that have been built into the grant, each supporting different components and expected outcomes. "In essence, we have created a Yup'ik Immersion Consortium" (Locke, 2018).

Other reasons for selecting Yup'ik included population size, teacher availability, and community interest. Given the size of the Yupik population statewide, within Anchorage and within ASD, selecting Yup'ik as the first indigenous immersion language will serve the greatest number of students. Further, the available pool of teachers with language proficiency is largest with Yup'ik. According to the experience of other indigenous language immersion programs in Hawai'i and other parts of the United States, when writing the grant, we anticipated teacher

recruitment with language proficiency to be the program's greatest challenge. Finally, ASD conducted a community survey in 2016 to assess the level of interest for immersion programs in new languages. Survey results put Yup'ik at the top of the Indigenous language of interest. It also placed third in interest overall, a remarkable placement considering that over 100 languages are spoken at home with ASD's student population.

## Definitions of Relevant Terms

Research in the realm of education is bound to be tied to the countless terms and acronyms associated with the field, and even more so with the subsets or content-specific areas. While a more detailed list of relevant terms used throughout this dissertation can be found in the Appendices, there are a few key terms that should be explained to fully understand the context and content discussed in this paper.

The first is ***Immersion Education***, sometimes referred to as Language Immersion Education, or Dual Language Immersion (DLI). All three are synonymous with one another and refer to an instructional model where academic content is taught in and through a second language; a language different from the dominant language in any given location. Specifically, according to Fortune and Tedick (2008, pp. 9-10), "Immersion" refers to educational programs committed to the following practices:

- Instructional use of the immersion language (IL) to teach subject matter for at least 50% of the preschool or elementary day (typically up to grade 5 or 6); if continued at the middle/secondary level a minimum of two year-long content courses is customary, and during that time all instruction occurs in the IL;
- Promotion of additive bi- or multilingualism and bi- or multilingual literacy with sustained and enriched instruction through at least two languages;
- Employment of teachers who are fully proficient in the language(s) they use for instruction;

- Reliance on support for the majority language in the community at large for majority language speakers and home language support for the minority language for minority language speakers;
- Clear separation of teacher use of one language versus another for sustained periods of time.

For example, in the United States, the English language is typically the language of instruction in public schools and universities. In this study, the Yup'ik language is the language of instruction during part of the school day. Immersion Education as we know it today can be traced back to 1963 in Montréal, Canada, when the first French immersion program started with 26 English-speaking children, because of the growing cultural and linguistic divide between Anglophone Canadians and Francophone Canadians (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Immersion Education, including various models, is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

When discussing second language teaching and learning, the "second" language is sometimes referred to as the ***L2***. Using the brief definition of Immersion Education above, since English is the majority language, Yup'ik would be the L2. Sometimes the L2 is called the target language (TL), the immersion language (IL), or the partner language. For ease of reading and for consistency, the term L2 will be used throughout this paper when referring to Yup'ik language instruction in the educational setting.

***Indigenous Immersion***, sometimes referred to as Indigenous Revitalization Immersion (IRI), is rooted in the Indigenous and Indigenous Language Revitalization movement. In the context of this paper, Indigenous Immersion simply means that the Indigenous (in this case, Yup'ik) language is the L2, the language or one of the languages of instruction. Indigenous immersion teachers are deeply dedicated to breathing life back into an endangered language and

culture and rebuilding a positive sense of Native identity by passing on language and Native ways to children (Fortune and Tedick, 2008, p. 13).

Finally, the last term that is critical in understanding this study is ***Yup'ik.*** Yup'ik refers to both the Indigenous people and language of southwestern Alaska, along the Bering Sea. There are over 19,000 speakers of Yup'ik, mostly located within the Lower Kuskokwim region of Alaska. Yup'ik language is also often referred to as Yugtun. These words can used Yup'ik is the second most-spoken Indigenous language in the U.S., after Navajo, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015). Chapter 3 of this dissertation dives much deeper into the Yup'ik language and its people, providing a sociohistorical perspective to the issues discussed here.

## Researcher's Positionality

To provide information on my positionality as a researcher, it is important to provide some of my background, upbringing, and professional experiences. I am aware of my many identities and experiences and have noticed how they inform my perceptions on the program and the data I collected. I'm a Caucasian male, upper-middle-class educator, and educational administrator. I am a first-generation college graduate and have been a professional educator for 25 years. I was born in Billings, Montana, and lived there briefly until my parents moved to Anchorage, Alaska, where I was raised and have lived most of my life. Although I do not associate at all as an Indigenous person, I do know that I have some American Indian from my father's side of the family, most likely Delaware Indian or Cherokee. Growing up in Anchorage, I had countless experiences related to Alaska Natives, albeit "from a distance," and not necessarily first-hand interactions. I believe part of this was since, at the time, in the 1970s and 1980s, Alaska Natives in Anchorage were not very visible. Although I was young at the time, I

don't recall being aware of their language, culture, or history in my schooling or everyday life in Anchorage. While this has been changing over the years, it wasn't until my college years that I became aware of the Alaska Native population in Anchorage, and that they *actually* existed outside of remote Alaska or in history books.

As a Caucasian, Western educator/outsider-researcher, and school district administrator, I am aware of my own positionality and subjectivity. I believe I should approach my role as researcher with deep humility, recognizing that although I hold a specific position of authority in the local school district, I am also an advocate and supporter of ongoing and future Alaska Native language programs. I recently learned of the term "allied other," which means a non-Native person who supports (etc.) Native languages and cultures. While some may put me in this category as an administrator, in my role as a researcher, I must be careful and walk the fine line between neutrality and advocacy. I must be aware of my own insecurities of my interactions with Alaska Natives who may have generational trauma still today from being punished or even tortured for speaking their own languages. Many were also sent to boarding schools outside of Alaska, where language and culture seemed to have been lost forever. Earning the acceptance and respect of the teachers and elders was critical in "accessing" their communities while I fully understand the co-constructed nature of interviews. I do not want to look like the hypocritical white man looking for a social justice problem to solve.

There have been moments where I feel seen and known by Yup'ik educators. For example, during the summer of 2018, I was able to use grant funding to bring ~~I brought~~ our initial Yup'ik immersion team (teacher, coordinator, and principal) to a weeklong professional development seminar at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis. There was also a group of Yup'ik immersion teachers there from Bethel, Alaska. While there, I was extremely surprised

and was literally brought to tears when I was given a Yup'ik name, through a kind of impromptu "spiritual" naming ceremony. An elder from Bethel performed the ceremony and the name I was given is *Qeyaakaq,* which was the name of our inaugural teacher's paternal grandfather, Joseph Friday, who's (given) Yupik name was Quyaakaq. His date of birth is unknown; he died in August 1990. In Yup'ik culture, people are named after a person who has passed to keep their spirit alive, "just as you are doing with my grandpa's leadership," (L. Warren, personal communication, August 27, 2023). According to Warren (2023):

> *Qeyaakaq is my grandfather on my dad's side. He was the village "chief" when they used to be called that. He was the biggest reason our school became the lone school district and not join LYSD or LKSD. He started going to our school to talk to students about being Cup'ik. You were named 'Qeyaakaq' because you show leadership just as my grandpa did, with "care." You were the visible one who started Yup'ik immersion. You made it happen, just like my grandpa.*

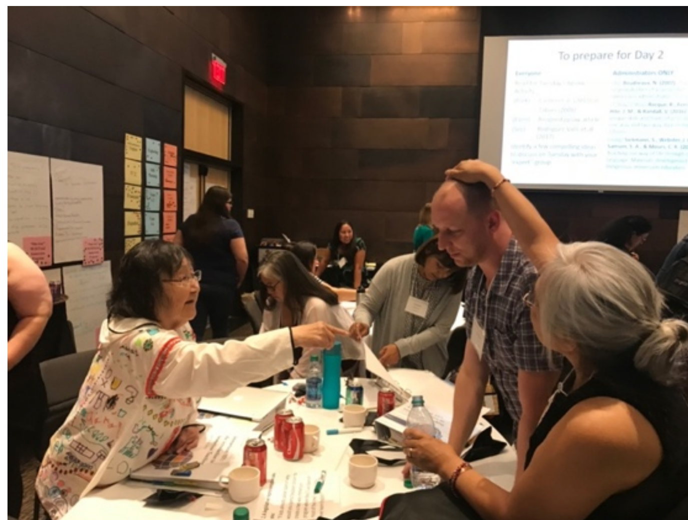



**Image 2:** Me being given a Yup'ik name ('Qeyaakaq') at an impromptu naming ceremony in summer of 2018 at the University of Minnesota, CARLA's "Immersion 101." Elder Ayaprun 'Loddie' Jones of Bethel, AK performed the ceremony. (Photographer unknown)

**Image 3:** Joseph Friday, 'Qeyaakaq,' originally from Qissunuq, and later from Old Chevak. Date unknown. (Photograph courtesy of Lorena Warren and used with permission)

**Image 4:** Joseph Friday, photographed by Alaskan photographer Myron Rosenberg, Chevak, Alaska, 1987. (Photograph courtesy of Myron Rosenberg and used with permission)

I go into this research already knowing that there is a huge level of distrust between Alaska Natives and Westerners. I contemplate how I can appropriately gain access into their world while honestly letting them know of the research topic without putting into question any forms of data collection. I do not want invalid data due to me being overly honest or upfront about my questions. However, I also want them to know what my end product will be and how it may be used in the future to inform further research within Indigenous language programs within

a Western setting. I will need to gain some serious trust first and carefully move forward. Here I also plan to enlist the help of Indigenous scholars who will not be a part of my research to help guide me.

I am reminded of the work of Leigh Patel (2016) regarding decolonizing educational research. She states that at its core, research is about the pursuit of knowledge. However, her work focuses on the ways that coloniality is manifested in both material conditions and the meanings that are made with those conditions, specifically within educational research, and even more specifically, what this structure means for projects of decolonization. She suggests that education research, through both meaning and matter, has played a "deleterious role in perpetuating and refreshing colonial relationships among people, practices, and land" (Patel, 2016, pp. 12).

In this qualitative ethnographic case study, I explore the impact of the Anchorage School District's Yup'ik Immersion Program, within the urban setting of Anchorage, Alaska. Through semi-structured interviews, as well as other data sources, including grant evaluation reports, this study centers around the public perceptions of developing and implementing this program in an urban public school system.

# CHAPTER 2: SOCIOHISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

## Brief History of Alaska

Alaska, considered a subcontinent of North America, is home to a unique and diverse group of Aboriginal people. Jointly referred to as "Alaska Natives," Alaska's Indigenous people can be divided into six major groupings (Langdon, 2014): 1) Unangan/Aleut; 2) Sugpiaq/Alutiiq (Pacific Eskimos); 3) Yupiit (Bering Sea Eskimos); 4) Inupiat (Northern Eskimos); 5) Athabaskans (Interior Indians); and 6) Tlingit and Haida (Southeast Coastal Indians). According to Langdon (2014), these categories are based on broad cultural and linguistic similarities of peoples living contiguously in different regions of Alaska. They do not represent tribal or political units, nor are they necessarily the units Alaska Natives have traditionally used to define themselves (Langdon, 2014).

Historians believe that Alaska has been inhabited for at least 10,000 years and some scholars believe that humans migrated from Asia to the Americas some 27,000-28,000 years ago by crossing the Bering Sea Land Bridge (Haycox, S. W., & Mangusso, M. C., (1996). Interestingly, Alaska history in the traditional sense, such as written documentation and eyewitness accounts, only dates to 1741, which was the beginning of the Russian Period (Haycox & Mangusso, 1996). It is believed that Alaska was inhabited by 80,000 to 100,000 Indigenous people at the time of contact with Russian explorers in the mid-1700s. According to Langdon (2014), "time of contact" refers to the earliest time that a Native group had significant direct

interactions with Europeans. Given the geographical vastness of Alaska, the time of contact differed for different regions of the land, and thus, some Native groups had different experiences through their contact with either Europeans or Americans, depending on when the contact occurred, the most recent being between 1850-1870 for the Inupiat, or Northern Eskimos.

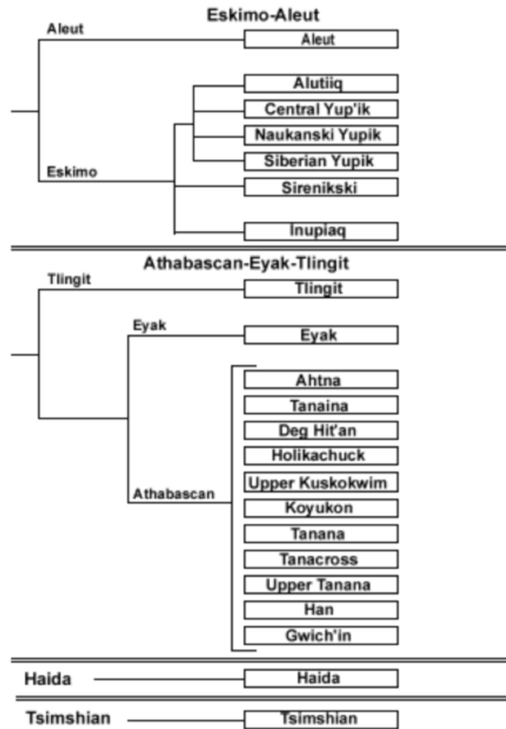



**Table 1:** Alaska Native Languages Family Tree. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks. https://www.uaf.edu/ancl/languages/

Comparatively speaking, Alaska's history is brief, yet quite complex. Politically speaking, Alaska's history is often categorized into five distinct eras (Haycox & Mangusso, 1996): the Russian Period (1741-1867); the early American era (1867-1897); the Gold Rush (1897-1912); the Territorial Period (1912-1959); and Statehood to present (1959-present). The lives of the Alaska Native Indigenous peoples have been forever changed since their first contact with Western society, less than 300 years ago. Once the Americans acquired Alaska from Russia

in 1867, the U.S. Congress designated it a "customs and military district" and in 1873 Congress labeled Alaska as "Indian Territory," apparently to prohibit the sale of distilled alcohol to Natives (Haycox & Mangusso, 1996).

## Alaska Native Languages

Although the Indigenous peoples of Alaska are often categorized into six different "family" groups, as indicated above, today Alaska is home to twenty distinct Alaska Native languages, with countless variations and regional dialects (Roderick, 2010). Alaska Native languages and words are multidimensional, meaning that some words and/or phrases are used to not only communicate information, but often spiritual or emotional dimensions, reflecting the holistic worldview of their people. According to Roderick (2010), Alaska Natives believe that language is birthed from the land in which the people themselves live and contains the vibrations of these lands in the sounds of the words used. Each Alaska Native language is unique, resulting from thousands of years of living in a specific area. An adopted or second language can never replicate what a particular Indigenous language is able to communicate (Roderick, 2010).

The destruction or erosion of the languages of Native peoples all around the planet is of significant concern to Indigenous nations, as well as to anthropologists, linguists, and others who understand the value and necessity of preserving cultural, linguistic, and intellectual diversity. Of some 6,000 languages spoken across the world today, linguists fear that 90 percent could disappear by the next century (Roderick, 2010). According to Hinton (2001), a language that is not a language of government, education, commerce, or of wider communication, is a language whose very existence is threatened in the modern world. This is true for Alaska Native languages and has been the case for several centuries.

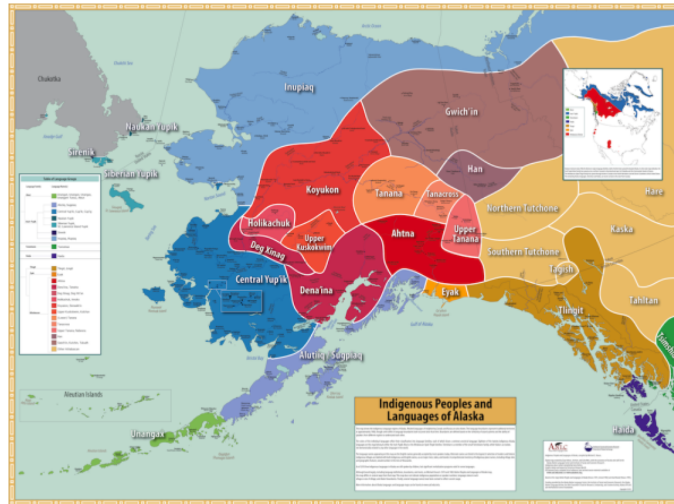



**Figure 1:** Map of Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks. http://www.uaf.edu/anla/map

Historically, missionary and government-sponsored schools in Alaska and the Arctic attempted to eradicate Indigenous languages and ways of knowing by punishing students for speaking their languages (Wyman et al., 2010, p. 703). While Alaska Natives did not experience the genocide that many American Indians faced in the 1800s, they were forced to speak English – to be educated in English, and were punished, often beaten, if they spoke their own language. By breaking the linguistic bonds that tied children to their cultures and elders, a chasm opened between many Alaska Native elders and youth. Much vital knowledge and wisdom was lost (Roderick, 2010, pp. 7).

American politics, particularly in the six decades between the 1870s and 1930s, suppressed Native American languages and culture (LaPier, 2018). The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) controlled Alaska Native schools for close to 90 years, from 1889-1976, causing havoc on the languages and cultures of the Alaska Native peoples (Andersen-Spear & Hopson, 2010). In elementary schools, Native children were schooled in English by imported Western educators,

mostly Caucasians, who would live and teach temporarily in remote village schools for one or two years before moving back to their homes out of state. These isolated, remote villages were not equipped with secondary schools, so when Native children were of age to enter high school, they were sent off to state-run boarding schools, many not even in Alaska, physically removed from their families, their villages, their culture, and their language. Because of this, many languages were lost over these decades, and the culture was severely compromised.

It wasn't until the mid-1970s that the educational system for Alaska Natives began to change. Specifically, it was the *Tobeluk v. Lind* case, often referred to as the "Molly Hootch case," whereby 27 teenage plaintiffs brought suit against the State of Alaska, claiming that boarding schools for Alaska Natives were discriminatory and unjust. This landmark case is considered one of great significance in terms of Alaska Native education and Indigenous rights. In essence, Anna Tobeluk, with her classmates, sued the State of Alaska for discrimination. Specifically, they demanded a high school in their community, to avoid being sent out of Alaska to a boarding school. In 1976 the Tobeluk Consent Decree was signed, which required the State of Alaska to build secondary schools in all Alaskan communities with fifteen or more high school-aged students (Kleinfield, J., Williamson McDiarmid, G., & Young, S. 1984).

In 1990 the Native American Languages Act was passed at the federal level, only after years of activism by Indigenous leaders representing American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. This act was designed for the preservation and protection of Indigenous languages. In 2014 in Alaska, then-Governor Sean Parnell signed House Bill 216 into law, legally recognizing Alaska's 20 Indigenous languages as "official" languages of Alaska, along with English. Seen at the time as primarily a symbolic statement that Alaska views its Native languages as equal to English, HB 216 turned out to be a monumental step toward elevating the

status of Alaska Native languages and bringing attention to the urgent need to address language loss, reversing the results of a similar movement in the 1990s that culminated in English being named the official language of Alaska (Locke, 2018).

It is far beyond the scope of this study to fully articulate the complexity and generational trauma that Alaska Natives have faced since being forced into assimilation of the Western world. However, in recent years there has been extensive work across the state in terms of language revitalization. Much of this work is a result of the tremendous efforts that have been in place for several decades in Hawai'i. Hawaiians have truly paved the way for Indigenous language revitalization efforts in the United States, and perhaps, internationally. In Alaska, the Alaska Native Heritage Center and the Anchorage Museum, both in Anchorage, have been doing work in this area. There has been recent interest within the Inupiaq language community of northwestern Alaska, as well as the Tlingit language community of southeast Alaska, of experimenting with language revitalization efforts, including language immersion programming.

## Yup'ik

The Yup'ik (or Yupiaq, Yupiit, or Yugtun), often classified by anthropologists as Bering Sea Eskimos, are from the southwestern region of Alaska, approximately 1.5 hours by jet plane west of Anchorage. Their region of Alaska is commonly referred to as the Lower Kuskokwim region, and their largest town, Bethel (population 4,500) serves as the commercial hub for the region. The Kuskokwim is the mighty river that provides life to the region. Bethel is only accessible by plane, and via snowmobile during winter months. As mentioned earlier, the United States Census Bureau (2015) identifies Yup'ik as having the second-greatest number of speakers (19,750) of an Indigenous language in the United States, following Navajo. While not all these

speakers of Yup'ik live in the Lower Kuskowim region, this is their place of origin. Additionally, this region's school district, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) has been home to a Yup'ik Immersion Charter School, Ayaprun Elitnaurvik (located in Bethel) since 1999. This public charter school has been successfully implementing Yup'ik immersion for non-Yup'ik speakers for close to twenty years, and they have developed a wealth of instructional materials including elementary literacy anthologies that have been shared with the Anchorage School District as part of our grant's partnerships.

LKSD is considered the largest rural school district in Alaska, encompassing some 21 village schools as well as several schools in Bethel (Yamauchi & Ceppi, 2006). Most of the district's schools are in extremely isolated villages, most of which are only accessible by small plane. These schools have varied models of bilingual instruction in Yup'ik and English but are not considered immersion programs. This is important to note since it is common for Alaska Native children from remote villages to sometimes be sent to Anchorage to live with relatives or family friends due to extreme societal issues that plague many villages – such as poverty, domestic abuse, depression, or drug and/or alcohol issues. When children are sent to Anchorage to attend school, often they struggle, not only with the size of the city, but with many of the modern amenities that they see as foreign and cannot relate to. They often struggle with literacy in English as well, which then perpetuates the lack of success in their other academics as well as the lack in overall engagement in school.

**Figure 2:** Map of Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD). http://www.lksd.org/schools

# CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous language revitalization is a worldwide, grassroots, and interdisciplinary movement with areas ranging from biodiversity, linguistics and cognition, linguistic anthropology, technology and language learning, political activism, and Indigenous sovereignty (Hermes, Bang & Martin 2012). As both a field of study and a social practice, language revitalization has grown exponentially "in tandem with escalating worldwide endangerment of minoritized mother languages" (Coronel-Molina & McCarty, 2016, p. 2). It is nearly impossible to read a book or article related to indigenous languages without seeing words or phrases such as: under siege, linguistic emergency, extinction, dormant, etc. Similarly, such writings also include words and phrases that paint a brighter picture, one of resiliency, hope, and human rights.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous peoples and their languages, it is critical to come to some common definitions. The Oxford Dictionary defines *Indigenous peoples* (also referred to as *First peoples, Aboriginal peoples*, or *Native peoples*) as ethnic groups who are the original owners and caretakers of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied, or colonized the area more recently. Further, an Indigenous language, or autochthonous language, is one that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people, often reduced to the status of a minority language. Such language would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations (www.definitions.net). Although languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people – for communication, education, social integration, and development, they also serve as a repository for each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions, and memory. Regardless, despite their immense

value, languages around the world continue to disappear at an alarming rate (en.iyil2019.org). Because of this ongoing tragedy, the United Nations declared 2019 as the *Year of Indigenous Languages (IY2019),* in order to raise awareness of them, not just for the benefit of the people who speak them, but for others to understand and appreciate the importance of their contributions to our world's rich cultural diversity. In fact, the U.N.'s observance was aimed to raise awareness of the consequences of the endangerment of Indigenous languages across the world, with an aim to establish a link between language, development, peace, and reconciliation (en.iyil2019.org). Recognizing that 'one year is simply not enough,' according to AFN (Canada's Assembly of First Nations) National Chief Perry Bellegarde, in December of 2019, the United Nations declared that the International Decade of Indigenous Languages would begin in 2022. "Language is an inherent human right," said AFN National Chief Bellegarde. "Yet in Canada no First Nations language is safe. Indigenous languages around the world are in danger of disappearing. The International Year of Indigenous Languages helped focus attention on this emergency and created new opportunities for our language champions to share their knowledge and expertise. The AFN is encouraged that the UN will declare an International Decade of Indigenous Languages to build on the International Year and promote, protect and revitalize Indigenous languages" (2019, PR Newswire).

"When an Indigenous group is a minority in a country governed by speakers of a different language, the language of the Indigenous group is potentially in danger of diminishing in use and perhaps eventually becoming extinct" (Hinton, 2001, p. 3). Krauss (1992) suggests that over half of the world's languages could be extinct within the next 100 years. These statements could be considered the underlying foundation of the Indigenous language revitalization movement, a movement to save Indigenous languages from extinction, breathe new

life into them, and sustain them for centuries to come. It is difficult to determine exactly when the Indigenous language revitalization movement began, as efforts have been, and are still being made, around the world, and across Indigenous peoples. The term “language revitalization” became broadly used in the 1990’s, yet the efforts of language revitalization have been happening since the end of the 19th century (Coronel-Molina & McCarty, 2016). Much of the research that has been conducted within the field of Indigenous language revitalization has been done within the past forty years, yet it is still an under-researched area, and according to Hermes, Bang, and Marin (2012) Indigenous languages have received little attention within the American educational research community. This is slowly changing. For the purposes of this chapter, the focus will be on Indigenous language revitalization efforts within the United States. Additionally, while the collective term “Indigenous peoples” refers to Native Americans/American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, the term “Native Americans” will be used throughout this paper to represent all the above, unless specifically indicated, or unless expressed differently in a quotation or citation.

In the United States, the notion of teaching Native languages came out of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960’s and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was really the first major concerted effort by communities to keep their languages from dying (Coronel-Molina & McCarty, 2016). While the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was not designed specifically for Native American or Alaska Native students, many Native American language programs got their start under Title VII bilingual education funds (Hinton & Hale, 2013). However, the need for bilingual education among American Indians and Alaska Natives is often questioned, since most Native American students are dominant in English when they start school (Crawford, 2004).

James Crawford (2004) argues that the language shift, because of the many turbulent years that Western beliefs and education overpowered Native peoples of the United States, a nonstandard dialect of English is often spoken my members of Native American communities, displacing the ancestral tongue among younger generations. Crawford, an expert in educating English learners, argues that "today's parents may retain some of their native language, but tend to be dominant in a variety of American Indian English; thus, their children learn this dialect at home. While such children grow up with no knowledge, or perhaps passive knowledge, of the indigenous language, they have little exposure to Standard English, or, in many cases, to literate uses of English before entering school" (Crawford, 2004, p. 267). As a result, Native American youth often experience the same type of language barriers as ELL immigrant students, however, these barriers tend to not be as noticeable and are thus overlooked. In fact, programs serving English-dominant students were ineligible for federal funding during the first decade of Title VII. Crawford goes on to explain that because of this, most Native American students went unserved, regardless of if they exhibited similar deficiencies or academic needs as non-Native English learners. In 1978 Congress expanded the definition of limited English proficiency (LEP) to include both "American Indian and Alaska Native students who come from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency" (Crawford, 2004, p. 267).

American politics, particularly in the six decades between the 1870s and 1930s, suppressed Native American languages and cultures (LaPier, 2018). When bilingual education for Native Americans was first introduced in the late 1970s, it faced a great deal of resistance, and not just from unsympathetic whites (Crawford, 2004). The decades and years of generational trauma surfaced, and in many cases suppressed emotional trauma was released, causing

confusion amongst Native Americans. For many Native Americans (in this case, referring specifically to American Indians), the thought of using tribal languages for educational purposes represented a confusing reversal of government policy. When the United States government instituted Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools in the late 1960s, Native American students were severely punished for violating English-only rules.

In Alaska, historically, missionary, and government-sponsored schools attempted to eradicate indigenous languages and ways of knowing by punishing students for speaking their languages (Wyman et al., 2010, p. 703). While Alaska Natives did not experience the genocide that many American Indians faced in the 1800s (Alaska did not become a U.S. territory until 1912, and became the 49$^{th}$ state in 1959), they were forced to speak English and be educated in English, and were punished, often severely beaten, if they spoke their own language. By breaking the linguistic bonds that tied children to their cultures and elders, a chasm opened up between many Alaska Native elders and youth. Much vital knowledge and wisdom was lost (Roderick, 2010, p. 7).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) controlled Alaska Native schools for close to 90 years, from 1889-1976, causing havoc on the languages and cultures of the Alaska Native peoples (Andersen-Spear & Hopson, 2010). In elementary schools, Native children were schooled in English by imported Western educators, mostly Caucasians, who would live and teach temporarily in remote village schools for one or two years before moving back to their homes out of state. These isolated, remote villages were not equipped with secondary schools, so when Native children were of age to enter high school, they were sent off to state-run boarding schools, many not even in Alaska, physically removed from their families, their villages, their

culture, and their language. Because of this, many languages were lost over these decades, and the culture was severely compromised.

In 1990 the Native American Languages Act was passed at the federal level, only after years of activism by indigenous leaders representing American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. This act was designed for the preservation and protection of indigenous languages. And in 2014 in Alaska, then-Governor Sean Parnell signed House Bill 216 into law, legally recognizing Alaska's 20 indigenous languages as "official" languages of Alaska, along with English. Seen at the time as primarily a symbolic statement that Alaska views its Native languages as equal to English, HB 216 turned out to be a monumental step toward elevating the status of Alaska Native languages and bringing attention to the urgent need to address language loss, reversing the results of a similar movement in the 1990s that culminated in English being named the official language of Alaska (Locke, 2018).

## A Movement toward Revitalization

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Hawai'i has been successfully designing and implementing Hawaiian immersion for decades and truly is leading the charge in terms of Indigenous language revitalization, not only for other Indigenous languages of the United States, but across the globe. This said, unlike the countless number of American Indian and Alaska Native languages, Hawaiian is the sole Indigenous language of Hawai'i, yet it is still severely endangered (Wilson & Kamana, 1998).

Papahana Kaiapuni (referred to simply as Kaiapuni) is the Hawaiian language immersion program, which began in 1987. It is a K-12 public school program within the State of Hawai'i. It should be noted that while the State of Hawai'i is comprised of eight large islands, only six are inhabited. Furthermore, the State of Hawai'i has only one (state-wide) school district. Kaiapuni evolved through the efforts of parents, Hawaiian educators, and activists. During the 1996-1997 school year, approximately 1,100 students and 60 teachers were involved in the Kaiapuni schools on the islands of O'ahu, Hawai'i (Big Island), Kaua'i, Mau'i, and Moloka'i. Most of these programs share a school site with larger English-medium programs, however, there are a few Hawaiian-language-only sites (Yamauchi & Ceppi, 1998). Since the inception of Kaiapuni, many other Hawaiian immersion programs have started throughout the state. In the spring of 2018, I had the opportunity to visit several programs in Hilo, on the "Big Island" of Hawai'i. I was impressed with the efforts that have much expanded since 1998, with current offerings ranging from pre-K through the doctoral level. The State of Hawai'i, its school system, the University of Hawai'i system, and community activists, have joined forces to provide an exemplar for language revitalization. While their journey has not been easy, they are able to serve as a model for other Indigenous language groups. My visit to Hilo was a part of the professional development portion of our grant, and in spring of 2019, our two inaugural Yup'ik immersion teachers also visited schools and programs in Hilo.

**Image 5:** Visiting a primary Hawaiian immersion classroom in Hilo, Hawai'i, August 2018. (Photograph by Brandon Locke)

## Language Immersion Education

Second language education in the United States is experiencing radical change, with century old perceptions about the value of being bi- or multilingual changing (Fortune, 2015). As such, we have seen a drastic increase in the number of language immersion programs across the country, especially in very recent years. Parents, in addition to teachers, administrators, and school boards, have discovered that a language immersion education moves students farther and faster toward the goal of bilingualism than any other school-based model yet conceived (Fortune, 2015). In the United States, since the initial introduction of the immersion model in the early 1970s, we have seen not only an increase in programs, but also an increase in the variations of models that now exist, including language revitalization programs, two-way dual language programs, in addition to the original one-way model.

Since their inception in Canada some 60 years ago, language immersion programs have grown in both popularity and numbers, not only in North America, but around the world (Howard, et al, 2018; Johnson & Swain, 1997). According to Curtain and Dahlberg (2015), as

research and information from Canadian immersion programs began to be disseminated, and as immersion programs were spreading rapidly in Canada, similar programs began to be established in the United States, with the very first U.S. program to be established in 1971 in Culver City, California. Since that time the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has conducted national surveys to track the growth of immersion programs and has maintained a national database to hold this information. In the United States, immersion programs started slowly, with only five documented programs by 1977. By 2011, according to Curtain and Dahlberg (2015) who cite a growth chart maintained by CAL, there were over 450 language immersion programs in the U.S. This said, it should be noted that most language immersion programs have, historically speaking, ended at the completion of elementary, or in some cases, middle school. There are not too many that have continuation programs at the high school level.

**Table 1**
**Number of DLI Programs in US Public Schools by Language**

| Language | Number of DLI Programs | Language | Number of DLI Programs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Spanish | 2936 | Polish | 5 |
| Chinese | 312 | Haitian Creole | 3 |
| French | 182 | Urdu | 2 |
| Japanese | 37 | Yup'ik | 2 |
| German | 31 | Greek | 2 |
| Portuguese | 27 | Lakȟóta | 2 |
| Hawaiian | 27 | Lushootseed | 2 |
| Korean | 23 | Makah | 2 |
| Russian | 17 | Diné | 2 |
| Italian | 7 | ASL | 1 |
| Hmong | 7 | Bengali | 1 |
| Vietnamese | 6 | Cherokee | 1 |
| Armenian | 6 | Yiddish | 1 |
| Arabic | 5 | | |

**Table 2:** DLI Programs in the U.S. in 2021; Canvass of Dual Language and Immersion (DLI) Programs in U.S. Public Schools, American Councils for International Education.

Before moving further, it is important to take a step back and clearly define what is meant by “language immersion” education. In the simplest of terms, immersion refers to a model of education where students learn the regular school curriculum through a “foreign” (or target) language at least 50% of the day at the elementary level. Since students typically begin at age 5, they learn the school’s curriculum in a natural setting that is developmentally and linguistically appropriate and where the content is also new and interesting. Fortune and Tedick (2008) remind us that, in most cases, these are choice-based educational alternatives offered within a larger public school system. As such, these programs are normally chosen by parents as an option for their children; they are not mandated as part of the regular curriculum (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2015). There are countless reasons as to how and why parents select this type of educational program for their children, as well as why some students exit along the way while others continue until the very end.

“One-Way Immersion” is a term used to describe most programs in the United States, whereby the students may share (but not always) a common linguistic background, such as English, yet are moving as one group toward acquisition of the same second language, for example, Spanish (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2015). The nuance of the definition changes slightly depending on the amount of instructional time each day that is spent teaching in the immersion language. In “full” or “total” immersion programs, sometimes referred to as 90/10 models, the second language is used for the entire school day during the first two or three years, with English being added around grade 3 and being taught by an English specialist. Partial immersion references programs where instruction takes place in the second language at least 50% of the school day by a dedicated language immersion teacher, and in English the second half of the day

by a dedicated English partner teacher (Fortune & Tedick, 2008; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2015). These are sometimes referred to as 50/50 models.

"Two-Way Immersion" programs are an amalgam of immersion and developmental bilingual programs (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). They serve both language majority and language minority students in the same classrooms. Ideally, 50% of the students come from each language group, balancing the overall student population, and leveling the playing field. Two-way programs embrace the goals of both immersion for language majority students and developmental bilingualism for language minority students (Lindholm, 1992). According to Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2000), the primary difference between two-way programs, compared to other immersion models, is the incorporation of both groups of students in the same classrooms and the active use of instructional strategies that promote cross-cultural cooperation and learning. These programs were often referred to as dual language immersion, however, this term is becoming much more common to describe "immersion" in general.

Curtain and Dahlberg (2015) reference the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), as having identified distinguishing characteristics of immersion programs (Table 3, below) as well as a summary of primary goals of immersion programs (Table 4, below):

***Distinguishing Characteristics of Immersion Programs***

- Subject matter teaching in the immersion language for specified amounts of time (at least 50% of the day at the elementary level [pre-K or K through grades 5 or 6] and two or more year-long courses in the immersion language in grades 6-12).
- Clear separation of languages for established periods of time.
- Curriculum that incorporates content goals but also includes focus on functional and grammatical language outcomes.
- Integration of language, culture, and content.
- Cognitively and linguistically challenging tasks.

- Developmentally appropriate instructional scaffolding.
- Student-centered curriculum with many opportunities for students to exchange meaning in partner and small-group activities.

**Table 3:** Distinguishing Characteristics of Immersion Programs, Curtain & Dahlberg, 2015.

### *Primary Goals of Immersion Programs*

- Proficiency in the second language.
- Maintenance and development of English language arts skills comparable to or surpassing the achievement of students in English-only programs.
- Mastery of subject content material of the school district curriculum.
- Cross-cultural understanding.

**Table 4:** Primary Goals of Immersion Programs, Curtain & Dahlberg, 2015.

Academic achievement is often touted as one of the consistently demonstrated benefits of immersion. Research has also shown that students from a range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds as well as students with some learning disabilities are successful in one-way, two-way, and indigenous language programs (Tedick, Christian, & Fortune, 2011). Typically, research studies tend to compare immersion student performance to peers matched for linguistic/cultural background and socioeconomic status in non-immersion programs, yet studies showing achievement comparisons among ‘at risk’, ethnically diverse students and middle-class white students in the same program are rare (Tedick, Christian, & Fortune, 2011). This provides cause for the argument that language immersion programs could potentially be the key to decreasing the achievement gap that is so prevalent in U.S. schools today.

Fortune and Tedick (2008) argue for the inclusion of Indigenous immersion as a stand-alone branch under the overarching umbrella of dual language immersion. Indigenous immersion programs are typically dedicated to linguistic and cultural revitalization for Native or Aboriginal groups around the world. The design and implementation practices of Indigenous immersion programs typically meet, and in some cases exceed the characteristics and primary goals of dual

language education as outlined below. Two specific examples include Hawaiian and Maori, in New Zealand (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). Unfortunately, often, Indigenous immersion programs struggle to adhere to the characteristics and goals referenced below. Despite having the best of intentions, these struggles and challenges are often the result of lack of available instructors (native speakers of the language), compounded by state licensure or certification requirements, as well as lack of curriculum and instructional materials.

Thomas and Collier (2012) have been conducting research within the field of two-way/dual language immersion for over 30 years and argue that this model is by far the most successful. Dual language classes deepen the students' and teachers' collaborative content explorations, using at least two languages as the vehicle for all curricular studies. In fact, they state: "We have found in our research that dual language education is the most powerful school reform for high academic achievement, whatever the demographic mix" (p. 27). Furthermore, students acquire a deeper ability to use the two program languages in oral and written form, eventually reaching native-like speaker proficiency in English and at least one other language (Thomas & Collier, 2012). The school's core curriculum, when taught in two languages, provides a powerful and natural way to acquire a second language while fully developing the native language.

Learning through two languages, according to Thomas and Collier (2012), expands and enhances students' thinking skills, ensuring that students' cognitive development and flexibility surpass those of students who are educated on one language only. Perhaps more importantly, students from diverse backgrounds learn to respect and value each other as partners in the learning/acquiring process (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

Students whose first language is not English are the fastest growing demographic group in U.S. public schools today, according to Collier and Thomas (2009). They cite the 1995 U.S. Census which predicts that these students, some fluent English speakers, and others not yet proficient in English, will make up 40% of the school-age population by the year 2030. Furthermore, there are 5.1 million school-age English learners in the U.S. and while they represent many regions of the world as well as many different languages, in 2009 roughly 75% of these students come from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, and 65% are born in the United States (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Currently, most U.S. school systems are drastically under-educating English learners. Nationwide, the achievement gap between average native English speakers and students who started school with little to no proficiency in English is very large. According to Collier and Thomas, "by the end of high school, this achievement gap is equivalent to about 1.2 national standard deviations, as measured by standardized achievement tests across the curriculum. This represents the difference between average scores at the 50th national percentile for native English speakers and the 10th-12th percentiles for students who were initially classified as English learners" (2009, pp. 3-4).

As we continue to explore the idea of utilizing dual language immersion models to potentially help close the achievement gap in U.S. public schools, it is critical to understand U.S. policies and laws as they relate to English learners. Collier and Thomas (2009) remind us that the basic rights of linguistically diverse students are based on three major foundations in U.S. law – the U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (guaranteeing all persons equal protection under the laws of the U.S.), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (banning discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any federally assisted program), and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (requiring all

public school districts to "take appropriate actions to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs"). "The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), continues to be the most significant federal court decision defining legal responsibilities of schools serving English learners. The key issue in this important ruling is defined as providing a *meaningful education.* Just teaching the mainstream curriculum in English is not considered meaningful" (Collier & Thomas, 2009, pp. 10). As stated in his 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* ruling, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas stated:

> *There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.*
>
> *Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the education program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful.*

Over the years in the U.S., especially since *Lau v. Nichols,* public school systems have seen a wide variety of bilingual/ESL/ELL programs and models – almost as diverse as the students they were designed to serve. How pedagogical options are defined obviously depends on the rationales behind them, meaning contending theories of second language acquisition (Crawford, 2004). One of the most common models currently used in U.S. schools is ESL (English as a Second Language), which is sometimes referred to as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), or in more recent years, ELL (English Language Learners). In this model, students often find themselves in the middle of grammar-based instruction with a heavy focus on "skill-building" exercises and memorization of vocabulary (often de-contextualized), or in the

middle of content-based instruction, where teachers stress the use of English to communicate in situations that will be meaningful to students or serve as a form of remediation to learn the school's adopted curriculum (Crawford, 2004). Sometimes this type of support is seen in the mainstream classroom, with additional ESL support delivered by an ESL teacher or tutor, and sometimes it is delivered in a pull-out model where ESL student leave their regular mainstream classroom to receive explicit, intensive instruction in English. Regardless, this approach is considered "subtractive" in that the goal is to develop English proficiency with no intention of or desire to maintain the students' first language. This approach can also be considered similar to how immigrants to the United States were treated in the late 1800s-early 1900s – the expectation was to lose their native language and culture, and assimilate into English and American culture, as quickly as possible. The only difference is that in ESL, there are instructional supports provided to do so.

On the other hand, "additive" bilingual models are those that provide an additive bilingual context for all students. This means that students receive nonstop support for both their first and second languages at least through puberty, which is the key to avoiding cognitive development slowdowns. In essence, this helps transform their educational experience to one with the same or similar advantages that language majority students have (Thomas & Collier, 2012). This approach is the closest to the ideal "dual language" education that Thomas and Collier argue to be key in transforming U.S. public education, meeting the needs of both language majority and language minority students, and eventually closing the achievement gap.

Considerable research has identified dual language education to be the best way for English learners, as well as native English speakers, to achieve biliteracy while also experiencing high academic achievement (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005). Success stories from dual

language programs from across the country have been widely disseminated, especially in recent years. Research reports from a variety of districts have repeatedly credited such programs for higher scores on standardized tests. Additionally, dual language programs are credited with promoting increased cross-cultural understandings (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the terms “two-way” and “dual language” are often used synonymously. Thomas and Collier (2012) state that “over the years the term ‘dual language’ has been defined by some researchers as applying to two-way programs with equal numbers of native English speakers and students from the other language background while ignoring one-way. We take the position that one-way is equally as effective as two-way in the long term and that both are enrichment models of dual language education” (p. 25). Furthermore, they maintain that, in terms of a “two-way” model, at least one-third of the students in the dual language program should be native English speakers and/or native/heritage speakers of the partner language. This is an important clarification since, according to Thomas and Collier (2012), the reality of our community school demographics sometimes limits our ability to reach that 50:50 balance of languages, stating “research ideals and practical realities can bring dual language educators to a compromise that works” (p. 27). When comparing the advantages and/or disadvantages between one-way and two-way program models, Thomas and Collier reference their ongoing research which has informed their stance that it does not matter which model is implemented, stating that “in the long term, both groups are able to reach grade level and beyond in their second language” (p. 27). The researchers do note, however, that students in a two-way model generally reach grade level achievement in English one or two years earlier than students in a one-way model, although they balance out in the end.

Campano, Ghiso, and Welch (2016) remind us that one of the most salient issues in education over the past few decades, and especially today, is the unprecedented linguistic and cultural diversity of student populations, with many policies geared toward immigrant youth and their public education. To make matters worse, the climate of high stakes testing in education and the remedial standardized curricula used to prepare children for such assessments homogenize diverse experiences (Compano, Ghiso, & Welch, 2016). The authors further contend that "part of what 'mismatch' suggests is that people occupy essentialized and bounded cultural contexts in particular spaces, and the goal becomes either to assimilate minoritized communities within the dominant discourse or two value the literacies and histories of each context while retaining them as separate" (p. 9).

There is a lot of discourse about the achievement gap in U.S. schools, and the need to close it. Yet, as Carter and Welner (2013) highlight, it is the disparities in certain achievement indicators that have dominated policy discussions in recent decades, with little attention being paid to disparities in opportunity. They maintain that, unlike the achievement gap, the "opportunity gap" moves the discussion away from outcomes, and toward the exploration in inputs. Additionally, they argue that not only is denying children equitable educational opportunities bad policy and inconsistent with basic American values, but it also places unnatural constraints on the healthy growth of disadvantaged children.

Given the rapidly changing demographics, the number of disadvantaged students, the increased number of immigrant and refugee children, in addition to those born in the United States, and the high percentage of English learners, a massive reform in public education in the United States is an absolute necessity. Dual language education programs have not only the academic benefits, but also the culturally responsive and cross-cultural benefits to promote a

strong, healthy, translingual U.S. society for future generations. Now more than ever before is it necessary for America's youth to grow up with bi- or multi-lingual skills in order to be successful in the 21st century. Dual language education may very likely be the secret to this success.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

## Theoretical Framework

This study is a qualitative and ethnographic case study, grounded within critical theory (specifically, critical language policy [CLP] research), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, and Indigenous Ways of Knowing (and Yup'ik Worldview). The beliefs and ideologies of these three theories naturally overlap in a way which lend themselves to provide a solid foundation to support the study, and more importantly, the critical message to the larger audience on the importance of Indigenous language revitalization efforts, locally and around the globe.

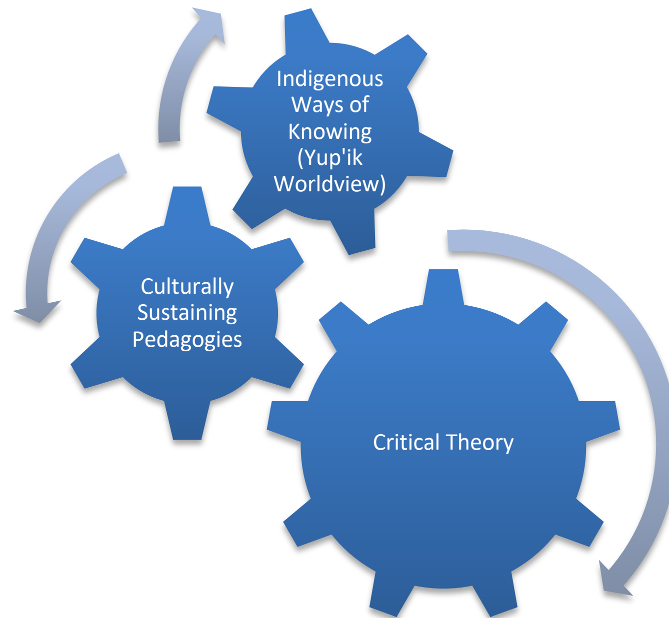



**Figure 3:** Locke's Theoretical Framework, Doctoral Dissertation (2024)

## Critical Theory

Critical language policy (CLP) research is part of a growing field of critical applied linguistics, including critical discourse analysis, critical literacy studies, and critical pedagogy (Pennycook, 2001). According to Tollefson (2005), when referring to CLP, the term "critical" has three interrelated meanings. First, it refers to work that is critical of traditional, mainstream approaches to language policy research. Second, it is inclusive of research aimed at social change. And finally, it refers to research that is influenced by critical theory.

Critical theory is based on the works of scholars such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Gramsci, and Habermas, to name a few. According to Tollefson (2005), much of the work within the area of critical theory involves a rethinking of Marxist theory, including critiques of Marxist and neo-Marxist work. This may be most apparent when exploring the first meaning of critical theory, as referenced above, that of critiques of traditional, mainstream approaches. Central to this belief is that it emphasizes apolitical analysis of technical issues such as terminology development, as opposed to the underlying social and political factors that affect language policy (Tollefson, 2005).

Traditional research, often referred to as neoclassical research or the neoclassical approach, is generally characterized by the assumption that language policies are usually adopted to solve problems of communication in multilingual settings and to increase social and economic opportunities for linguistic minorities (Tollefson, 1991, Eastman, 1983). Such traditional research was first seen in the 1960s and 70s as a means of "assisting" developing countries to become more modern. Later, such approaches were extended to developed countries, where

language policies were believed to be useful for integrating linguistic minorities into mainstream socioeconomic systems, as well as linguistic minorities into mainstream educational settings (Tollefson, 2005).

However, through the lens of critical theory, policies often create and sustain a variety of forms of social inequality, and it is commonplace that policymakers often promote interests of dominant social groups. This brings us to the second area within the definition of critical theory, that of social change. Specifically, Tollefson (2005) suggests that, under the umbrella of social change, critical theory research tends to examine the role of language policies in social, political, and economic inequality, ultimately with the end goal of developing policies and reducing these various forms of inequality.

One area within the field of education, specifically bilingual and second language education, that we see this is within the promotion, maintenance, and revitalization of indigenous and heritage languages. This is usually related to social justice. According to Tollefson (2005), under this guise, CLP research generally highlights ethical questions of policy and research methodology, while fundamentally opposing positivist approaches that often emphasize a researcher's "objectivity" and distance from their subjects.

The third and final meaning of "critical" refers to research work that is or has been influenced by critical theory, specifically systems of social inequality, and those systems that are often considered invisible due to ideological processes "that make inequality seem to be the natural condition of human social systems" (Tollefson, 2005, p. 43). Schools, in particular, are often associated with critical theory, especially when referring to the concept of power and the notion of inequality.

Finally, through the lens of indigenous language revitalization, and using Hawai'i as an example, Warschauer (1997) states that the very act of learning Hawaiian is a profound sociocultural act since it is part of an effort to reassert the rights of Hawaiians against a century of linguistic and cultural repression. Within the U.S., Hawai'i has been leading the charge with intentional language revitalization efforts for decades. Their model easily serves as a roadmap for other Indigenous language communities to follow suit.

## Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

"*Culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) is a critical framework for centering and sustaining Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities as these memberships necessarily intersect with gender and sexuality, dis/ability, class, language, land, and more. First and foremost, CSP explicitly names whiteness (including white normativity, white racism and ideologies of white supremacy) as the problem, and thus, decentering whiteness and recentering communities is our point of departure" (Alim, Paris, & Wong, 2020).

According to Paris (2012), "In the face of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society, research and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality" (pp. 93). This statement captures the essence of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, which seek to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012). Ladson-Billings commends the work of Paris and Alim (2014), discussing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies as "a version 2.0 – a 'remix' of culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) with the added features of both sustaining the evolving

cultures of students as well as creating a sort of 'hybridity, fluidity, and complexity' that fosters a multilingual, multicultural classroom" (Coulter & Jimenez-Silva, 2017, pp. 2).

With regards to this study, the notion of CSP specifically supports the argument against the "white Westerners" making decisions that directly impact the Native peoples of the United States, specifically Alaska, for example. Coulter and Jimenez-Silva (2017) write: "On mountains and near rivers and in canyons and deserts and by the sea, the Elders of Indigenous communities have acted in various ways to sustain the culture and language of their peoples. Many have looked toward schools to become the means through which their cultures are valued and taught rather than subverted and silenced." They continue, "in the meantime in urban and rural schools around the United States, grandparents and great-grandparents from around the world watch their children play in their living rooms and yards and wonder what is lost as their children slowly take on American values and cultural norms, perhaps losing their native language in the process. These children work to learn English and school-based content in what, in some cases, have become very restrictive language environments" (pp. 290). Comments supporting this will be identified in the Findings section of this dissertation.

## Indigenous Ways of Knowing/Yupiaq Worldview

The third and final component of my proposed theoretical framework is that of Indigenous Ways of Knowing, and more specifically, the Yupiaq (Yup'ik) Worldview. While critical theory comes from a Western perspective, one could argue that aspects of it can be found in many different Indigenous groups' Ways of Knowing, as much of these are centered around Elders educating their community groups first, followed by the individual. It is not realistic nor

appropriate to suggest that all Indigenous groups around the world subscribe to the same worldview, however there are many commonalities amongst them. Most Indigenous peoples' worldviews seek harmony and integration with all life, including the spiritual, natural, and human domains (Burger, 1990; Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992). These three realms serve as the foundation of traditional worldviews and all aspects of indigenous peoples' lives (Kawagley, 2006).

Further articulating these fundamental components of Indigenous worldviews, Yup'ik scholar Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (2006) writes:

> *Their constructed technology was mediated by nature. Their traditional education processes were carefully constructed around mythology, history, the observation of natural processes and animals' and plants' styles of survival and obtaining food, and use of natural materials to make their tools and implements, all of which was made understandable through thoughtful stories and illustrative examples. This view of the world and approach to education has been brought into jeopardy with the onslaught of Western social systems and institutionalized forms of cultural transmission* (pp. 1-2).

Kawagley (2006) further explains what this means from the Yupiaq (Yupik) perspective, suggesting that:

> *The Yupiaq have experienced particular nuances in thinking, ways of doing things, and other idiosyncrasies of the Western world through the envoys of the various institutions established to administer to the needs of the Yupiaq people. From the Yupiaq perspective, the constellation of these new values, beliefs, and practices introduced through schooling, religion, government, economics, and numerous technological devices represents a worldview quite distinct from that of the Yupiaq. In Yupiaq eyes, Western society often appears as a monolithic entity, despite the fact that it is made up of many diverse institutions and divergent points of view* (pp. 2-3).

Finally, I offer one last thought from Kawagley regarding Indigenous Ways of Knowing and its relation to the Western world's sociocultural theory:

*A worldview consists of the principles we acquire to make sense of the world around us. Young people learn these principles, including values, traditions, and customs, from myths, legends, stories, family, community, and examples set by community leaders. The worldview, or cognitive map, is a summation of coping devices that have worked in the past and may or may not be as effective in the present. Once a worldview has been formed, the people are then able to identify themselves as a unique group* (pp. 7-8).

Patel (2016) references the work of Kawagley, mentioned above, suggesting that we do not exist in isolation from social and material contexts, separated from one another. She states: "this is true in the sense of humans being connected as well as humans and nonhuman entities being connected and coming into existence with each other. This is a long-standing tenet of much of Indigenous knowledge systems" (pp. 49). Patel further argues that in relation to Indigenous knowledge systems, Kawagley's work "speaks out loud a centuries-old (if not older) epistemology such that Western(ized) audiences might be able to read it, as well as exploring what this knowledge system means in an era marked not by interconnection but by the Anthropocene. In this way, Kawagley's work and how it is situated is itself an example of relationality, of ideas never being absent of thinkers in specific contexts" (pp. 50).

Kovach (2009) suggests that "qualitative research offers space for Indigenous ways of researching, yet any understanding of Indigenous methodologies alongside Western-constructed research processes (qualitative or otherwise) triggers recollection of the miserable history of Western research and Indigenous communities" (pp. 24).

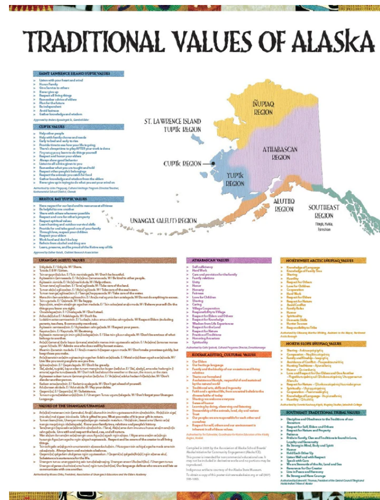



**Figure 4:** Traditional Values of Alaska, Alaska Native Knowledge Network, https://www.uaf.edu/ankn/

## Methods and Research Design

A qualitative explanatory and ethnographic case study design was used to conduct the research in this study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. Further, they state that such research design ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but through a variety of lenses which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm, "recognizing the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity. Searle (1995) suggests that qualitative case studies are built on a social construction of reality.

Much of this research design comes from Yin (2003) who suggests that a qualitative case study be considered when one (not necessarily all) of the following is most appropriate: (1) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (2) the behavior of those involved in

the study cannot be manipulated; (3) the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions because they are relevant to the study; or (4) boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

Specifically, this study aligns with Yin (2003), who states, would be used for seeking answers to questions "that sought to explain the presumed casual links in real-life interventions that are too complex for survey or experimental strategies. In evaluation language, the explanations link the program implementation with program effects" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 547).

## Types of Data and Modes of Data Gathering

A hallmark of case study research is the ability to use multiple data sources, which according to Patton (1990) and Yin (2003), serves as a strategy to enhance data credibility. Also unique to case studies, when compared to other types of qualitative research, researchers can collect and integrate quantitative survey data, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

As typical with many qualitative case study research projects, data was collected using a variety of sources, including:

- Observations, including audio, video, and still-recordings
- In-depth semi-structured ethnographic interviews with individuals
- Group interviews ["listening session"] (if possible)
- Archival records: physical artifacts (including data collected for reporting purposes of the grant, including external evaluator's reports)

A culturally responsive approach was employed when collecting data, with specific attention being given to appropriately gaining access into the Yup'ik community and culture. "Research" is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary (Smith, 2012). Knowing this, building a sense of trustworthiness was essential. Employing Alaska Native discourse values (Merculieff & Roderick, 2013) was crucial in aiding in this process and served to gain continued trust between myself and the participants. I was reminded of how critical this trust is through Smith's (2012) words:

> *When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it* [research] *stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity* (pp. 1).

## Research Questions

This study is a qualitative ethnographic case study designed to explore the impact of the Anchorage School District's Yup'ik Immersion Program within the urban setting of Anchorage, Alaska. The study's research questions center around perceptions of developing and implementing an Indigenous language immersion program in an urban public school system.

1. What is the impact of the Yup'ik Immersion Program on the ASD community and the Yup'ik community in Anchorage and beyond?

2. Beyond this, explore such impacts as:

*On staff – how they manage within the Western institution

*Yup'ik parents/families and their perceptions on a sense of belonging

*Symbolic of reclaiming, Indigenous education spaces

*What are the successes? Is this program special, and if so, why?

## Settings and Participants

While the Yup'ik Immersion program is located at College Gate Elementary, which is located within the Anchorage School District (ASD), it is critical to provide some background on the city of Anchorage. Historically speaking, Anchorage is a young city, having been founded in 1913. It has grown to a large metropolitan city of roughly 400,000 people, home to more than half of Alaska's overall population (741,894 in 2016). Further, there are approximately 130,000 K-12 students within Alaska, with 43,000 of them being within the Anchorage School District. Surprisingly to many, Anchorage is an extremely diverse city. Of the ASD's 50,000 students, over 100 first languages spoken at home, and approximately 20% of ASD students speak a first language other than English, and therefore qualify for ELL services. University of Alaska Anchorage sociology professor Chad R. Farrell has identified Anchorage as having the top three most diverse high schools in the nation (Farrell, 2017). The top five languages after English spoken by ASD students include Spanish, Samoan, Hmong, Filipino, and Yup'ik. Yup'ik is the only Alaska Native language to fall within the top ELL (English Language Learners) languages of the ASD, supporting the idea that Yup'ik may be considered the most prevalent Alaska Native language in use today. Additionally, in the past several years two pre-K Yup'ik immersion programs have begun. Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) has a preschool program for children ages 0-3. Cook Inlet Native Head Start (CINHS) has a preschool program for children ages 3-5. These programs, in future years, will provide a natural pipeline to ASD's College Gate Yup'ik

Immersion Program. Both entities are local non-profits designed to help Alaska Native and American Indian peoples living within the Cook Inlet (Anchorage area) region to meet their full potential.

## Race and ethnicity

Minority students comprise more than 50 percent of the student population (48,089 students - May 2017).
African American: 6%
Alaska Native/American Indian: 9%
Asian: 10%
Biracial/Multiracial: 15%
Hispanic: 11%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 5%
Caucasian: 44%

## Non-English languages spoken

Most ASD families — 80 percent — speak English at home. The remaining 20 percent speak 99 languages. As of October 2014, there were 5,745 students eligible for English Language Learner services.
Top 5 languages spoken at ASD after English K-12, 2017:
**Spanish: 1394**
**Samoan: 1238**
**Hmong: 1008**
**Filipino: 811**
**Yupik: 300**

**Figure 5:** Race, Ethnicity, and Languages of Anchorage School District, https://www.asdk12.org

College Gate Elementary is a traditional neighborhood K-5 elementary school of the Anchorage School District, located in east Anchorage. College Gate, built in 1970, is currently

home to 312 K-5 students. In addition to the traditional neighborhood program, College Gate also has several federally funded Title VI Indian Education grant projects in place including *Project K'il*, a federal demonstration grant designed to empower Alaska Native (not just Yup'ik) students for success in school through the project's strong emphasis on cultural responsiveness, social-emotional learning (SEL), and effective teaching strategies.

**Image 6:** College Gate Elementary, Anchorage School District, https://www.asdk12.org/domain/3604

Additionally, Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) has a strong presence in the school with their "Parents as Mentors" program, also known as "Cultural Foundations." Anchorage School District's Title VI Indian Education Department also staffs a Youth Development Tutor at College Gate due to the school's high percentage of Alaska Native youth. In fact, it has the highest percentage of Alaska Native children in all of Anchorage's 62 elementary schools. Thus, College Gate was a natural fit to host the new Yup'ik immersion program.

While the research site itself is limited to Anchorage, Alaska, research study participants were drawn from a variety of inter-related institutions and entities. These included: ASD Yup'ik immersion teachers and staff; College Gate principal and ASD district administration; parents/family members; school and Native community members; elders; consortium partners including LKSD and Avant Assessment; government officials (local, state, federal); external grant evaluator; and others. Given the uniqueness of this study, it was impossible to truly hide the identity of the research site, setting, and context. However, all precautions were used to keep participant names and titles confidential. Pseudonyms were used in the actual study and individuals' roles/titles are not disclosed.

Parents/relatives/guardians have been a significant source for data collection and include both Native and non-Native family members. Local Elders and other members from the city's Native community were also invited, as well as key individuals from our consortium partners. These partners include: The Alaska Native Heritage Center; Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC); and Cook Inlet Native Head Start (CINHS); Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD); and Avant Assessment (assisting with the development of Yup'ik assessments). Finally, local, state, and federal government officials were invited as participants.

At the beginning of the study, approximately 60 individuals were identified as potential participants, encompassing the various stakeholder groups mentioned above. One of the interview questions asked participants to identify additional potential participants. In the end, 30 people agreed to participate, with another 30 either declining or did not respond. Of the 30 who did participate, the overall study sample included: Yup'ik Immersion and English Partner Teachers, school and district administrators, school board members, local municipal assembly members, elders, professors/researchers involved in the program, and community partners. Of

the 30 participants, 7 were male and 23 were female; 14 were Alaska Native and 16 were non-Native. While I did not ask for ages, I would guess that the age-range of the participants was between 30-75 years old, with the majority being between 40-50 years old.

| Pseudonym | Interview Date | Location | Gender | Native/Non-Native | Generic Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nora | 12/8/2023 | Zoom | F | N | Researcher/Professor |
| Cillaraq | 2/4/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | Yup'ik Immersion Teacher |
| Sonia | 2/5/2024 | Zoom | F | N | District Administrator |
| Patricia | 2/16/2024 | Zoom | F | N | District Administrator |
| Panigkaq | 2/16/2014 | Zoom | F | Y | Yup'ik Scholar, Professor, Grandparent |
| James | 2/17/2024 | Zoom | M | N | School Board Member |
| Ciuliq | 2/18/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | Yup'ik Immersion Teacher |
| Cuigun | 2/18/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | Yup'ik Immersion Teacher |
| Rebecca | 2/18/2024 | Zoom | F | N | School Board Member |
| Girdy | 2/19/2024 | Zoom | F | N | School Board Member |
| Rita | 2/19/2024 | Zoom | F | N | National Language Expert |
| Nuuni | 2/19/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | Yup'ik Immersion Teacher |
| Tacuk | 2/19/2024 | In-person | F | Y | Elder |
| Kegyuuggay | 2/20/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | District Administrator/Title 6 Indian Education |
| Putyukiiaq | 2/21/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | District Administrator/Title 6 Indian Education |
| Bridget | 2/23/2024 | Zoom | F | N | Researcher/Professor |
| Dean | 2/23/2024 | Zoom | M | Y | Principal |
| Douglas | 2/23/2024 | Zoom | M | Y | District Administrator/Title 6 Indian Education (former) |
| Nikki | 2/24/2024 | Zoom | F | N | Parent/Employee |
| William | 2/24/2024 | Zoom | M | N | City Assembly |
| Stephanie | 2/25/2024 | Zoom | F | N | English Partner Teacher |
| Chasity | 2/25/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | Parent/Employee |
| Diana | 2/26/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | District Administrator/Title 6 Indian Education |
| Thomas | 2/27/2024 | Zoom | M | N | District Administrator |
| Justin | 2/28/2024 | Zoom | M | N | State Legislator |
| Connie | 2/29/2024 | Zoom | F | N | Researcher/Professor |
| Maangiar | 3/1/2024 | Zoom | F | N | English Partner Teacher/Parent |
| Arnaqulluk | 3/1/2024 | Zoom | F | Y | Parent |
| Peter | 3/1/2024 | Zoom | M | Y | Community Partner |
| Diane | ¾/2024 | Zoom | F | N | State-level Administrator |

**Table 5:** Research study participants.

## Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. These interviews were carried out via Zoom, except for one which occurred face-to-face, between December 2023-March 2024. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), the purpose of SSIs (semi-structured interviews) "is to ascertain participants' perspectives regarding an experience pertaining to the research topic. Beyond that common denominator, however, SSIs have diversified into different types, each uniquely oriented to assessing, confirming, validating, refuting, or elaborating upon existing knowledge and the discovery of new knowledge. Furthermore, the contemporary SSI may be empathetic and politically engaged."

At the beginning of each interview, I started off my thanking the participant for agreeing to be a part of this study, asked if they had received and read the consent form, and asked if they had any questions. I also asked if they had a pseudonym that they would like me to refer to them as. None of the participants had any questions, and most did not have a preferred pseudonym. I then started each interview by reading this statement:

*The Anchorage School District has been somewhat of a pioneer in language immersion education, starting in 1989 with Japanese. Since that time ASD has added 2 Spanish programs, the nation's first Russian immersion program and German, all of which are K 12. We've also added Chinese, which is currently up to Grade 7, Yup'ik, our first and only Alaska Native Language, currently up to Grade 5, and French, currently, up to Grade 4. Our programs are considered partial models or 50/50, with half of the core content taught in English meaning, ELA and math, and the other half of the core content, science and social studies taught in the second or immersion language, as well as that language's, language, arts, and literacy. All that to be said, given what you have experienced and/or know about ASD's immersion programs, and in particular, the Yup'ik immersion program…*

I would then continue by asking questions, usually starting with the first one (see below). The remainder of the questions followed, but not necessarily in the order below, because the interviews themselves were more like conversations. The semi-structured interviews typically included the following questions:

- *Given what you have experienced and/or know about the ASD's Yup'ik Immersion program, what are the successes? What are the strengths of the program? What are the challenges? Do you consider this program to be special or not? Why? Why not?*

- *What do you perceive to be some of the biggest challenges/barriers to this program? Do you think these challenges/barriers would be consistent across other urban settings? Why/why not?*

- *In programs such as this, how do Western and Indigenous (Yup'ik) worlds (beliefs) come together, if at all? What are areas of improvement for this?*

- *Has this program provided any unique sort of sense of belonging to students, Native or non-Native?*

- *What are your thoughts about increasing the number of Indigenous language immersion programs throughout Alaska and the U.S.?*

These questions were designed to probe participants and get their thoughts and perceptions to help answer the question of "exploring the impact of Indigenous language revitalization in a public-school setting." Each interview ended by asking the participant if he/she suggested anyone else to interview. Semi-structured interviews typically have an interview guide with questions geared toward addressing the research objective. According to Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021), the guide is "not meant to be read verbatim in the same order with each interview, rather, it is meant to provide structure and focus to the natural flow of conversation for each unique interview." Further, they state that semi-structured interviews often include main open-ended questions with follow-up probe questions the interviewer may choose to ask during

the interview. This contrasts with close-ended questions one typically finds on survey instruments, such as yes/no questions or multiple-choice options, which traditionally have been more useful in quantitative studies.

## Data Analysis Procedures

As Seidman (2019) states, interpreting data is not only a process researchers do toward the end of their studies, but often throughout. "Even as interviewers question their participants, tentative interpretations may begin to influence the path of their questioning" (p. 136). As a participant-researcher since before the program began, I have been keenly aware of the overall thoughts regarding starting this Yup'ik Immersion Program. That said, these were anecdotal thoughts with no actual proof. As a researcher, I was seeking to understand the public's perception of launching an Alaska Native (Yup'ik) language immersion program in a public elementary school. Since I have been living this experience since 2018, I certainly had an idea, generally-speaking. This study has allowed for a more thorough and diverse investigation into my initial thoughts.

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. Further, it is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). The thematic analysis process involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging

themes become the categories for analysis. Further, this theoretical approach includes the researcher fitting themes into preconceived categories, in contract with the inductive approach which is more data-driven, allowing themes to be categorized outside of the questions or prompts that were presented to the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

Zoom-based interviews were conducted with 29 of the 30 participants. One participant, an Alaska Native Elder, was interviewed in-person in her home. Zoom was used to capture the audio recording. The Zoom platform automatically provides a written transcription of the recordings. However, such transcriptions are often not 100% accurate and often miss some words or transcribe words, especially unfamiliar words (i.e. Yup'ik) incorrectly. I went back through each recording and compared it to the Zoom-created transcripts, and made corrections as needed. As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, the process of transcription can be an excellent way to start familiarizing yourself with your data, in fact they go on to say that some argue that it should be seen as a 'key phase' within the scope of data analysis within interpretive qualitative methodology. Further, Braun and Clarke go on to state that "analysis involves a constant moving back and forth between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analyzing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. Writing is an integral *part* of analysis, not something that takes place at the end, as it does with statistical analyses. Therefore, writing should begin in phase one, with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes and continue right through the entire coding/analysis process" (p. 86). Additionally, they say that analysis is not a linear process of simply moving from one phase to the next, but rather, it is recursive, where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases, that it develops over time, and should not be rushed. This concept fits nicely with the need to review Zoom-created transcriptions to the actual recordings, as I suggested the need to do. Not only did this

process allow for corrections to be made, producing more accurate transcriptions of interviews, but also allowed for more opportunities to synthesize the data to ensure accurate coding occurs.

MAXQDA24 was utilized to assist with the initial coding of the 30 recorded interviews. MAXQDA24 is a qualitative data analysis software that offers a wide range of tools to analyze and understand qualitative data, including the ability to code and categorize the data, identify patterns and themes, and create visual representations of the data. The product name "MAXQDA" stands for Max (referring to German sociologist Max Weber) and the abbreviation QDA, which stands for Qualitative Data Analysis. The latest version is referred to as MAXQDA24.

The transcriptions of the 30 interviews were uploaded into MAXQDA24 as individual files. Each one was assigned with a pseudonym and labeled accordingly. Then the daunting process of coding began, with each interview taking approximately 30-45 minutes to code. When contemplating how to best code these datasets, I went back and forth between inductive and deductive coding. In the end, deductive coding seemed the most appropriate for this study. "One really important dimension in coding and theme development is the way you tackle the question of where and how meaning is noticed: this ranges from inductive (data-driven) to deductive (researcher- or theory-driven) orientations" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 56). According to Braun and Clarke (2022), "a deductive orientation to coding refers to a more researcher- or theory-driven approach, where the dataset provides the foundation for coding and theme development, but the research questions asked – and thus the codes developed – reflect theoretical or conceptual ideas the researcher seeks to understand through the dataset" (p. 57).

In terms of the 30 participant interviews, 20 initial codes were generated, with 467 initial assignments to these codes. From the 20 codes, 9 surfaced to the top with the greatest number of assigned codes. These included: Challenges; Benefit/Value of Native Languages and Cultures; Program Strengths; Funding; Other; General Advocacy; Next Steps; Sense of Belonging; and Reclamation.

Following the initial coding using MAXQDA, I took the top four major themes and analyzed them more carefully. During this process, I was looking for sub-codes, or themes, that could provide a more in-depth understanding of the initial themes. In some cases, there was overlap, such as "Challenges" and "Funding." For this coding, I did not use MAXDQA or any other tool. I literally printed out the original coded transcripts, used color-coded highlighters, and identified sub-codes throughout the process.

## Ethical Dilemmas

One of the biggest challenges with this study was it was extremely difficult to keep the research site anonymous, or confidential, as the site itself is critical to know and understand within the context of this study. There are only three (known) Yup'ik Immersion programs in Alaska, but only one is in a large urban setting (Anchorage), which is College Gate Elementary. Although the overall site itself is publicly known, all participants are still referred to by pseudonyms within the study. However, if their title or position is important, it may need to be named, although the individual holding that position is not named other than their pseudonym. This study would not have been nearly as salient if a fabricated community, school, and language

would have been used. This study was designed to tell a compelling story and to encourage other Indigenous groups to do something like revive and revitalize their languages.

## Trustworthiness

As Yin (2018) indicates, in case study research, the need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods, such as experiments, surveys, and histories. He states that using multiple sources of evidence permits going beyond appreciating the breadth of a case study's scope, in fact, one of the major strengths of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. Because multiple sources of evidence are included in this study, specifically interviews and detailed reports (7) provided by the grant's external evaluator, a triangulating approach was employed to analyze the data. According to Stake (1995), for data source triangulation, we look to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently.

Further, triangulation refers to using different data sources of information by "examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding validity to the study" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

Yin (2018) also states that a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. Further, "the need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods, such as experiments, surveys, or histories" (Yin, 2018, p. 127). Additionally, Yin states that "using multiple sources of evidence

permits going beyond appreciating the breadth of a case study's scope" (p. 127). The data used within this study includes 30 semi-structured interviews conducted, coded, and analyzed by the researcher; 8 qualitative reports conducted by an external grant evaluator, and analyzed by the researcher; and several "Action Plans" for Alaska Native Languages, prepared by the State of Alaska, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. These three independently different data sources were utilized to "cross check" the overall findings. While the interviews were used to develop the initial themes via thematic coding, the grant evaluator's reports and the documents from the State of Alaska were used to support and substantiate the findings.

In terms of validity and reliability, I refer to Creswell (2014) who suggests that "*Qualitative validity* means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while *qualitative reliability* indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (p. 201). Further, as indicated by Creswell and Poth (2018), triangulation includes corroborating evidence through multiple data sources. As the researcher of this study, I was looking for authenticity and validity but not necessarily consensus of the study's participants.

"Because qualitative researchers are the primary instruments for data collection and analysis, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through observations and interviews. We are 'closer' to reality than if an instrument with predefined items had been interjected between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied. Most agree that when reality is viewed in this manner – that it is always interpreted – internal validity is considered a strength of qualitative research" (Merriam et. al, 2002, p. 25). One strategy that qualitative researchers may employ to establish validity is *triangulation*. This term, triangulation, was first cited by Foreman in 1948 as

a procedure for independent investigators to "establish validity through pooled judgement" and using outside sources to validate case study materials, with Denzin later presenting an extended interpretation of triangulation, noting four distinct types: multiple investigators; multiple theories; multiple sources of data; and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings (Merriam et. al, 2002). Further, triangulation is common using multiple data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, to name a few.

# CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

When I wrote my dissertation proposal, I had some assumptions based on my field notes: *Eventually, as data are collected and analyzed, I anticipate a lot of positive comments and feedback, from both a humanistic perspective, as well as from a political one. I anticipate positive comments surrounding the notion that this program is 'good for the community,' 'good for Alaska Natives,' and 'long overdue in Anchorage.' However, I also anticipate some skepticism, especially in terms of ongoing funding and sustainability.* Interestingly, what I surmised was not incorrect, in fact it was very accurate. However, it was far from complete.

I have been immersed in this grant project since 2018 and have been required to complete multiple annual reports as well as two significant final performance reports with the U.S. Department of Education. Thus, I have heard, and collected, quite a bit of anecdotal information, most of which has been positive and supportive, from both the Native and non-Native community. As mentioned earlier, in terms of the 30 participant interviews, 20 initial codes were generated, with 467 initial assignments to these codes. From the 20 codes, 9 surfaced to the top with the greatest number of assigned codes. These included:

- Challenges (62)
- Benefit/Value of Native Languages and Cultures (47)
- Program Strengths (43)
- Funding (39)
- Other (36)

- General Advocacy (34)
- Next Steps (30)
- Sense of Belonging (24)
- Reclamation (21)

| **Code theme** | **Segments** | **Percentage** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Challenges | 62 | 13.3 |
| Benefits and Value of Native Languages | 47 | 10.1 |
| Program Strengths | 43 | 9.2 |
| Funding | 38 | 8.1 |
| Other | 36 | 7.7 |
| General Advocacy | 34 | 7.3 |
| Next Steps | 30 | 6.4 |
| Sense of Belonging | 24 | 5.1 |
| Reclamation | 21 | 4.5 |
| Native vs. Western | 20 | 4.3 |
| Being Proud | 19 | 4.1 |
| Bi/Multilingual Benefits | 16 | 3.4 |
| Urban vs. Rural | 11 | 2.4 |
| Additional Indigenous Programming | 9 | 1.9 |
| Parents not speaking Yup'ik | 9 | 1.9 |
| Community Involvement | 7 | 1.5 |
| Policy | 5 | 1.1 |
| Future Importance | 4 | 0.9 |
| Trauma | 4 | 0.9 |
| Scheduling Issues | 3 | 0.6 |
| **Total Initial Codes** | **467** | **100.0** |

**Table 6:** Study's Coded Themes

I have also collected eight qualitative reports from our grant's external evaluator, Dr. Martha Bigelow, professor of second language education at the University of Minnesota. These reports span the years of 2018-2024. She has been a part of this project since its inception and has visited the program eleven times. Each time she visits, she has done observations, taken copious notes, and conducted interviews with teachers, parents, administrators, students, community partners, and others. Because her reports are part of this federally funded grant, and

because they have been shared with the U.S. Department of Education as part of our annual reporting, it is assumed that data from her reports may be used as part of this qualitative case study, omitting names and confidential information, obviously. It is also assumed that IRB approval from Indiana University is not required since these reports are considered public property of the U.S. Department of Education for grant-reporting purposes. No names or identities are included.

In addition, Dr. Bigelow has spent a considerable amount of time from 2018-2024 reviewing the various grant narratives and proposals, data and milestones to date, and spent time observing in the program. In her first report she outlined (1) lessons learned, (2) opportunities to act now, (3) future potentials, and (4) open questions on a variety of topics including: instructional team; future teacher recruitment; making Yup'ik visible; curriculum development; connections to families; student recruitment; leadership and advocacy; equity; next steps. Here is a brief excerpt of her report where she writes about leadership and advocacy (Bigelow, 2018, pp. 4-5):

*There is resoundingly strong support for this program among the 4 ASD administrators I met. I also want to note that although I was not able to speak with the College Gate Elementary Principal, all the staff felt that he was an involved, strong supporter and spokesperson for the program. He also attended the summer institute in Minnesota with them this past summer, further demonstrating a high level of commitment in gaining the skills he needs to help lead this program at his school.*

*The short-term goal is to offer an articulated, successful Yupik program K-6 at College Gate Elementary. Although, the program has just begun, it has the making of a very high-quality program that is embraced by the community, the school, and the district. None of the conversations that I had with anyone at ASD questioned the importance and relevance of the new Yupik immersion program. Given this support, this program could become a cornerstone of a vision to foster Yupik language and culture maintenance/reclamation/revitalization broadly in the state of Alaska and in Anchorage, together with the historic and strong program in Bethel. More educational opportunities to learn in Yupik, more political backing, and concerted efforts*

*to normalize Yupik is the public sphere could lead to Alaska following in the footsteps of renown examples of Indigenous language revitalization such as those in Hawaii, Ireland and New Zealand.*

Given my intimate and lived experiences within this program, for the initial grant writing to implementation, as well as a second and third grant application, I anticipated the data collected for this study would be overwhelmingly positive. The ASD's Yup'ik immersion program has filled a gap which has been long overdue. The program has been and still is providing a much-needed opportunity to revive and revitalize one of Alaska's Native languages, and in doing so, also reviving and revitalizing its traditions, customs, and culture. It allows others – non-Natives, to learn the language and experience aspects of its rich culture, providing a unique opportunity for members of the community to become more invested in the need to preserve the richness of Alaska Native history, languages, and cultures. Although the program has had a relatively small enrollment overall, compared to some of ASD's other language immersion programs such as Japanese and Spanish, I also expected the data would unleash and support the importance and need for ongoing funding, beyond federal grants, to keep this unique program viable and alive for future students and their families, regardless of enrollment.

Taking the original nine codes/themes that surfaced to the top, I am focusing on the top four, since I have found overlap through a more in-depth analysis, as well as some sub-themes. For this study we will focus on 1) Challenges; 2) Benefit and Value of Native Languages and Cultures; 3) Program Strengths; and 4) Funding. Each of these themes are described below and are further analyzed with the major sub-themes that emerged.

## Challenges

***Challenges*** surfaced to the top of the coded interviews. Given the uniqueness of the program which has been the focus of this research study, it may seem obvious that one might encounter challenges. This said, the challenges identified in the data collection were extremely diverse and have provided a comprehensive understanding of how difficult it can be to develop and implement a language immersion program in an Indigenous language, and even more so in an urban public-school environment.

The term ***Challenges*** is also extremely vague, which requires a deeper dive into the various components of being a challenge, such as funding, lack of teachers, lack of materials, etc. For example, in two of the earlier interviews for this study, one person stated that "*From what I have heard, a major concern is that the Yup'ik immersion program, could possibly be dropped. This is a huge concern.*" The second participant indicated that *"the challenges, of course, are people that can speak the language, you know. And certainly, that's kind of, you know, really on the technical side. How do we get the next speaker in?"* These quotes represent well the wide range of challenges that have been, or could be, identified.

Of the 62 segments identified within the Challenges theme, several salient sub-codes emerged. These reoccurring sub-codes include: a) lack of qualified teachers; b) limited time; c) enrollment concerns; d) lack of materials and resources; e) leadership; and f) transportation.

Additionally, there was one outlier that didn't fit into one of these sub-codes, yet I thought it was important to discuss. Tacuk, an Elder, said *"I thought it was full immersion, and I was really disappointed to find out it was dual immersion."* She continued by stating, *"Full immersion is the best way to become fluent in a language. Dual immersion does not do that. It*

*doesn't really stick, and your goal is to right now produce fluent speakers. And dual immersion, I know, does not produce fluent speakers."*

I recall the uncomfortableness of this interview and felt it was more important to listen to her and get her thoughts and comments, rather than counter her opinion. As mentioned in Chapter 3, there are various program models, and yet the body of research does not support her opinion. In fact, the program model that has proven to be the most effective is the two-way model, which is dual immersion. This is the program type where the student population is roughly 50% of the dominant language (i.e English) and 50% of the L2, or immersion language (i.e. Yup'ik). According to Thomas and Collier (2017), many longitudinal research studies have clearly shown that dual language is the one immersion model in the United States in which students reach the highest levels of achievement. I believe my feeling of being uncomfortable in this situation corresponds with my positionality, specifically due to my entailments and insider knowledge of the program model.

### *Lack of Qualified Teachers*

Although the Yup'ik immersion program is fully staffed, it has not been easy to find qualified teachers, and there is certainly not a pool of candidates in waiting, so when we have a vacancy, it is an extremely difficult situation. Thomas, a district administrator, stated that *"even though we live in Alaska, it is difficult to find Yup'ik speakers who not only know the language, but can also teach it."* Stephanie, an English Partner Teacher, said that *"getting teachers is a big challenge, because Yup'ik is a dying language, so trying to find someone pursuing or who has their teaching certificate and is able to teach it, and is fluent enough to teach it."* Finally, Diana, a former district administrator said, *"We don't have teachers. You're always scrambling to get*

*teachers. In my opinion, any language teacher is doing twice as much work as an English teacher."*

### *Limited Time*

This sub-code appeared due to the partial or dual model, with 50% of the core academic content (English language arts and math) being taught in English, and the other 50%, science, social studies, and Yup'ik language and literacy, being taught in Yup'ik. One English Partner Teacher, Maangiar, said *"we do have a limited time to teach core concepts and core subjects. And we have some strugglers, academically, and so I don't know if it's because it's just half day or if it's just a lack of support elsewhere."* Putyukiitaq, a district administrator, has a son in a Chinese immersion program. She indicated that *"I've had to put my son in tutoring for like countless hours of tutoring in reading, and my thought was, well he's only getting half the instruction time that a neighborhood kid would be getting. So, you have to be extremely involved with, like what's going on in the classroom with the teachers, and, you know, attending those parent-teacher conferences."*

### *Enrollment Concerns*

Enrollment has been a concern since the inception of the Yup'ik immersion program. The program is a public choice program, open to any student. Yet compared to other immersion programs in the district, it has maintained low enrollment over time. Connie, a researcher who has worked in the field of immersion for decades, said: *"I'd say one of the biggest concerns facing the program is enrollment, particularly with Native enrollment. Now you're up to grade 5 and we would want to see larger classes so that teachers aren't teacher splits. You want to see a solid number of kids in each grade level."* Thomas, a district administrator, said that *"it appears*

*our enrollment struggles in that program, and I believe some of the reasons why it may be struggling in a lack of awareness about the program, that it even exists."*

| | Elementary | | | | | | Middle | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **K** | **Grade 1** | **Grade 2** | **Grade 3** | **Grade 4** | **Grade 5** | **Grade 6** | **Total** |
| **2018-2019** | 27 | | | | | | | 27 |
| **2019-2020** | 32 | 30 | | | | | | 62 |
| **2020-2021** | No accurate data available due to online learning during COVID | | | | | | | |
| **2021-2022** | 20 | 24 | 22 | 24 | | | | 90 |
| **2022-2023** | 21 | 22 | 22 | 20 | 21 | | | 106 |
| **2023-2024** | 19 | 18 | 23 | 20 | 17 | 19 | | 116 |
| **2024-2025** | 26 | 15 | 17 | 23 | 18 | 15 | 15 | 129 |

**Table 7:** Yup'ik Immersion Enrollment, 2018-2024

## *Lack of Materials and Resources*

Lack of materials and resources is a constant challenge in immersion programs, yet the problem is magnified in languages such as Yup'ik, where there is already a limited amount of print materials. A K-5 Yup'ik reading/literacy curriculum was purchased from the Lower Kuskokwim School District, in Bethel, Alaska. They are home to the first Yup'ik immersion program and developed reading materials years ago through a grant from the State of Alaska. Since science and social studies are taught in Yup'ik in our program, it was necessary to translate ASD-adopted curriculum into Yup'ik, which has been a lengthy process and one that is never done. Ciugun, a Yup'ik teacher, stated *"based on my own experience it is really challenging for me to do the science and social studies because most of the materials aren't even translated, and it's sometimes hard for me to find words cause most of those we don't have in Yup'ik."* Nora, a researcher who has worked with various immersion programs in the past, and who has served as the grant's external evaluator since it began, said that *"the Yup'ik program needs to probably*

*default to stuff that has been produced through grants or teacher-made materials, and as you know, teachers don't have a lot of capacity to create a lot of high-quality teacher-made stuff."*

### *Leadership*

This sub-code emerged with the context of overall support, or lack thereof, at the school level. Nuuni, one of the Yup'ik teachers, stated that *"from the principal and the staff the first couple of years, I mean, it was like we felt so unwelcome like we shouldn't be there, and that, you know, the first couple of years we were battling with the neighborhood program. Oh yeah, and that instructional coach, and her telling parents that they should pull their kids from the program."* Kegyuuggay, a district administrator, said: *"they could use a stronger leadership team, someone who is really understanding of what the program should look like, but also passionate in what the capabilities, the outcomes, the intentions of what the program should look like, and to really bring a sense of pride to that community. I think a cohesive team, one that collaborates between neighborhood and immersion itself is super important."* Chasity, a parent with several children in the program, said: *"It takes a strong leader to not have a divided climate when there are different programs under the same roof."* Finally, Nora said that *"bad school leadership is a big concern. And finding teachers. Those can go hand in hand because the better the local school leadership, the happier the teachers are which makes them better at recruiting new teachers."*

### *Transportation*

Transportation has also been an ongoing challenge since the program began. The Yup'ik Immersion Program is a lottery-based, choice program. As with all lottery programs in ASD, student transportation is not provided to students who live outside of the school's attendance zone. Unfortunately, this has resulted in lower enrollment in the Yup'ik program. Rebecca, a school board member, stated: *"So all of our programs of choice struggle with transportation access, unless you're zoned for that school. So, parents who really do want their kids to go to an immersion program, they have to do some heavy lifting for years, to get their kids to and from that program of choice."* Dean, a district administrator, who is also Alaska Native, said that *"transportation is a big deal, because a lot of our Native families still don't drive in Anchorage."* He further explained that *"in the villages, (remote Alaska) off the road system, Native people don't have cars. They don't have roads. They drive 4-wheelers or snowmachines. They don't need a driver's license and most do not know how to drive a car."*

In her January 9, 2020, report, Dr. Bigelow identified a short list of, what she called "Equity Challenges." Here is what she referenced (Bigelow, 2020, p. 9):

*Every program grapples with how to remove barriers to families and students in order to guarantee access to an equitable educational experience. The equity challenges in the Yupik immersion program seem to be the following:*

a. *Currently, the children who do the English part of their day in the afternoon do not have the benefit of a TA the entire time because all kindergarten TAs leave in the afternoon. How will this policy impact the Yupik immersion children who need extra or individualized help with letters, sounds, and numbers? Could this staffing policy result in an equity challenge? If it is not possible to re-group children such that those who need more support in English, do English in the morning, how can there be more support for students who need an intervention in order to make progress toward kindergarten literacy and numeracy goals?*

*b. While the lottery system for enrolling students was a barrier expressed by many of the ASD staff, the few parents I spoke with did not voice this as barrier. Nevertheless, it seems that unless there is a waiting list for this program, there is no need for the lottery system. Could the program use a simple open enrollment system until the program is full and there is the need for a waiting list or lottery system?*

*c. Children often experience some slippage of their skills during the summer months. Given the newness of the program, is it possible to offer a summer learning opportunity to help children maintain their Yupik language gains from the previous year and be first-grade ready? This may or may not be an equity issue based on how far they will have come by the end of kindergarten and what other opportunities they have to use Yupik in their daily lives.*

*d. While transportation is a well-known equity issue in ASD already, it is included here as another barrier of access for this program. Families outside the College Gate Elementary attendance area may not have the means to provide transportation for children they would like to enroll in the Yupik Immersion program. How can ASD solve this perennial problem?*

## Benefits and Values of Native Languages and Cultures

The benefits and values of Native language and cultures presented as the second-highest code from the initial coding process. Many of the responses and comments in this area came from an interview question, which was, “how would you respond to a person who says, ‘why would I put my kid in a Yup’ik immersion program, instead of something like Spanish’?” As one might imagine, this question elicited some strong feelings and comments, which led to several sub-codes, or themes, including reclamation, empowerment, cultural connections and competency, which surfaced above the rest. The variety of other sub-codes was diverse, including topics such trauma, discrimination, colonialism, to name a few.

### *Reclamation*

One local Alaska Native leader, Peter, responded: *"America doesn't acknowledge our languages. Shoot, the only Indigenous language they seem to love is Hawaiian, because it's got this romantic vowel sound to them, but everything else is always Anglicized, I mean even the State's name, Alaska, is Anglicized. So, it's just this common perception that has started with the colonial Americanization part. The Russians were not offending our languages like the Americans, when Sheldon Jackson came in. They were like 'let's kill the language. Kill the Indian, save the man.' And that's where the attitude comes out of. So as a Native person I would shame them. I know you're not Native, and you couldn't do that. I would shame them into. You have become very colonized. You think like White people. Now, that's how I would, I would react to my own people. But I know that you as a district person can't say that. And as a non-Native it's hard to say that. But my reaction to my own people who respond, that is, you have really sucked up to Westerners in this and that. You're just as bad as the rest of them, and trying to destroy us bought you into their system. So, thank you for all the suicides and the dysfunction."*

While the above quote may appear to be an extreme response, it certainly represents the continued and residual fear, distrust, and generational trauma experienced by Alaska Natives, still today. For example, Tacuk, an Elder, states: *"Remember, some of the parents will have been punished at school for speaking their language, and when you go through that trauma, that trauma goes with you throughout your life."*

A local Yup'ik scholar, Panigkaq, said, *"that's why I advocate for you to teach children how to be a good person. Because that's what Yup'ik means. Yup'ik means 'a real human*

*being.'"* She continued with, *"and so, because our worldview is different compared to what the Western system's expectations is, it makes it challenging for Indigenous people to feel successful within this system and that's why it's like no wonder, Indigenous people are always below, always last at everything or highest in dropout rates. So, I really support the immersion program."*

James, a Caucasian man and school board member, stated that:

*Engaging people from a culture or go to that country, we really get to understand things on a deeper level. But for Indigenous peoples, you're really talking about something different. It's recognizing and reviving a culture. I mean, we have such a poor history with Indigenous peoples in North America, I am not quite sure how I would think about it if I had grown up in that culture…I'm going to say that it's recognition that we've overlooked and looked past for a long time. But it is also just a recognition honoring a culture that we actually tried to crush at some point and have done some pretty horrible things to. So, I guess I see as having a different purpose, different outcomes. It does really have that benefit of truly engaging the community.*

In discussing potential societal challenges, James continues with:

*It also feels like trying to keep a certain amount of history open, that which has been closed off for a long time. I am not sure we will see the benefits right away. I think it will take a long time for it to truly come out. I try to imagine if I was a teenager in, let's say, the Yup'ik program, and really learning my forefather's language, being able to talk to Elders in a way that I might not have been able to before, and just having that be a normal part of my studies. I think that would change the way I looked at prevailing culture in Alaska today and my engagement*

*with it, and in a positive way. And in the long run, it is a valuable and worthwhile thing for us to be doing.*

Perhaps one of the most compelling, and detailed responses came from Dean, a district administrator who is also Alaska Native, but not Yup'ik. He said:

*The community has needed something like this for a long time because there continues to be a disconnect between the Native community and the education system, since it was utilized as a program to 'beat the savage out of us.' I know from experience that my uncles, they were not trusting of the school at all because if they spoke their language at all they would get their hands slapped. So that has created a disconnect and a distrust of the whole education system for a long, long time, to where parents don't put value on it, because of the experiences of their parents, their uncles and aunts, may have had in the past. And then it has taken a long time for the Native community in general to be able to come back and trust that education system. Since the talk about boarding schools that people went off to die in, and stuff, whether it was in Canada or, I had family members sent off to Pennsylvania in the 1950s. So, the Yup'ik immersion program offers an opportunity to give back that culture that was stripped away because Native culture often feels like a lot of social norms that we have put on us, a lot of social problems like alcoholism abuse. You know all of that stem from our culture and identity stripped of us. And when you take away our resources, our culture, our identity, all the stuff that kept us thriving for some 1,000 years, has gone away, and we had to adapt to something 200 years ago. And so with that, there needs to be some sort of bridge, like the bringing back of aboriginal languages to Alaska and Anchorage, very innovative and making a strong attempt to do this with the help of federal government grants' Indian Education programs…because we need something*

*like this to bridge, and hopefully expand to more than just one Native language taught here, because we have over 20 official Alaska Native languages, and many, many dialects.*

In her January 9, 2020, report, Dr. Bigelow included (Bigelow, 2020, p. 9). "*Community members see the Yupik Program at College Gate as a way to heal old wounds related to public schooling and language and culture loss."* This strong statement is consistent with the research findings of the participants whom I interviewed. Further, this statement shows the intense need for ongoing healing. In the 2024 Action Plan for Alaska Native Languages, Focus Area #2 is entitled *Address Oppression and Intergenerational Trauma.* In this report it is stated that:

*Alaskan education includes dark histories of language suppression and child abuse that included the removal of children from their homes, the denial of having identities they were born into, and forced assimilation that included violent means of attempted linguistic and cultural erasure."* They expand on this further, saying, *"The State of Alaska must bring the historical and lasting impacts of boarding schools and genocidal educational practices to the surface and determine methods of healing, reconnection, and acknowledgement to new and equitable directions in governance and education while providing increased access to trauma-informed mental health recovery practices for individuals, communities, and institutions* (Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, 2024, p. 2)

## *Empowerment*

The concept of power and empowerment arose as a key theme in the participant interviews, underscoring the idea of value and benefits to Indigenous language learning. Bridget, a professor and researcher who has worked with immersion programs for several decades said:

*"for a heritage learner, the child's who's language and culture in the language of the program, that program holds so much power and potential for that child to understand something about their identity and how valuable for them to come to know that their heritage, the richness of the traditions of their heritage, the richness of their language, is of value, is important, and it's something to be very proud of."*

Connie, an immersion researcher, and a Caucasian, took a similar stance as Bridget, suggesting that it would be *"such a gift to be able to enroll your child in such a program. An Indigenous child in an Indigenous program is also something that is serving the greater good of the community, because these languages and cultures will die if the community doesn't work together to keep them alive, with the support from, hopefully from white people, that have taken away so much from the Indigenous communities. I would also say it is somewhat of a responsibility, if you will, to the whole community that it's bigger than them. It's bigger than their child. And you know that knowing that language and being able to have that connection to that Indigenous identity. To have the connection to ancestors is so critical."* I noted that this quote implies, perhaps, that the Yup'ik immersion program in question is only open to Yup'ik or Alaska Native students, which is not the case. While the program does attract a significant number of Native families, the make-up of the overall student population is very diverse.

Taking a similar, yet different approach, Ciugun, a Yup'ik teacher, said: *"For me, it gives the student, and allows them to be in a community where they can connect with their other peers, or that similar to their culture or language. And I think it helps like to be a bridge. That gap of, you know, from the 1960s and before, where they weren't allowed to speak their own language, but then now having them come into it and try to revitalize it. Because like back then it was banned and they weren't able to speak their own language, or they got in big trouble. It was like*

*forced upon them. But I feel like that many families should try to dive towards revitalizing that language, and also cultures and traditions too. So, I think it might heal, heal a part of the past, and also creates community."* Nora, a language educator scholar, supports Ciugun's comments: *"It's a way for them to feel whole in terms of their culture and identity, and their roots, and nobody's saying they can't learn Spanish or Chinese* (referencing the interview question), *but this is a way for them to really feel connected to an ethnic and cultural identity. It's a way to try and right some past wrongs."*

## *Cultural Connections, Cultural Competency*

Thomas, a district administrator, focused on the benefits to the entire school, not just the Yup'ik immersion program. In fact, the Yup'ik immersion program represents only one-third of the school's overall enrollment. He states: *"It helps being in a neighborhood school, because I think that there are opportunities for others, not just Yup'ik speakers, or maybe not even just Alaska Native students, to be exposed to and learn to appreciate Alaska Native languages and cultures because of being in that learning community with them. Certainly, a school-within-a-school model like this, there are certainly things that the language immersion program does that are unique, that the neighborhood program does not do. But there are many things that they do together, both as staff, and then also with the students, so those are certainly some benefits."*

Thomas expanded on his thoughts as he launched into a larger-scale approach to overall cultural appreciation and competency. He elaborated:

*So, one of the things that is sometimes overlooked from people looking outside into language immersion programs, they don't realize initially the cultural component that is so critical to language learning and acquisition. Kids who participate in a language immersion*

*program are not doing the same sorts of language-learning lessons that you or I may have done in high school. It's a different model of learning entirely. And I think that the awareness that it develops and the appreciation that it develops for students, and sometimes their families, it increases their sort of 'cultural IQ,' right, their cultural facility, their awareness and appreciation for not just the target language culture, but other cultures in general.*

This comment directly supports and reinforces one of the primary goals of language immersion programs, that of cultural competency, or cross-cultural understandings, as discussed in Chapter 3.

The comments above from Thomas directly support those of Nikki, a (Caucasian) parent of a (Caucasian) Yup'ik immersion student. She states:

*It's fortunate the advantages that we have had for our son. Because of his participation, he's not only doing reading and writing and learning in another language, he has become completely immersed in it. He is going to compete tomorrow in JYNO* (Junior Native Youth Olympics), *where he was asked to do the stick pull. So, beyond that he has learned, even in his English-speaking class, just amazing things about the traditions. He goes berry-picking, which is something our family would have never done. He's eaten seal. It's just crazy the stuff they allow them to do and create. The benefits are just unreal, and I did not realize how smart kids are, because to watch them be able to just shift their brain in between two languages.*

When asked why they, as a Caucasian family, and brand new to Anchorage, decided to enroll their son in the Yup'ik immersion program as a kindergartener, Nikki replied:

*Why wouldn't we? But really, we do get asked that all the time. Well, why wouldn't we? Where else would you have the opportunity to learn this? So, you can learn Spanish anywhere.*

*You can learn Spanish on DuoLingo. You can learn it on the app. Whatever. Where else would you ever have the opportunity to learn a Native language from native speakers who grew up in that Native culture? Like, where else would you ever have that opportunity. It just seems crazy to me to not do it. Even if he doesn't continue to speak it professionally in his life, it's still these experiences that he's having that are really going to really be valuable to make him a more empathetic and aware person.*

## Program Strengths

Many of the comments in the previous section, *Benefits and Values of Native Languages and Cultures,* are also relevant to strengths of the program. However, the quotations below were coded more appropriately to clearly articulate program strengths. Further, the data highlighted below, although varied, all together paints a very descriptive picture of this unique program, including *Overall District and Yup'ik Immersion Strengths, Sense of Pride and Identity, and Program Growth, Expansion, and Professional Development***.**

### *Overall District and Yup'ik Immersion Strengths*

Rebecca, a school board member, had this to say about ASD's immersion programs in general, as well as a few comments specific to the Yup'ik immersion program:

*I'll speak broadly to the successes and strengths of the immersion programs. First, if you look at the official emails that the school board received about a year ago, when immersion programs were on much more of the chopping block, you'd see an incredible community articulation of the perception and value of these programs. How these programs generally do extraordinary things to, you know, create young, globally minded and locally minded citizens.*

*Kids who are able, you know, to develop the grit, develop the fortitude to work through, you know, mastering two languages as they graduate. The hundreds of emails we received were a declaration of the value that's added to sort of a general education, by having immersion programs offered in our system. They are something business leaders celebrate, you know, and offer to people who might consider moving to Anchorage.*

She continued, adding specifically about the Yup'ik immersion program:

*My 7th grader, you know, has a friend who recently moved here from Montana, or Wyoming, like by Yellowstone, and they bought a house in the neighborhood that's zoned for the Yup'ik immersion program. And their younger child,* (who was of age to join the program) *who is not Alaska Native, met the kids in the cul-de-sac, and they were all going to the Yup'ik immersion program. So, they decided that's what they wanted for their family, and they've been doing very well there. It has just been so heartening to hear the openness from a non-Alaska Native family, of having their child learn in the Yup'ik immersion program. They saw it as a place to build community in a lot of ways, as a new-to-Alaska family. And you know, they perceived it as, it would be a challenge for their son, to keep him engaged at a higher-level. So that's really exciting.*

Another school board member, James, had these general comments about ASD immersion programs:

*Well, what I know about the strengths and successes of the immersion programs is relatively recent. And it comes from being a board member and actually spending some time at several of the graduation ceremonies and getting to hear the stories from the kids and chatting with some of the parents. It was something I didn't fully pick up on, even as an educator in the*

*system, kind of knowing about the programs through the district…so you know the successes, I think for Anchorage, especially as ab international city as an air crossroads, and yeah, we'd certainly like to be more of a business crossroads, but we've been more of a refueling stop for people on their way to do business elsewhere. But the fact that we're turning out a cadre of citizens that have grown up here and that can land in a foreign country and comfortably speak with people, and presumably would be representing a U.S. interest or the U.S. government. I think it's a pretty remarkable thing, and potentially adds our capacity to be engaged with the world in a meaningful way, whether that's commerce, diplomacy, or whatever, beyond that from again, from being at some of the ceremonies, the realization that there's just a different level of commitment in a relationship between the district and immersion families. This isn't something they do while they're here, so to speak. It's not something people do for a couple of years, and then change their minds. People start their kids out in it, and that's for the next twelve or thirteen years.*

Bridging the link between overall district immersion program strengths, and those specific to the Yup'ik immersion program, Cillaraq, a former Yup'ik immersion teacher stated: *"I think the Yup'ik program is special. It's the only Alaskan language that's available right now, that's also being taught in our area. It's very special because it helps others to maybe understand, even if it's a tiny bit. I think it's very special because we get a chance to revitalize it, make it bigger or make others learn, make others become aware of it and make possibly others be more interested."*

Because this program is open to any child, regardless of ethnicity, as part of the public school system, it's critical to capture Cillaraq's words: *"Opening it up to every, everybody. Different types of people are a plus. Because being Yup'ik, I have different types of friends. I*

*think if they came into town and heard somebody speak their language, it makes them want to learn. I think it would be better to open it up to everybody to know that this is a good language for us. This is the language we speak; this is a tiny place of who we are."*

| Ethnicity | Kindergarten | First Grade | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alaskan Native | 15 | 16 | 31 |
| Multi-Ethnic | 9 | 7 | 16 |
| White | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Hispanic | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| American Indian | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Black | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Asian | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **TOTAL** | 34 | 29 | 63 |

**Table 9:** Yup'ik Immersion Ethnicity Breakdown, 2018-2020 (Grades K-1 only)

Nikki, a district employee and Yup'ik immersion parent [non-Native] discussed the referenced the academic success of her son as a program strength: *"As far as my child is concerned, when it comes to reading and math scores, he is reading in BOTH languages and his reading scores are higher than I expected they would be. He's now bringing home books that have Yup'ik writing in them, and I would have never thought that a strength would be that he was actually learning to read and write in that language, which is incredibly difficult. So to think that he can actually do that with a language that didn't have a written language dictionary until what, the 1960's…just a huge testament to how hard his teacher works."*

Thomas, a retired district administrator, who also has grandchildren in a different ASD immersion program, said:

*One of the benefits that I didn't mention earlier about the Yup'ik immersion program, is that we know that among our demographic groups, our Alaska Native and Native American groups have some of the most challenging attendance and academic achievement data and they have higher incidents of drop-out rates in high school. I believe, while I don't have the research on hand to support this, but I believe the Yup'ik immersion program kids, Alaska Natives and others, to find their place because it's not just about language. There's place-based learning and things that go along with that immersion experience that honors and values the ways of knowing and learning.* Further, he stated: *"The metrics we use for staffing from like a programmatic elementary level from the finance office, there may also be an argument for additional funding, perhaps through Indigenous or Migrant education, to help support this program…If we had data to show the benefit of an Alaska Native immersion language program and how it supports our most at-risk learners. We have a moral responsibility to provide that opportunity to as many students as possible, so that it actually does go toward funding."*

Thomas ended by saying: *"Well, I welcome any additional funds, adding any additional funding sources. My only concern is whether that is a one-time grant, or whether it is part of a long-term plan for helping meet the needs of our Alaska Native students and working to right some of the wrongs that have historically been perpetuated are that we're still processing and dealing with."*

Dr. Bigelow, in her first report, dated September 28, 2018, highlighted some of the comments from when she met with a small group of parents after school (Bigelow, 2018, p.3):

*I was able to speak with only a few parents, but all were very happy to have the opportunity to enroll their child in the Yupik immersion program. The parents gave different*

*reasons for enrolling their children in the program. One mother, who does not have an Alaskan Native background, wants the cognitive benefits that come with multilingualism for her child. She was especially happy about the small class size, extra teaching staff for her child who may need an IEP related to language development. Parents with Alaskan Native backgrounds expressed excitement with the program because they specifically want their children to be exposed to Yupik culture and language. This is true even in the case of an Alaskan Native family that does not identify as Yupik. None of the parents expressed any difficulty enrolling their children in the program and said that they were able to arrange transportation. (Enrollment and transportation challenges did come up in conversations with staff, however.) The Native Alaskan parents are very happy that the program is available and that their children are learning, and eager to go to school every day.*

### *Sense of Pride and Identity*

The idea of sense of pride, sense of identity was truly an ongoing theme throughout most of the interviews, and certainly in the program reports written by the external grant evaluator. However, they didn't all get coded as such since there were countless variations of both pride and identity, for example, some hinted at these but perhaps better coded as "special," "unique," "confidence," "student behavior," and many of the data coded within "Reclamation" were also very much related to this sense of pride and identity.

Maangiar, one of the English partner teachers, stated that: *"A strength I see is the culture the kids take from it. It's like they're all honorary Natives. And they take a lot of pride in Alaskan culture. So, I think it's really great that, you know, of course being in Alaska, that we're focusing*

*on one of our own, and revitalizing it. We have kids that are not just Native in this program. A lot of different backgrounds. There is a lot of diversity here. So, it's really cool to see these non-Native students even speaking somewhat fluently now and doing dances, and they all have Yup'ik names, and they take great pride in that. So, I think being able to take part in the culture and pride of the culture is huge.* Maangiar is a woman of color and a non-Native. However, she and her husband elected to enroll their [non-Native] children in the program, mostly out of convenience since she's a teacher there. She has the unique opportunity to experience the program as both a teacher and a parent.

Nora, professor/researcher/grant evaluator, remarked that *"I love that this program is open to anybody. I think that should be a huge source of pride, and I have always been impressed with my conversations with parents, Yup'ik and non-Yup'ik, Native and non-Native…all of the parents are committed and invested in learning this language. It's just such as special thing, and I think parents are also kind of tuning into the need to be connected to the land and place."*

Chasity, who is a Native woman, is also a parent and district employee, with several children in the program. She stated that, *"As a mom, the sense of cultural pride is huge. The program has helped, not like we don't do it at home, but I feel like it really has solidified the sense of pride in his* [her son] *culture and being able to speak because he's the only one in our house that speaks his language even though it's the language of his dad's village. Most people in that village don't speak the language because they were so close to where St. Mary's school was that Elders didn't allow them to learn it because of what happened to them at school. So, it is truly providing healing for that."*

Panigkaq, who not only a local Yup'ik scholar, but she has grandchildren in the program and has also served as a teacher and principal in another Yup'ik immersion program in remote Alaska. She said, *"I love how the children are very proud, proud of, well anybody that's involved in the program. Well, when I watch them perform, you could see the confidence that they have, and my two grandchildren, along with their friends, when I ask them 'how was your day? How was school?' It's always good. They always want to go to school, from my understanding and my observation, because they are taken care of holistically. They have values that are taught, they are taught to have a relationship, and respect their teachers…the Indigenous values, the Yup'ik way of life that is recited in the school, I know it works because, as a former teacher and principal from an immersion school, we used to do that."*

Connie, a now-retired immersion education professor and researcher, observed: *"You know, another strength that I see, there's a tremendous, it's very clear. When the teachers talk about the kids, how much they love them. And there's a real focus on really creating a striong sense of identity, especially in the Native children. And I think that with a school district that honors the Native community by offering a program like this, it's just a phenomenal strength."*

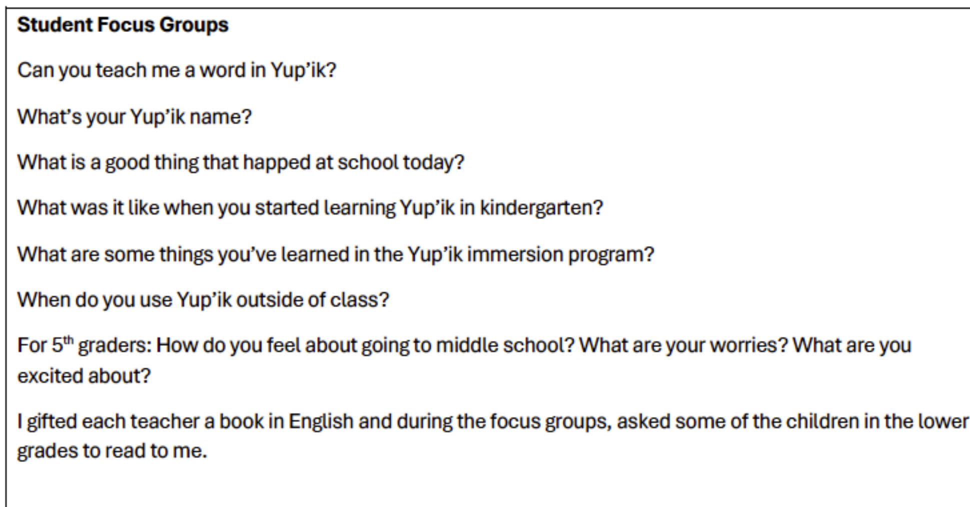
Nuuni, one of the Yup'ik immersion teachers, and a parent of students in the program, referenced student behavior as a component of the Yup'ik way of being, which aligns with the Yup'ik sense of identity. She articulated: *"We can see behavior differences between our students and neighborhood students. I don't know how many times this year, or Ms. X's* [English partner teacher] *and other Yup'ik classes have gotten complimented on their behavior and told we have the best-behaved kids, and you can see it. Like, when we had an assembly last week and we had the two neighborhood sixth grade classes and my fifth grade* [Yup'ik immersion] *class the Yup'ik immersion students were clearly way better behaved than the neighborhood kids and we*

*got back to the class, and one of the students said something about how embarrassed he felt about how the sixth graders had been acting. And I remember saying to 'Ms. X,' later and she said that even other teachers, like the specialists, always say how well our kids are."*

One of the school board members, Girdy, noted that*: "Connecting kids to culture is always a strength to their culture, and their language, and I think we do a better job of it when we do it in the immersion model…because I think it's more embedded. I think it's more meaningful to families and to kids. It's the language, yes, but it's the culture, the attitude. It's the framework of how people think and how they navigate in this alternate world which they have had to assume."*

In a similar, yet unrelated study, Spenader and Locke (2024) noted that, "*The* [Yup'ik] *teachers explained a naming ceremony that is held each year whereby all new students are given a Yup'ik name. This is an example of new cultural knowledge about student' 'own' culture for some, and about 'other' cultures for others. Cillaraq explained, 'We want those people that have passed on (died) to continue in these kids' lives. So we name these kids according to the people who have passed on."*

Some of the most compelling data has come from the quantitative and qualitative information contained in Dr. Martha Bigelow's reports over the years. In her last report, dated August 13, 2024, she included comments from students, grades K-5. She interviewed students within small group settings. Below is the set of conversation starters she used with groups of students to talk about their perspectives on the Yup'ik immersion program, followed by student comments (Bigelow, 2024, pp. 9-10):



**Student Focus Groups**

Can you teach me a word in Yup'ik?

What's your Yup'ik name?

What is a good thing that happed at school today?

What was it like when you started learning Yup'ik in kindergarten?

What are some things you've learned in the Yup'ik immersion program?

When do you use Yup'ik outside of class?

For 5th graders: How do you feel about going to middle school? What are your worries? What are you excited about?

I gifted each teacher a book in English and during the focus groups, asked some of the children in the lower grades to read to me.

**Image 7:** Bigelow's Student Focus Group Questions

*In Kindergarten, the children told me excitedly that they were working on a Mother's Day project which was a flower. They eagerly said Yup'ik words, sang, and named body parts. They said that blueberry picking – even getting rained on – was fun. One child happily exclaimed, 'We do crafts! It is so fun!' and 'we can give our craft to any person we want.'*

*First graders were similarly enthusiastic about school in Yup'ik. One child said, 'I am the most Yupiker! My superpower is Yup'ik. I am 6 years old, and I am really smart.' This child spoke of her family in the village who speak Yup'ik and that she talks on the phone with relatives in Yup'ik. This and other positive academic and linguistic identities and experiences were common among this little group of first grades. Another child said that her superpower is making friends, but she did admit that she did not know how to read, and I confirmed this when I asked her to read a page from a very basic children's book.*

*Third graders were effusive in their comments about their experiences in the Yup'ik program as well. One child said, 'I LOVE berry picking- the whole time is having fun with your friends. When my grandpa came, I spoke to him in Yup'ik My grandma speaks it too. We do dance sometimes and this helps. Sometimes my 5th grade sister who knows more she talks to me in Yup'ik and we talk fun Yup'ik. I went to the village Bethel and used Yup'ik. We can sing dance.' Another student named one teacher saying, '[insert teacher name] is awesome.' Some students spoke specifically about their language proficiency: 'I can listen and understand, 'I can listen and understand 50% of what I hear. Teachers help us.'*

The fifth-grade students, who were the inaugural group of Kindergarteners in 2018, had quite a bit to say. Clearly, they were proud of their experiences:

*The fifth-grade students had a great deal to say about their experiences. They were the first group of students to join the program, and they have had many of the teachers, have been together since kindergarten and are on their way to middle school together, something that is comforting to them.*

*They reported that they are using more Yup'ik this year than last year. They proudly shared that their teacher, [insert name], pretends not to understand if they speak English. I asked them if they feel that they caught up after not speaking much Yup'ik in 4$^{th}$ grade. They enthusiastically said, 'yes'! But they admit that even if they can read in Yup'ik, they can't always understand what they are reading. They refer to this as reading 'without pictures.' Another student said, 'I can read and write sentences, not full paragraphs yet.'*

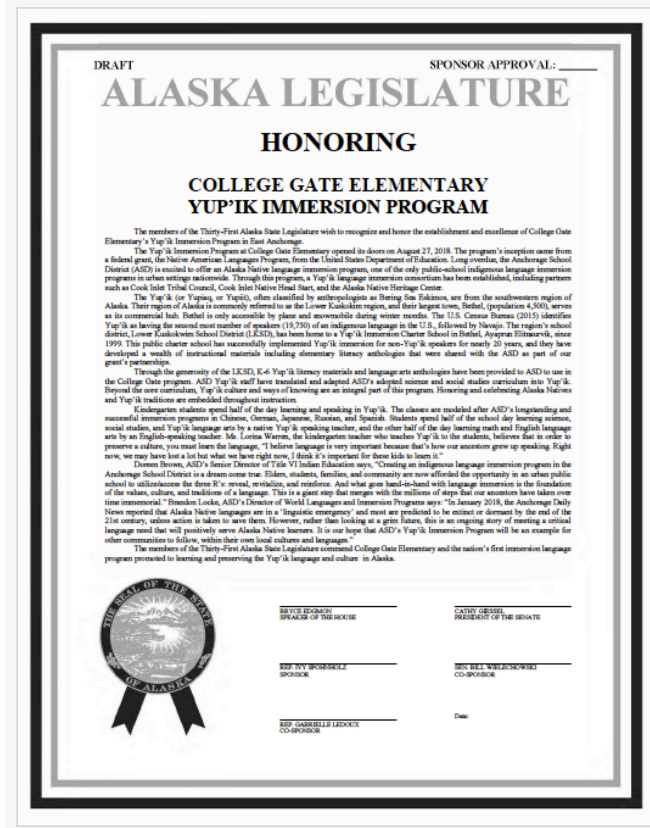
*One student shared very sophisticated linguistic knowledge with me. She said, 'Suffixes change the word meanings. We have memorized that stuff.' She also said, 'A sentence in English could be one long word in Yup'ik', also showing metalinguistic awareness.*

*We discussed using Yup'ik outside of school. Students seemed to like participating in performances. They enjoy performing for a wide range of audiences, including the other grades in the program. Some students said that mostly grown-ups are the ones that use Yup'ik, but at that moment, another student told a story of how he helped an elder at the hospital find the place she was supposed to go. He was very proud that he could use Yup'ik with her because she didn't speak English and seemed very stressed at the hospital. Some fifth graders have siblings that are in the program, and they laughed about having Yup'ik as a secret language among the kids in the family.*

*Regarding the transition to middle schools, one child worried about fewer hours in the day being dedicated to Yup'ik and was hoping that the principal would visit College Gate (which he did). Another student was excited about doing STEAM.*

*In general, the students want to improve their proficiency in Yup'ik. They like teachers who push them to use Yup'ik and they are happy to share their cultural knowledge with others. They like challenging, engaging, 'not boring' teaching.*

*One student shared that she was invited to talk to the school board about keeping funding for the program. She felt confident doing this and was happy to champion the program, even in this high stake's venue. The last thing they said to me was 'It is an awesome program!' and 'We were the first ones here!'*



DRAFT SPONSOR APPROVAL: ______

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

HONORING

COLLEGE GATE ELEMENTARY
YUP'IK IMMERSION PROGRAM

The members of the Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature wish to recognize and honor the establishment and excellence of College Gate Elementary's Yup'ik Immersion Program in East Anchorage.

The Yup'ik Immersion Program at College Gate Elementary opened its doors on August 27, 2018. The program's inception came from a federal grant, the Native American Languages Program, from the United States Department of Education. Long overdue, the Anchorage School District (ASD) is excited to offer an Alaska Native language immersion program, one of the only public-school indigenous language immersion programs in urban settings nationwide. Through this program, a Yup'ik language immersion consortium has been established, including partners such as Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Cook Inlet Native Head Start, and the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

The Yup'ik (or Yupiaq, or Yupiit), often classified by anthropologists as Bering Sea Eskimos, are from the southwestern region of Alaska. Their region of Alaska is commonly referred to as the Lower Kuskokim region, and their largest town, Bethel, (population 4,500), serves as its commercial hub. Bethel is only accessible by plane and snowmobile during winter months. The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) identifies Yup'ik as having the second most number of speakers (19,750) of an indigenous language in the U.S., followed by Navajo. The region's school district, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), has been home to a Yup'ik Immersion Charter School in Bethel, Ayaprun Elitnaurvik, since 1999. This public charter school has successfully implemented Yup'ik immersion for non-Yup'ik speakers for nearly 20 years, and they have developed a wealth of instructional materials including elementary literacy anthologies that were shared with the ASD as part of our grant's partnerships.

Through the generosity of the LKSD, K-6 Yup'ik literacy materials and language arts anthologies have been provided to ASD to use in the College Gate program. ASD Yup'ik staff have translated and adapted ASD's adopted science and social studies curriculum into Yup'ik. Beyond the core curriculum, Yup'ik culture and ways of knowing are an integral part of this program. Honoring and celebrating Alaska Natives and Yup'ik traditions are embedded throughout instruction.

Kindergarten students spend half of the day learning and speaking in Yup'ik. The classes are modeled after ASD's longstanding and successful immersion programs in Chinese, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Students spend half of the school day learning science, social studies, and Yup'ik language arts by a native Yup'ik speaking teacher, and the other half of the day learning math and English language arts by an English-speaking teacher. Ms. Lorina Warren, the kindergarten teacher who teaches Yup'ik to the students, believes that in order to preserve a culture, you must learn the language, "I believe language is very important because that's how our ancestors grew up speaking. Right now, we may have lost a lot but what we have right now, I think it's important for these kids to learn it."

Doreen Brown, ASD's Senior Director of Title VI Indian Education says, "Creating an indigenous language immersion program in the Anchorage School District is a dream come true. Elders, students, families, and community are now afforded the opportunity in an urban public school to utilize/access the three R's: reveal, revitalize, and reinforce. And what goes hand-in-hand with language immersion is the foundation of the values, culture, and traditions of a language. This is a giant step that merges with the millions of steps that our ancestors have taken over time immemorial." Brandon Locke, ASD's Director of World Languages and Immersion Programs says: "In January 2018, the Anchorage Daily News reported that Alaska Native languages are in a 'linguistic emergency' and most are predicted to be extinct or dormant by the end of the 21st century, unless action is taken to save them. However, rather than looking at a grim future, this is an ongoing story of meeting a critical language need that will positively serve Alaska Native learners. It is our hope that ASD's Yup'ik Immersion Program will be an example for other communities to follow, within their own local cultures and languages."

The members of the Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature commend College Gate Elementary and the nation's first immersion language program promoted to learning and preserving the Yup'ik language and culture in Alaska.

THE SEAL OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

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Date:

**Image 8:** Alaska Legislature Honor of ASD's Yup'ik Immersion Program, September 2019

**Image 9:** Yup'ik Immersion students perform at an ASD community event (Photograph by Brandon Locke)

***Program Growth, Expansion, and Professional Development***

This sub-category is somewhat broad, yet many of the salient features of overall strengths of the program overlap within the areas of program growth and expansion, and outside programming for professional development.

Bridget, an immersion researcher with decades of experience, and who has worked with our teachers over the past years, indicated that: "*There are other places similar to, you know, what you have. But again, historically, we've got these programs, isolated programs in a district. So, I think the way Anchorage has approached the professional learning and onboarding of new immersion teachers, you've opted to do that across programs, and that is an obvious strength."* She further stated that: *"The 50/50 model that you have used has obviously been something that has been able to receive local buy-in and that local buy-in, again, and that long-term implementation, is a huge strength."* She continued, discussing professional development: *"I think it was very smart and strategic to use grant funds to take advantage of and making connections with programs outside of Alaska, with other successful and established Indigenous immersion programs* (referring to visits to Hawaiian immersion programs as well as Ojibwe immersion programs in northern Minnesota, and the inaugural Yup'ik immersion program in Bethel, Alaska).

Similarly, Connie, a now-retired immersion education professor and researcher, commented: *"It's just such a success to have been able to establish this program from the get-go. You know, it's really difficult to establish Indigenous immersion programs for a wide range*

*of reasons, not least of which is making sure you've got a solid staff. And I know you've done a very focused plan on making sure that the staff has gotten solid professional development."*

Bridget, a retired immersion researcher, noted the strengths of developing strong partnerships along the way. She stated:

*Certainly, getting the grant was very successful, and the support has been really significant. I also think that with that funding one of the things that was able to happen was the intentional partnering, broad-based partnering with Alaska Native language support organizations in the community, and also partnering with the Bethel program, and making use of that. Also, you know, in the early years of the program formation and ongoing curriculum development and Elder input and support in those types of things isn't just 'fluff,' it's absolutely a core essential for an Indigenous program. There has to be that web, and very clear presence frankly, and leadership from the Indigenous partnership and from the Indigenous peoples, and from Indigenous organizations.*

It should be noted that Bridget did some consulting and worked on a few projects within the program, and as such, because aware of some of the community partnerships we developed, with entities such as Clare Swan Early Learning Center, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, and the Alaska Native Heritage Center, to name a few.

Starting a new program, almost organically, is going to always experience challenges, especially unseen ones, as well as skepticism, yet, the optimism, community buy-in, and needed support helped us get through the initial years of the first grant. This was enough to keep the flame going, and to apply for a second 3-year federal grant, to expand the program through fifth grade. That said, the idea of ongoing funding beyond federal grants was always a topic of

discussion, with fears that the program may need to be cut given the lack of funding for education, overall, by the State of Alaska.

## Funding

The notion of funding has been a conversation piece since before the initial grant application was submitted in spring of 2018. Recognizing that no program is sustainable on grant funds alone, the ongoing discussion has been about concerns of long-term funding, specifically if the program had low enrollment numbers. For context, five of ASD's immersion programs (Japanese, two Spanish, Russian, and German), the first one starting in 1989 and the last one in 2007, are currently all K-12 programs and the district has a solid record of enrollment numbers over the years. The three newest programs (Chinese, started in 2016; Yup'ik, started in 2018; and French, started in 2019) do not have a solid track record since they are still growing, adding one grade at a time, until they to, hopefully, become a K-12 program.

Not surprising, with any brand-new program, one might expect lower enrollment given the newness and uncertainty of said program. That said, in the fall of 2018 when the Yup'ik immersion began, they started with 27 Kindergarten students, compared to 54 in Japanese, 72 in German, and 63 and 65 in the two Spanish immersion programs. It should be noted that in ASD, based on over 30 years of experience, a minimum of 50 new Kindergarten students is needed each year to account for attrition over time, since the programs are 13-year programs. That said, the Yup'ik immersion program meets the needs of a unique population within the larger one, even though it is open to anyone. Over time, we've heard skepticism and comments about how Spanish, or even Japanese, is much more relevant to American students. However, when we

applied for the grant to support Yup'ik immersion, we did so because it could potentially fill a decades-old problem and ideally create an opportunity for more Alaska Native students, and others, to feel connected and supported, in school, city life, and overall. In the narrative of the original (2018) grant application, we stated:

*Yugtun Qanerluten, which means 'Speak in Yup'ik,' is designed to respond to the unique educational needs of Alaska Native students in the Anchorage School District. As urban people culturally rooted in small village life, ASD's Alaska Native students experience great tension between their cultural heritage and the large public-school format in this middle-sized, highly diverse city. Cultural dislocation (Reyhner, 2001), coupled with a host of other social issues such as poverty and transience, pile on to confront many of these young children as they enter the public school system as kindergartners. These issues result in academic struggle, with ASD's Alaska Native/American Indian students experiencing the lowest graduation rates and highest dropout rates of all ethnicity groups. Too many Native students and parents, ASD's large schools seem impersonal and intimidating. Urban Native students lack opportunities to connect with their heritage, to know who they are and their place in the world. 'Urban Natives often don't know their own culture . . . if you let them, they will melt into the woodwork,' notes a CITC high school teacher. The proposed project will create a small village within a school, a cultural safety zone and place of belonging that uses the tongue of the ancestral home. Inside Yugtun Qanerluten classrooms, Yup'ik language immersion can replicate the kinds of academic and cultural gains seen in other indigenous language immersion programs (Reyhner, 1997).*

Not knowing this background in its entirety, research participants were asked questions regarding funding of the Yup'ik immersion program, beyond grant funding. The sample question asked was "whose responsibility is it to ensure the teaching of Alaska Native languages and cultures?" The way the question was asked varied upon the interview/conversation. That said, responses were coded and then assigned a "coming from" space as opposed to an emerged theme. It made more sense to categorize by the "coming from," i.e. Alaska Native community vs. Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

### *Alaska Native and Community Feedback Regarding Funding*

Peter, a local Alaska Native leader, who has also served as a community partner with the Yup'ik immersion program, said: "*I'm glad to hear you guys have that long-term plan of expanding, and moving it up so kids can move up with it. Coming from the Indigenous community, our biggest fear, always when we hear of budget constraints in school districts, our biggest fear always, and we know the district offers multiple other migrant* [which he uses to refer to any language other than Alaska Native languages] *as immersion, our biggest fear and concern is always…is that our Indigenous things are gonna be first on the block. And maybe that's just from our past, and nothing specifically to do with the district, but there's always that fear that when there's budget crunch time, that anything Indigenous will be taken out first."*

Peter continued with:

*My personal feeling, it's the responsibility of our school districts, that are funded by our state. And here's my reasoning. America has done a great job of stripping our language from us through its educational system. It's my opinion, we're residents, we're citizens of this state. It's also their responsibility now, how to help bring that back for us. In my opinion, I know that districts always want to say 'oh, get the corporations to donate this money'. We can't do it unless you get grants. We can't do it unless we have this outside funding. They didn't need outside funding. Yet, they didn't need outside funding to strip us of our languages, and to forbid those in the schools…they used regular public-school funding…but they should be using regular public-school funding. I think our corporations need to do way more for education than we're*

*doing currently and could help supplement these things. But I still don't think it should be the reason the district would say 'No, we're not doing this because we don't have outside funding.*

Maangiar, an English partner teacher and parent of students in the program, said: *"I mean, it's great that we've had these grants, but I mean, it is the other immersion programs are funded through ASD and the state, right? I feel like it should be the same. Right?"*

Paul, an Alaska Native, has had a variety of variety of unique connections to the program over time. Currently a leader in the Alaska Native community, he has also held administrative positions in ASD, and his own children attend one of ASD's immersion programs. He stated:

*You mentioned College Gate has a class of 'X' in Yup'ik, but across the hall has 'Y' in the neighborhood program. And any logical school board member is going to see that is an issue. I would really hope, and this is going to have to come from an outside pressure, but I'd really hope that the ASD school board would make a resolution that just guarantees enough funding to sustain it. It's really not an expensive program. It's just an inequitable program, at least if you look only at the BSA* [Base Student Allocation]. *Does a district of over 40,000 students really care if there are Yup'ik immersion classrooms with 20, 30, 40, 50 kids under the total ratio? But for the district to possess this knowledge indefinitely, institutionally, forever is so important, and it's worth the money. But that would have to come from a school board resolution that says we're codifying that we will always invest in this, no matter what the state does. But I would also encourage that has to come from a tribal advocacy route too, that would have to actually encourage the school board to do so.*

Arnaqulluk, a local Yup'ik woman with children in the Yup'ik immersion program, an also an ASD employee, when asked about who's responsibility she sees as funding Native language programs, if any, said:

*I think it's like, the state. And like, the government* [referring to federal], *you know? I don't want to sound mean, but they're the reason why a lot of our Native language was wiped out. You know, we should be pushing students, our kids to like relearn our language and they were just like ripped out of their homes and everything. So, they weren't able to learn their languages, and if they did speak their language, they were beaten for it. And there's a lot of like Elders that talk to us and say that, well told me, that they applaud me for speaking a bit to my children, but they still won't speak Yup'ik to their children, because of how bad they were beaten and disciplined for it. So, I feel like it would be the* [federal] *government and all the people that should fund the* [Native] *languages."*

Cillaraq, a now-retired Yup'ik immersion teacher in the program, responded this way: *"Too expensive? I think what's very expensive is the language, because once that's gone, it's gone. So, I really want you to help me bring out the language. Bring out the culture. It's very, very important, because, you may say it's expensive to fund this program, and for us to teach it, but it's our language. It may be expensive, but it's worth it."*

Patricia, who happens to be both a district administrator, but also a parent of two Spanish immersion graduates of ASD, when asked about responsibility of funding, noted that:

*I think it's our responsibility. I mean, this is…we do our land acknowledgement at the beginning of any training we do, or any large meeting, and we are living on lands of Dena'ina people. Like why aren't we? Why wouldn't we be stewards of that and leading that work? I*

*mean, that's a 'no brainer' to me. As far as funding goes, I think it, it, well our community has clearly made it known that it is a value of this community to have our immersion programs. And every time it has come up as potentially being cut or reduced, you hear the community come out. Why do we do it this way? Why do we have immersion? And it's like, well, this was a value of our community and has been supported and expanded over decades. And if this is a social value of our community, then we should be supporting it through our funding.*

Kegyuuggay, an Alaska Native herself, is a district administrator, and a parent of several Russian immersion students, noted that, *"In order to make any change with anything, I've realized that it really has to start with informing others of the importance of why we're doing things and really, just showing like what's already been done."*

Dean, a district administrator, who is also Alaska Native, discussed funding as being a two-pronged issue:

*You know, the education system needs to pick up some of it, but I think there needs to be more of a partnership with our thriving Native corporations here in Alaska. Because for sustainability, I think we need to find ways to make inroads with those corporations and show the value of bringing this sort of education to our Native people, and then build those partnerships, not only to be successful in Yup'ik, but begin to build those inroads with other Alaska Native languages, so that we are the biggest little 'village' in Alaska and that our languages reflect that and are able to thrive with support from our billion-dollar Native corporations that we've got growing in Alaska.*

Panigkaq, a local Yup'ik professor and scholar (and former teacher and principal), and who has grandchildren in ASD's Yup'ik immersion program, said:

*We are part of the public. And you know, Alaska Native languages are official languages of the state. And so, should be covered by public monies. And why? It was already taken away from us Indigenous people through, the school system, through religion, and to as part of our way of advocating and apologizing to the people. You* [unclear who the 'you' is] *fund it, and consider it a part of the system, why should it take grant money all the time, to push our languages, to sustain our languages, to revitalize our languages in our villages?*

### *State Funding*

Diane, a state-level education administrator, said: *"It's getting more expensive with less dollars in the shoot. Our public education system is set up in that the state provides funding, but local districts make the decisions on how to use that funding. I don't get to determine what happens to ASD's budget."* Referring specifically to immersion programming the way ASD's models are set-up, as a strand within a traditional neighborhood school, she had this to say: *"We see it time and time again, you know, the neighborhood program versus immersion, and if you had all immersion, you might have one singular focus and mission. But when we split the baby that's how we have our conversations. They're not only about the significance of Yup'ik and being the first one* [Alaska Native immersion] *in ASD, specifically for languages, but you know there's just competing interests.*

A former Alaska state legislator, Justin, said:

*I think one of my only legislative regrets is not trying to do more, that is direct funding of Native languages. And I guess it's just sort of your attention gets split in so many directions. I thought there was political potential to potentially do that or create a reliable funding*

*mechanism that would do that. But I think it's, you know, there's a little bit of federal support, unfortunately there's nothing in the state that supports language revitalization.*

### *Local Funding: Anchorage School Board and Anchorage Assembly*

Girdy, a local school board member, who has also been a staunch supporter of ASD's immersion programs overall, in the past, noted: *"The only weakness I see is being able to continue to fund it, which I am hopeful and optimistic for."* She continued with discussing the challenges of difficult local decisions being based on a state-funded education system. When asked about who's responsibility it is to fund Alaska Native language programs such as ASD's Yup'ik immersion program, she said:

*The responsibility really lies on the funding that we get from the state legislature. What we are able to do as a board, is very little. But how we are able to finance schools and programs is always dependent upon adequate funding from the state. And grants are wonderful, but when those grants run out, we've got to figure out how to keep that work going. Anything as valuable as gifted, immersion, all of these programs, they're all valuable, but we've got to be able to afford them. If our governor and legislature do not adequately fund education, then we're going to struggle…I think it is up to the school board to figure out a way to fund these programs, but we can only fund in as much as we're able to do, based on, you know, the funding we receive."* She ended by stating: *"We need an increase in the statutory BSA* [Base Student Allocation]*, and it needs to be inflation-proof.*

James, a longtime (now retired) ASD educator, and current member of the ASD school board, said when referring to funding: *"First off, I don't really see this being much of a discussion point as long as we have enough students that want to participate…so the question becomes, well, how much extra does it cost?"*

Rebecca, a current ASD school board member, referenced boarding school history, reparation, and how the state should take on some of the ownness of past treatment of Alaska Natives. She said:

*My point is that the value of the Yup'ik immersion program…it allows our community to continue to pass that baton so that we don't run the risk of, it sounds really trite, but there is enormous value in understanding, and making sure that as folks become Elders, and pass it along, right? There's also the boarding school history. I mean, it is directly, it's the antidote to boarding schools right, or to the legacy of boarding schools which forced assimilation, which forced students to, you know, never speak their language again. It's kind of a form of reparation in a way. So, maybe the state, going back to talking about funding, maybe the state should be on the hook for funding Native language programming.*

When asked a question about continued funding for this program, William, a local assemblyman and business owner, who interestingly has much experience working in rural (i.e. remote) Alaska, had this to say about funding: *"We really rely on the School Board to make decisions about funding, unless there was something that I thought was like a glaring issue or strongly not support of. You know, they're an elected body, right? And they are serving at the pleasure of their constituents, just like I am of mine. And I trust that elected body to make decisions that are in the best interest of the school district."*

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I end this research study as it begun. Language endangerment and erosion is viewed as a tragic phenomenon on a global level. In my 50 years living in Alaska, I have personally witnessed (via countless media reports over the years), languages that have died. When the last living speaker of a language passes away, the language is gone forever. It has become extinct. While Indigenous language revitalization efforts are occurring across the globe, Alaska is unique in that it is home to twenty official Alaska Native languages, all of which are still alive, but barely.

Alaska, as a unique political unit, has had a very short history, relatively speaking. For over 10,000 years, Alaska Native peoples have lived here in harmony with the land. When Western society entered their world 300 years ago, their lives – cultures, languages, ways of living, were forever changed. Over these past three centuries, numerous unique languages have become extinct. Additionally, Alaska Natives have become distanced from their languages, and thus, their cultures.

Worse yet, when Alaska Natives leave the comfort of their own local villages, and move to a large metro area like Anchorage, they literally feel like a (small) fish out of (a large body of) water. This discomfort often perpetuates ongoing issues, or begins new ones in terms of depression, domestic violence, and drug and/or alcohol addiction. Children tend to suffer the worst and providing a haven for them to be educated daily in both Yup'ik and English is an opportunity for success.

Not only have Indigenous languages suffered across the globe but so have their peoples. More and more we hear about language revitalization movements in all parts of the world. The reality is that this goes far beyond language. This represents a group of humans who share a humanistic bond through language and culture and are desperately trying to keep it alive. Value has been placed on languages and cultures, almost like the stock market. Why is one more valued or important than another? This is a question far beyond the scope of this research proposal, yet it supports the notion of Indigenous language revitalization movements, domestically and abroad. Are these movements worth it or not? Why or why not? Who ultimately decides?

As mentioned earlier, I have been immersed in this (grant) project since 2018, serving as the primary grant writer and project director and implementing all aspects of it, while simultaneously working on this research study and dissertation. It has been difficult to separate my lived experiences from this actual study because they have overlapped constantly. I am not surprised by the themes that surfaced through the interviews, which were supported by Dr. Bigelow's (external evaluator) reports, and consistent with other documents discovered and explored along the way. I went into this study hoping to gain thoughts, opinions, insights, and feedback on developing and implementing an Alaska Native language immersion program in the city of Anchorage. Recognizing that ASD (Anchorage School District) already had a longstanding, established history with other language immersion programs since 1989 (i.e. Chinese, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish), combined with the fact that we had no Alaska Native language representation, and that Native American/Alaska Native language programs in urban public schools (open to anyone regardless of ethnicity) were basically non-existent.

# Discussion

## *Local and Global Significance of this Research*

This research study looked to examine the development and ongoing implementation of an Alaska Native Indigenous language (Yup'ik) immersion program in the city of Anchorage, Alaska. Funded through an initial federal 3-year grant, following by a second 3-year federal grant, with no guarantee of ongoing funding beyond, the research looks at how local entities perceive the development of the program, and its language revitalization efforts, specifically researching overall community impact and sustainability. As the first and only Alaska Native language immersion program in Anchorage, the study examines the perceptions of value (culturally, linguistically, educationally, financially, etc.) of the program.

In my research proposal, I wrote, "While it is difficult to speculate anticipated findings from data not yet collected, the results of this study could be used to justify continued funding from the Anchorage School District, federal or state grants, local grants, or local community partnerships, specifically with Alaska Native corporations. Additionally, since this Indigenous language immersion program is a first in a large (non-Native) urban setting, the research may serve as a 'lessons learned' document and model for other potential indigenous programs throughout the United States. Finally, using Hawai'i as the exemplar, additional work needs to be done in terms of collaboration with the University of Alaska system for teacher training and certification as well as a 'grw your own' approach to teacher recruitment and retention."

Looking back at these anticipated thoughts from my research proposal, they all remain salient and accurate today, now that the study is concluded. In fact, in January 2024, the 2024 Action Plan for Alaska Native Languages was provided to Alaska's Governor, Mike Dunleavy, and to the Alaska Legislature, as well as to the 'beloved' People of Alaska. This report, entitled *Ayaruq*, was provided (and is annually) by the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. In their introductory letter preceding the report, they state: *"In the vast expanse of Alaska, where the heartbeat of 23+ Indigenous languages resonate, our languages are not mere words; they are the threads that weave the fabric of cultural identity for every individual of Native heritage. They are also the languages that were born onto the lands upon which we as Alaskans reside, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that these languages are nourished and protected. These languages flourished for thousands of years and have stood resilient against colonization and external threats, signifying the prosperity of our people"* (Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, 2024).

They continue with, *"Today, the State of Alaska stands at a crucial juncture, an opportune moment to act decisively in support of each Indigenous language. The Alaska Native Language and Preservation Council labors to support a strategic and purposeful language movement. In pursuit of this vision, we outline essential policy steps to propel progress toward the revitalization and stability of our treasured languages. The fate of Native languages rests on the collective shoulders of us all, and future generations will remember our actions or lack thereof as this document represents a call to action and you will be asked whether or not you answered that call"* (Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, 2024).

## Implications and Applications to Practice

Why do these findings matter? In this study I attempted to answer the main research question: What is the impact of the Yup'ik Immersion Program on the ASD community and the Yup'ik community in Anchorage and beyond? Additionally, I had several other questions on impact I hoped to explore through the data collection process. Namely: 1) On staff – how they manage within the Western institution; 2) Yup'ik parents/families and their perception on a sense of belonging; 3) Symbolic of reclaiming, Indigenous education spaces; 4) What are the successes? Is this program special, and if so, why?

While the responses from the participants did not necessarily answer all of the above questions, the empirical findings of this study provide strong evidence that the Yup'ik Immersion Program in the Anchorage School District contributes to the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of the students, while at the same time contributes to the reconciliation and healing that is necessary due to the impact of colonization and genocide against Indigenous peoples. In other words, the program benefits individuals and society as a whole, which are two of the main goals of education.

The "challenges" identified in the research findings show areas for improvement and considerations for not only moving our program forward, but potentially also can serve as a sort of "lessons learned" for other Indigenous language communities as they consider creating language programs. One area of significance within this category is that of lack of qualified teachers. While there is no immediate solution to this problem, I suggest looking into alternative pathways to teacher certification, potentially starting by looking at what states such as Hawai'i or

New Mexico have done. For this important work to occur, there must be collaboration with Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development's (DEED) Teacher Certification Office. Most likely this would require substantial buy-in from the Alaska Legislature, developing some sort of change in state statues or regulations. Although there are several alternative pathways to teacher certification in Alaska, holding a bachelor's degree (at minimum) is required. While I am not suggesting lowering standards to be a teacher in Alaska, I am suggesting that in certain cases, specifically with Alaska Native languages, criteria be looked at on a case-by-case basis, including life experience, proficiency in the language and culture, etc. Additional work needs to be done in the K-12 setting, specifically at the high school level, while working with post-secondary institutions, to encourage Alaska Native students to pursue careers in education.

Enrollment concerns are also ongoingly problematic. We have a Yup'ik immersion program in a free, K-12 public education setting. Anchorage also has a large Yup'ik (ethnically, not necessarily linguistically) population. Why are there not more students entering this program? Is it an awareness issue? Is it a value (or lack thereof) issue, is it a transportation issue? Work needs to be done to determine why parents/families are not considering this program for their children. This will help to find solutions of how to make it more accessible to families. If transportation is the issue, what funding sources are available to assist in breaking down this barrier?

The "benefits and values of Alaska Native languages and cultures" that surfaced in the findings are clearly and overwhelmingly powerful testaments of the ongoing need for healing for

the decades of generational trauma experienced by Alaska Natives. Further, they show a good-faith effort of the non-Natives of today trying to reconcile the past in their support of Alaska Native language revitalization efforts. Themes such as reclamation, empowerment, and cultural connections and competency were extremely evident and powerful. The data from this area reminds me of the work and important message of Anton Treuer, professor of Ojibwe at Bemidji State University in Minnesota. His 2020 book *The Language Warrior's Manifesto: How to Keep Our Languages Alive No Matter the Odds* is a true call to action, incorporating stories of setbacks and successes, pointing the way for all who seek to preserve Indigenous languages. The third chapter of his book is entitled "What's in the Why?" where he states that colonization has been brutal for every population on the planet. "Europeans colonized one another. Irish, Welsh, Basque, and Flemish populations faced incredible pressure on their heritage languages as the English, Spanish, and French empires conquered and colonized them. Those enlarged empires then went on to colonize populations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas" (Treuer, 2020). He continues, "Even when the physical violence used to control human populations abated, other forms of colonization continued. English was required as the language of instruction in all Irish schools, for example, and remained so long after the wars were over. For most linguistically marginalized populations, such colonization has never stopped." Further, Treuer states, "In the United States, more than thirty states now have official English-language policies. This is a recent political trend, in response to the increasing Anglo-American angst about the growth of brown, Spanish-speaking populations. But the impact on Indigenous languages is also profound – reducing funding opportunities, installing new prohibitions against non-English languages in many schools and organizations, and stigmatizing language enclaves, work, publications, and use" (Treuer, 2020, pp. 32).

The "program strengths" of the study truly signify the "why" behind this grant-funded project, and the value-added to our students and their families, Native and non-Native. The sense of pride and identity, alone, is worth the determination and hard work to maintain ASD's Yup'ik immersion program. Additionally, it is my hope that these identified strengths can and will provide an impetus for other Indigenous language communities, giving them a sort of "spark" to light the flames needed to get their own programming realized, designed, implemented, and continued.

Many of the ideas that surfaced in "program strengths" overlap some with the area of the "benefits and values of Alaska Native languages and cultures." My hope is that this momentum will not be lost, but rather, serve as a springboard for additional work in Alaska and beyond. *Ayaruq* was mentioned earlier in this study. *Ayaruq* is the the biennial action plan for Alaska Native Languages, prepared by the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, and submitted to Alaska's governor and members of the Alaska State Legislature. One of the focus areas of the 2024 Ayaruq Action Plan is that of Alaska Native languages. The first page of the document is a letter dated January 1, 2024, and is addressed to the Honorable Governor Mike Dunleavy, Esteemed Alaska State Legislators, and the Beloved People of Alaska. In this letter it states:

> *Ayaruq: 2024 Action Plan centers on the overarching objective of fostering an increase in the number of speakers of all Alaska Native languages and promoting their widespread use across the state. To achieve this, we concentrate on four key areas, each accompanied by policy recommendations for the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the broader public. This Action Plan urges Alaskans to formulate strategic plans for the growth and development of each Alaska Native language. It provides suggested pathways for individuals, families, communities, institutions, and governments to embark on a collective journey, breathing new life and vitality into our languages. Recognizing the imperative of self-reliance, we call upon our own communities, the State of Alaska Executive Branch, and the State of Alaska Legislature to champion healthy language and cultural practices for all Alaskans.* (Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (2024).

The four focus areas of the 2024 Ayaruq Action Plan include: 1) Affirm the right to Indigenous education; 2) Address oppression and intergenerational trauma; 3) Commit to language equity; and 4) Normalize the use of Alaska Native languages. The fact that these areas have already been identified as salient issues to Alaska Native peoples, and the action plan includes ideas for working toward meeting these focus areas, in my opinion, the next step is to identify an accountability plan. This is a nice segue to the last top findings of my study, those surrounded by funding.

Lastly, the "funding" section within the findings clearly identifies a disconnect, a huge gap in the discussion of stripping the languages and cultures of Natives away by Westerners, yet the continued unfunded pathways to resurrect these languages and cultures, without the need to apply for grant funding. Time is running out to play the "blame game." In Alaska, local school districts are reliant on state funds to fund schools. This is an area where, in terms of Indigenous language revitalization efforts, one can argue for guaranteed funding, outside of the normal funding allocation formula (BSA, or Base Student Allocation), so that Native languages have a chance for survival.

This is where going back to the Ayaruq is critical, yet coupled with a compatible accountability plan. That said, Indigenous communities also need to step up and assist. As written in the cover letter of the Ayaruq, *"Recognizing the imperative of self-reliance, we call upon our own communities…"* (Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (2024). Alaska Native Corporations, of which there are currently twelve, have funding and resources to help with language revitalization efforts.

“Tribes located in Alaska do not have a land base (e.g. reservations). Through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA), Alaska Native corporations hold title to roughly 44 million acres of land held in private corporate ownership. Because land ownership and the governmental relationship are held by two different and distinct entities that represent Alaska Native people, the differences in Alaska are magnified when compared to Lower 48 tribes. ANCSA extinguished aboriginal land title and mandated the creation of private, for-profit corporations owned by Alaska Native shareholders. Alaska Native regional corporations are owned by over 140,000 Alaska Native shareholders and hold title to nearly 27 million acres of land across Alaska. Alaska Native regional corporations manage the land for the benefit of their shareholders.” ANCSA Regional Association, https://ancsaregional.com/overview-of-entities/.

Without a significant change in policy, practice, and funding, Alaska Native languages, as well as other Indigenous languages throughout the United States, and worldwide, will continue to decline and eventually die. There is a lot of “P.R.” out there and we are amid the worldwide “Decade of Indigenous Languages.” What does this mean? What is the purpose of this proclaimed decade if governments, local to federal, are not stepping up to help solve this ongoing worldwide problem? Without their support, financial and other, the inevitable will occur.

## Limitations

Without a doubt, the biggest threat to this study, could also be considered a benefit, which is that of my positionality. I am very much an insider, and I have devoted so much of my brain and work to this project, of having to or helping to spin it into a positive light to stakeholders, all while knowing about with program's worrisome problems. I wrote the grant applications; I envisioned and developed an implementation plan and saw it through to fruition. While I entered this research study with what I considered a "neutral space," I can't help but think that some personal biases didn't surface.

Another potential limitation of this study is that it focuses on one relatively small immersion program. And although 30 interviews were conducted, the list of individuals invited to participate was generated mostly by me. That said, several of the people I interviewed were recommended by participants who suggested names to me. One the other hand, if a general call for participants was sent out to the masses, it would have been next to impossible to conduct that many interviews, especially if the individual had little to no understanding of immersion, Indigenous language revitalization, or the uniqueness of the research setting.

Although this study does fill a gap that is missing in the collective research, I was not able to find any similar studies to compare my study to. This is most likely due to the very limited number of Indigenous language immersion programs offered in U.S. public schools, specifically in urban settings, to date. Therefore, it was not possible to conduct a similar study or replicate a previous study, nor was it possible to compare my findings with a previously conducted study.

## Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned above, I was not able to find any similar studies to which I could compare my study. That said, I believe that my research begins to fill a much needed or overlooked area in the literature overall. Although we do have studies that represent the Hawaiian context, it appears that no research has been done within the Native American context of the contiguous United States. Additional studies, both qualitative and quantitative, need to be conducted to gain a greater understanding of how other Indigenous language immersions are perceived within their communities, given their unique contexts. While conducting my study, I did identify a Navajo immersion program in New Mexico as well as an Ojibwe immersion program in Minnesota. However, both programs appear to be in communities much smaller than Anchorage. Regardless of the school district size, the need still exists.

In addition to exploring the community's perception and impact of an Indigenous language immersion program, I believe that research should also be conducted on how well students perform, academically and linguistically, in such programs, compared to other non-Indigenous immersion programs. Further, I believe there needs to be research conducted on the well-being of Indigenous students, mentally and socially, in such programs. Are such programs providing a safe learning environment where all students, and especially Native students, feel connected to school.

# Conclusion

As Ward Churchill (2004) reminds us, “since the end of the ‘Indian Wars’ in 1890, by which point the Indigenous population of North America had been reduced to 5 percent or less of its preinvasion total, the weight of policy in the U.S. and Canada alike has been placed on ‘assimilating’ – ‘digesting’ might be a better word – the residue of survivors” (pp. 12). The title of Churchill’s 2004 book, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, was referenced by Peter, one of my research participants, not as a book title, but more of a commonplace way of thinking of Indigenous peoples. I don’t believe he was not suggesting that they [Indigenous peoples] tolerate these words, but rather, recognize them as how their peoples were eradicated over time.

In addition to the limitations and suggestions for additional research that I mention above, we, as a collective (worldwide) society, still have so much work ahead of us to protect, sustain, and revitalize Indigenous languages. As mentioned in chapter 3 of this study, in December of 2019, the United Nations declared that the International Decade of Indigenous Languages would begin in 2022. "Language is an inherent human right," said AFN National Chief Bellegarde. "Yet in Canada no First Nations language is safe. Indigenous languages around the world are in danger of disappearing. The International Year of Indigenous Languages helped focus attention on this emergency and created new opportunities for our language champions to share their knowledge and expertise. The AFN is encouraged that the UN will declare an International Decade of Indigenous Languages to build on the International Year and promote, protect and revitalize Indigenous languages" (2019, PR Newswire). At the time of this writing we’re already two years into this new Decade of Indigenous Languages, yet what appears to be lacking are

documented success stories of policy change or funding allocations that ensure the goals and efforts of this UN declaration are being worked toward and attained.

I believe this research study not only fills a long overdue void in the literature, overall, but also provides a context for the uniqueness and challenges of Indigenous language revitalization efforts. It gives voice to Natives and non-Natives alike, hearing their thoughts and concerns on the importance of reclaiming, revitalizing, and preserving Indigenous languages in Alaska, the United States, and potentially beyond. Having this lived experience for the last six years, my heart is full of what we have accomplished, and what we continue to work toward. I am hopeful that this study may serve as a model, or at least spark some imagination, of what other Indigenous peoples may be able to conquer and accomplish in their communities.

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# APPENDICES

## Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview may include the following questions:

- *Given what you have experienced and/or know about the ASD's Yup'ik Immersion program, what are the successes? What are the strengths of the program? What are the challenges? Do you consider this program to be special or not? Why? Why not?*

- *What do you perceive to be some of the biggest challenges/barriers to this program? Do you think these challenges/barriers would be consistent across other urban settings? Why/why not?*

- *In programs such as this, how do Western and Indigenous (Yup'ik) worlds (beliefs) come together, if at all? What are areas of improvement for this?*

- *Has this program provided any unique sort of sense of belonging to students, Native or non-Native?*

- *What are your thoughts about increasing the number of Indigenous language immersion programs throughout Alaska and the U.S.?*

## Recruitment Email

Greetings!

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study for my doctoral dissertation at Indiana University. My study is entitled: *Yup'ik Immersion in an Urban Context: An Ethnographic Case Study Exploring the Impact on Indigenous Language Revitalization in a Public School Setting.*

My research proposal examines the development and implementation, and ultimately the impact, of an Alaska Native Indigenous language (Yup'ik) immersion program in the city of Anchorage, Alaska. Funded through an initial 3-year federal grant, followed by a second 3-year federal grant, with no guarantee of ongoing funding beyond, this research looks at how local entities perceive the development of the program, and its language revitalization efforts, specifically researching overall community impact and sustainability. This is the first and only Alaska Native language immersion program in Anchorage, which is open to any student regardless of race, ethnicity, or background. Given this rarity, the study examines the perceptions of value (culturally, linguistically, educationally, financially, etc.) of the program. Specifically, this study explores the impact of the Yup'ik Immersion Program on the ASD community and the Yup'ik community in Anchorage and beyond. Participants will include teachers, administrators, parents/family members/guardians, community (consortium) partners, elders, and government officials (local, state, federal).

During this study, we will meet in person or via Zoom at an agreed upon time and for approximately one hour. Through a semi-structured interview process, we will discuss your ideas, opinions, feelings, and thoughts around Indigenous immersion language programming in U.S. public schools. We will discuss your insight and expertise on such programs, as well as your views, beliefs, and recommendations for ongoing improvement and future work and needs.

I will seek to examine what recommendations you have for Indigenous language revitalization programs in the U.S. (in Alaska, Hawaii, and the Lower 48), as well as insights into curriculum, or program models.

Your participation in this study will involve one session that lasts approximately one hour. We can meet in person or via Zoom, depending on your preference. The interview will be recorded. This study will be carried out from January-March 2024, with most interviews to be conducted in January and February.

If you are interested, would like to learn more, or agree to this, please let me know. I have a participant consent form to provide to you that includes further details (see attached). I would like to get interviews scheduled as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration and I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brandon Locke

Doctoral Candidate in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Indiana University

## Informed Consent Statement

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

# Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled: ***Yup'ik Immersion in an Urban Context: An Ethnographic Case Study Exploring the Impact on Indigenous Language Revitalization in a Public School Setting,*** (IRB# 20639) conducted by Brandon Locke, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Indiana University. The faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Serafin Coronel-Molina, Professor of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at Indiana University.

## What the Study is About

This research proposal examines the development and implementation, and ultimately the impact, of an Alaska Native Indigenous language (Yup'ik) immersion program in the city of Anchorage, Alaska. Funded through an initial 3-year federal grant, followed by a second 3-year federal grant, with no guarantee of ongoing funding beyond, this research looks at how local entities perceive the development of the program, and its language revitalization efforts, specifically researching overall community impact and sustainability. This is the first and only Alaska Native language immersion program in Anchorage, which is open to any student regardless of race, ethnicity, or background. Given this rarity, the study examines the perceptions of value (culturally, linguistically, educationally, financially, etc.) of the program. Specifically, this study explores the impact of the Yup'ik Immersion Program on the ASD community and the Yup'ik community in Anchorage and beyond. Participants will include educators, administrators, parents/family members/guardians, community (consortium) partners, elders, and government officials (local, state, federal).

## What I will ask you to do

During this study, we will meet in person or via Zoom at an agreed upon time and for approximately one hour. Through a semi-structured interview process, we will discuss your ideas, opinions, feelings, and thoughts around Indigenous immersion language programming in U.S. public schools. We will discuss

your insight and expertise on such programs, as well as your views, beliefs, and recommendations for ongoing improvement and future work and needs.

I will seek to examine what recommendations you have for Indigenous language revitalization programs in the U.S. (in Alaska, Hawaii, and the Lower 48), as well as insights into curriculum, or program models.

The semi-structured interview may include the following questions:

● *Given what you have experienced and/or know about the ASD's Yup'ik Immersion program, what are the successes? What are the strengths of the program? What are the challenges? Do you consider this program to be special or not? Why? Why not?*

● *What do you perceive to be some of the biggest challenges/barriers to this program? Do you think these challenges/barriers would be consistent across other urban settings? Why/why not?*

● *In programs such as this, how do Western and Indigenous (Yup'ik) worlds (beliefs) come together, if at all? What are areas of improvement for this?*

● *Has this program provided any unique sort of sense of belonging to students, Native or non-Native?*

● *What are your thoughts about increasing the number of Indigenous language immersion programs throughout Alaska and the U.S.?*

## Duration and Location of the Study

Your participation in this study will involve one session that lasts approximately one hour. We can meet in person or via Zoom, depending on your preference. The interview will be recorded. This study will be carried out from November 2023 through February 2024, with most interviews to be conducted in December 2023 and January 2024.

## Potential Risks and Discomforts

The research procedures described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts:

There is minimal risk to the participants of the study such as loss of time and possible minimal discomfort. There may be a risk of negative emotional reactions to the subject of language revitalization.

## Benefits

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to others include: the overarching goal to contribute to Indigenous language preservation, revitalization, and decolonization in U.S. public schools. In addition to these goals the research can provide evidence for Indigenous student/parent/family demand for Indigenous language education in U.S. public schools

A significant byproduct of Indigenous language programming is fostering improved cultural competence among non-Natives.

## Privacy/Confidentiality

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and any printouts in a locked file cabinet. Participants will be referred to by their pseudonym in the study.

## Compensation/Payment for Participation

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

## Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

## Offer to Answer Questions

Please ask me any questions you may have at this time or later. Should you have questions/concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact Dr. Serafin Coronel-Molina at: scoronel@indiana.edu or the Indiana University Institutional Review Board at: irb@iu.edu

## IRB Documentation/Protocol

**Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 7:25:52 PM Alaska Daylight Time**

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**Subject:** ASD Research Request Approved
**Date:** Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 4:52:37 PM Alaska Daylight Time
**From:** tix_carolyn
**To:** Locke_Brandon
**CC:** Garrity_Patrick

Good Afternoon Brandon,

Your research request for "Yup'ik Immersion in an Urban Context: Perceptions on Indigenous Language Revitalization Efforts" has been approved. Please coordinate with fellow directors and onsite principals for the next steps of your data collection. Thank you for submitting a research request so early and for having patience as we work through the COVID-19 crisis. We wish you the best of luck with your project moving forward.

Best,
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Carolyn Tix
Research Analyst
Anchorage School District
tix_carolyn@asdk12.org
(907) 742-4451

PROTOCOLS

# APPROVAL LETTER

**To**: Coronel-Molina, Serafin

**Protocol #:** 20639

**Protocol Title:** Yup'ik Immersion in an Urban Context: An Ethnographic Case Study Exploring the Impact on Indigenous Language Revitalization in a Public School Setting

**Type of Submission**: Initial

**Level of Review**: Exempt

**Approval Date**: Wednesday, November 29th 2023

**Expiration Date**: no date provided

**If Expiration Date = "No date provided," this research does not require annual renewal; thus there is no expiration date.*

The Indiana University HRPP approved the above-referenced submission. Conduct of this study is subject to the IU HRPP Policies, as applicable.

**Additional Notes:**

This research is exempt under the following category:

-Category 2(ii)

**Documents approved with this submission:**

## Attachments

| | |
|---|---|
| Recruitment Materials | Locke 20639 Research Consent Form for.docx |
| Data Collection Instrument | Locke Doctoral Study Data Collection Form.pdf |
| Other | Locke IRB Interview Questions.docx |
| Recruitment Materials | Locke Recruitment email.docx |

You should retain a copy of this letter and all associated approved study documents in your research records.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact the HRPP via email at irb@iu.edu or via phone at (317) 274-8289.

**Curriculum Vitae**

**BRANDON T. LOCKE**

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## EDUCATION

- Ed.D., Literacy, Culture, and Language Education, Indiana University, 2016-2025*;* Dissertation title: *Yup'ik Immersion in an Urban Public School: An Ethnographic Case Study Indigenous Language Revitalization*
- M.Ed., Educational Leadership, University of Alaska Anchorage, May 2007
- M.Ed., Curriculum and Instruction: Second Languages and Cultures Education, Certificate in Language Immersion Education, University of Minnesota, May 2004
- B.Ed., Secondary Education and French, University of Alaska Anchorage, December 1996
- French as a Second Language Program, Université Laval, Québec, Canada, 1992-1993

## CERTIFICATION

- Alaska: Type B Certificate (K-12 Principal), expires 4/13/2027
- Alaska: Professional Teacher Certificate: French, Grades K-8, 7-12, expires 4/13/2027

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

- Director, World Languages and Immersion Programs, Anchorage School District, 2013-Present
- Senior Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Anchorage School District, 2016-2018
- Dean, Teacher Seminars and Director of STARTALK Programs, Concordia Language Villages, Bemidji, Minnesota, 2008-2018
- Elementary Principal, Anchorage, Alaska, 2008-2013
- Assistant Principal, Middle School, Anchorage, Alaska, 2007-2008
- Dean, French Language Village, Concordia Language Villages, Bemidji, Minnesota, 2000-2006

## K-12 TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- South Anchorage High School, French, Grades 9-12, Levels I-Adv. Placement, 2005-2007
- Central Middle School, French, Grades 7-8, World Language Department Chair, 2004-2005
- Mounds Park Academy (St. Paul, MN), French, Grades 5-12, Fall 2003

- Goldenview Middle School, French, Grades 7-8, World Language Dept. Chair, 1997-2002
- High School Credit Teacher, Concordia Language Villages, Bemidji, Minnesota, 1998

## POST-SECONDARY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Adjunct Instructor, Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, *AMLA 600: Second Language and Immersion Methodologies* (4 graduate credits); Summers 2008-Present
- Adjunct Instructor, University of Alaska Anchorage, College of Education, *EDFN A695: Internship in Teaching World Language in Secondary Schools* (1 graduate credit); Spring 2018
- Adjunct Instructor, University of Alaska Anchorage, College of Education, *EDSY A667: Teaching World Language in Secondary Schools* (3 graduate credits); Fall 2017
- Adjunct Instructor, University of Alaska Anchorage, College of Education, various professional development courses; 2013-Present

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

- Planning Committee, Pacific Northwest Council for Languages (PNCFL) Conference, Anchorage, AK, April 25-26, 2025
- Planning Committee, 9$^{th}$ International Conference on Dual Language and Immersion Education, Salt Lake City, UT, Oct. 2-6, 2024
- Board Member, ACTFL, 2023-2026 (Treasurer, 2024; Chair, Advocacy & Outreach Committee; Member, Finance Committee)
- Board Member, Alaska World Affairs Council, 2021-Present
- Alaska's Liaison, National Museum of Language, 2021-Present
- Officer, ACTFL Immersion SIG, (Chair, 2022), 2021-2023
- Fellow, America's Languages Initiative, 2020-2022
- Organizing Committee Member, Second International Conference on Literacy, Culture and Language Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN October 2020 (Virtual)
- Alliance Member, National Dual Language Immersion Alliance, American Councils for International Education
- Advisory Council Member, CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange, Global Navigator Program), 2019-2020
- Article Reviewer, *The Language Educator (ACTFL),* 2017-Present
- ACTFL 2018 Teacher of the Year Selection Committee
- STARTALK Site Visitor, Summer 2017-2021
- Commissioner, Anchorage Sister Cities Commission, appointed by Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz, January 2017-December 2017
- Proposal Reviewer, ACTFL Convention, 2016-Present
- Proposal Reviewer, Sixth International Conference on Immersion and Dual Language Education: *Connecting Research and Practice Across Contexts,* Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), October 2016
- Advisory Board Member, Pacific Northwest Pathways Collective, Portland State University-University of Oregon Flagship Communities Linkages Grant, 2015-Present

- Member, ACTFL AAPPL Advisory Committee, 2015-2016
- Member, ACTFL Public Relations Committee, 2014-2015
- Advisor, Japan Alaska Association, 2014-Present
- Board Member, Montgomery Dickson Center for Japanese Language and Culture, University of Alaska Anchorage, 2012-Present (President, 2022-Present)
- Consultant and Teacher Trainer, Scenic Park STARTALK Chinese Summer Camp, 2013-2021
- Mentor Principal to Administrative Intern, ASD DEEL II program, 2010-2012
- Language Screening Interviewer (French), Anchorage School District, 2007-2013
- ASD/AEA Mentor Teacher, 2004-2007
- Article Reviewer, *Learning Languages: Journal of the National Network for Early Language Learning (NNELL),* 2002-2003
- Consultant, Spanish, Japanese, and Russian summer language immersion camps, Anchorage School District, spring 2002
- LAUNCH! World Languages Curriculum Frameworks, Standards Review, and Textbook Adoption Committee, Anchorage School District, 1998-2000
- ETS Standards Study Panelist, French Teacher Licensure Assessment, Alaska Department of Education, Atlanta, Georgia, January 2000

**GRADUATE STUDIES THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER (Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota)**

- Yang, S. (2024). *Hmong Perspectives on Learning Hmong as a Heritage Language.*
- Gao, J. (2024). *Exploring the Role of Dialects in Promoting Intercultural Communicative Competence in Chinese as a Foreign Language Classrooms.*
- Reuter, T. (2023). *What Affects Teachers' Target Language Use? Factors Around TL Use with Novice Learners in the Classroom.*
- Hathaway, T. (2022). *Game-based Student Response Systems and Verbal Morphologies.* (Academic Advisor/Thesis Chair)
- Unger, C. (2021). *The Impact on Vocabulary Acquisition in Language Learning.*
- Girmscheid, E. E. (2019). *A Comparison of Language Competency between Elementary Immersion and High School Language Program Graduates.*
- Luptak, T. M. (2018). *Montana World Language Teachers' Beliefs and Perspectives on Effective World Language Teaching Practices.*

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- Participant, College Board AP Workshop, Anchorage, AK, May 2023
- Participant, College Board AP Workshop, Phoenix, AZ, December 2005
- Graduate Research Assistant, University of Minnesota, 2002-2004
- Content-Based Language Teaching through Technology, University of Minnesota, 2002-2003
- ASD Administrator Designee/International Travel Training, January 1998
- Gifted Education certification, Alaska Pacific University, 1998-2001

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- *How Well do You REALLY Understand the National World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages?* AFLA Conference, Palmer, AK, October 25-27, 2024
- *Dual Language Immersion in the United States: Definitions, Goals, Models, and More,* Arkansas Foreign Language Teacher's Association Annual Conference, Little Rock, AR, October 11, 2024 **(Invited Keynote)**
- *From Imagination to Implementation: Possibilities for DLE in Arkansas,* Arkansas Foreign Language Teacher's Association Annual Conference, Little Rock, AR, October 11, 2024 **(Invited Presenter)**
- *Showcasing ASD's Yup'ik Immersion Program,* with Darrell Berntsen, Statewide Convening on Out-Migration, hosted by U.S. Representative Mary Peltola (AK-D), Anchorage, AK, September 5, 2024 **(Invited Presenter)**
- *Dual Language/Immersion in the United States: Goals, Characteristics, Models, and More,* Multi-State Pathways to Teaching French, virtual, May 30, 2024 **(Invited Presenter)**
- *French for All: An Example of Collaboration for Immersion Programs Between the French Embassy and School Districts,* with Louise LeCam, PNCFL Conference, Seattle, WA, March 23, 2024
- *A Twist on Advocacy: Community Partners, Parent Groups, Sister Cities, and More,* Third Seminar on French Bilingual Education in the United States, French Embassy in the U.S., Washington, DC, October 23-25, 2023 **(Invited Presenter)**
- *Alaska's Seal of Biliteracy,* AFLA Conference, UAA, October 6-8, 2023
- *Initiatives to Support Indigenous and Minority Languages: A U.S. Perspective,* World Languages Forum 2023, Hosted by Education Perfect, August 30, 2023 **(Invited Panelist)**
- *Dual Language/Immersion in the United States: Goals, Characteristics, Models, and More,* Multi-State Pathways to Teaching French, virtual, July 27, 2023 **(Invited Presenter)**
- *Using Data (Not Just STAMP) to Make Informed Decisions,* DLI Summer Institute, MORE Learning/Avant Assessment, Virtual, July 18-19, 2023 **(Invited Presenter)**
- *How the French Embassy Can Support the Creation and Growth of DLI Programs in the United States,* with Mathieu Ausseil and Victoria Creux-Laroche, ACTFL Immersion SIG Webinar, February 27, 2023
- *Leveraging the French Embassy Funding Programs to Develop the Teaching of French in the Pacific Northwest,* with Victoria Creux-Laroche and Aminata Diawara, PNCFL Virtual Conference, February 24-25, 2023.
- *Intercultural Citizenship in Dual Language and Immersion Contexts,* with Allison Spenader and Cassandra Glynn, ACTFL Annual Convention, Boston, MA, November 18-20, 2022
- Invited Symposium Panelist, *Leading Successful Dual Language Immersion Programs: What We've Learned from Those Who Have Done It,* 8th International Conference on Immersion and Dual Language Education, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 2-5, 2022.
- Invited Symposium Panelist, *Leading Professional Learning,* 8th International Conference on Immersion and Dual Language Education, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 2-5, 2022.

- *A Twist on Advocacy: Community Partners, Parent Groups, Sister Cities, and More,* 8th International Conference on Immersion and Dual Language Education, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 2-5, 2022
- *Instructional Leadership for New Immersion Programs,* with Leslie Baldwin, ACTFL National Convention, Virtual, November 19-21, 2021
- *French Embassy and School Districts: An Example of Collaboration in Anchorage,* with Mathieu Ausseil, ACTFL National Convention, Virtual, November 19-21, 2021 (invited presenter)
- *Reclaiming Native Language and Promoting Tribal Sovereignty via Native American Language Grants (NAL@ED),* invited panelist, National Native American Language Summit (virtual), November 18-19, 2021.
- *Engaging and Empowering Indigenous Immersion Families through Family Engagement Workshops,* with Diane J. Tedick, La Cosecha Dual Language Conference, Albuquerque, NM, November 11, 2021
- *Recovery of Programs Following a Return to In-Person Teaching,* with Lisa Harris and Lourdes Flores-Hanson, Third Seminar on French Dual Language and Immersion Education (Virtual) Embassy of France, June 23, 2021 (invited panelist)
- *Russian Dual Language Immersion Programs and Higher Education,* with William J. Comer, Lilia Doni, Brandee Mau, and Katya Huelsman, American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL) Conference (Virtual), February 2021
- *Planning for and Implementing an Indigenous Immersion Program: Success with Federal Grant Writing,* Alaskans for Language Acquisition (AFLA) Conference, Anchorage, October 2019
- *Notice of Public Rulemaking (NPRM) for Native American Language (NAL@ED) grants: What Makes a High-Quality Project?* Panelist, Office of Indian Education Program Staff, U.S. Department of Education, National Indian Education Association 2019 Convention & Trade Show, Minneapolis, MN, October 2019 (invited)
- *Yup'ik Language Immersion in the Anchorage (Alaska) School District,* 2019 Interagency Annual Native Languages Summit, Minneapolis, MN, October 2019 (invited)
- *Planning for and Implementing Indigenous Language Immersion Programs: An Alaskan Example,* Second International Conference on Revitalization of Indigenous and Minoritized Languages, University of Brasilia, Brasilia, Brazil, October 2019.
- *Curriculum Articulation and Collaboration in a Yup'ik Immersion Program,* with Martha Bigelow, PhD., ACTFL National Convention, New Orleans, LA, November 2018
- *Lessons Learned: Planning for and Implementing Indigenous Language Immersion Programs,* First International Conference on Literacy, Culture and Language Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, October 2018
- *Lead with NCSSFL: Year 1 Experiences with Seal of Biliteracy Implementation,* with Jill Woerner, Susan Spinnato, and Bonnie Pechulis, ACTFL National Convention, Nashville, TN, November 2017
- *Quality Tier I Instruction: Tools and Supports to Provide Access for All Students,* with Dr. Sharon Azar, Alaska RTI Conference, Dena'ina Center, Anchorage, February 2017
- *Providing a Pathway to Immersion,* with Jennifer Schmitz and Yan Wang, STARTALK Fall Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, October 2016

- *Concordia Language Villages 101: An Introduction to How Language and Cultural Immersion is done in the North Woods of Minnesota 24/7,* with Tove Dahl, AFLA – Alaskans for Language Acquisition Conference, Anchorage, Alaska, September 2016
- *Fundamentals of Immersion,* Alaska Native Language Summit, Juneau, Alaska, February 2016
- *Live the Language: Integrating Experiential Learning into the Classroom,* with Cassandra Glynn, Ph.D., ACTFL National Convention, San Diego, CA, November 2015
- *Refresh Yourself with the "Refreshed" Standards"* and *Conscience Culture: Moving Beyond Tacos, Baguettes, and Lederhosen,* AFLA-Alaskans for Language Acquisition Conference, Anchorage, Alaska, September 2015
- *Language Instruction Using Authentic Materials,* with Lara Ravitch, Alwiya S. Omar, and Pam Delfosse, STARTALK Fall Conference, Portland, Oregon, October 2013
- *Concordia Language Villages: Diversity and Adapting to a Language Immersion Setting,* with Liv Thorstensson, International Camping Congress, Mexico City, Mexico, October 2005
- *Building & Maintaining a Successful Middle School Language Program* and *Language Learning in the Woods*, Montana Association of Language Teachers/ MEA-MFT Educator's Conference, Billings, Montana, October 2003
- *Mission Martinique: Content-Based Language Teaching through Technology*, AFLA-Alaskans for Language Acquisition Conference, Anchorage, Alaska, October 2003
- *New Teacher Workshop*, World Languages Program, Anchorage School District, December 2001, February 2002
- *From CLV to the Classroom: Activities Encouraging Active Student Participation*, with Donna Clementi, ACTFL National Convention, Washington, DC, November 2001
- *Leading from the Middle: Targeting the Standards,* Anchorage School District Middle Level In-Service, Mears Middle School, November 1999

**PUBLICATIONS**

- Locke, B. T. (2025). (Forthcoming). Indigenous language revitalization: Dual language immersion in practice. In V. Russell et al. (Eds.), *The handbook in world language instruction.* Routledge.
- Spenader, A. J. & Locke, B. T. (2024). Dual language and immersion programs: Naturally fostering intercultural citizenship. In Kong, K. & Spenader, A. J. (Eds.), *Diverse perspectives on intercultural citizenship in language learning.* Multilingual Matters.
- Alqahtani, A., et al. (2019). Short guides in education research methodologies. Indiana University. Online at: https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/24429?fbclid=IwAR1WrQJsLe8cOFocFTyijK1lWaRQtRen3pc-TpQ7akL8LMlGYblg7U464MU
- WorldView Blog: http://www.concordialanguagevillages.org/blog/villages/indigenous-anchorage-is-in-the-middle-of-everywhere#.XpZ4cC2ZPR0 (February, 2020)
- Locke, B. (2018). Language, Culture, and Community Engagement: Anchorage's New Yup'ik Immersion Program. *The Language Educator, Mar/April 2018,* 41-43, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

- WorldView Blog: http://www.concordialanguagevillages.org/blog/villages/live-the-language-integrating-experiential-learning-into-the-classroom#.XpZ5Ji2ZPR0 (May, 2017)
- WorldView Blog: http://www.concordialanguagevillages.org/blog/villages/language-educators-canand-mustbe-champions-of-change#.WO74ScevFWY (April, 2017)
- Graner Kennedy, L. & Locke, B. (2016). Empowering Educators. *The Language Educator, Aug/Sept 2016,* 30-33, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
- Lundgaard, G. & Locke, B. (2016). A different perspective: Seeing the World-Readiness Standards as innovation. *The Language Educator, Jan/Feb 2016,* 32-36, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
- Locke, B. T. (2004). Standards for school leaders: Implications for leadership in foreign language immersion programs. *ACIE Newsletter, 7*(2), Bridge insert, pp. 1-8. Available: http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/bridge-7(2).pdf
- Locke, B. T. (2002). Language in the woods. *Lingo, 25*(2), 2-3

**INDEPENDENT CONSULTING/CONTRACTED WORK**

- Consultant, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), 2019-Present
- External Facilitator, Middle School Immersion Advisory Committee, Governor's World Language Expansion Initiative, Delaware Department of Education, 2015-2016

**REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS**

- Glynn, C., Wesely, P., & Wassell, B. (2018). Words and Actions: Teaching Languages Through the Lens of Social Justice, 2nd Edition. Alexandria, VA: ACTFL.
- Curtain & Dahlberg (2016). Languages and Learners: Making the Match, fifth edition. Boston: Pearson

**AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS**

- CEHD Distinguished Alumni Award, University of Minnesota, November 2024
- NADSFL Supervisor of the Year, November 2023
- PNCFL Outstanding Contributions to the Teaching of World Languages in the Pacific Northwest, March 2022
- AFLA Friend of Languages Award, September 2021
- *Ordre des Palmes Académiques*, *Chevalier,* Republic of France, July 21, 2021
- Recipient (Anchorage School District), ACTFL Melba D. Woodruff Award for Exemplary Elementary Foreign Language Programs, November 2020
- Recipient, Leo and Jean Fay Fellowship, Indiana University, 2018-2019
- Delegate, 2017 Study Tour for U.S. Educational Decision Makers, Goethe Institut and ZfA Central Agency for German Schools Abroad
- Delegate, 2017 Summer Program in Korea for American School Leaders, Foundation for Korean Language and Culture in USA

- Delegate, 2016 College Board/Hanban Chinese Bridge Delegation to China
- Recipient, Ruth G. Strickland Memorial Fellowship, Indiana University, 2016-2017
- AATF Outstanding Administrator Award – honorable mention, 2015
- M.Ed. Awards of Recognition, University of Minnesota, 2003, 2004

**GRANTS**

- Anchorage School District Yup'ik Immersion: *Project Ciumurulluku Yup'ik Elitnauryaraq (Moving Forward in Yup'ik)* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Indian Education, Native American Language (NAL@ED) 3-year federal grant, $1,141,015, 10/1/2024-9/30/2027
- French Embassy in the U.S. FACE Grant, $5000, 2023-2024
- French Embassy in the U.S. FACE Grant for French Teaching Intern, $4000, 2023-2024
- Anchorage School District Yup'ik Immersion: *Project Anglicarluk Yugtun Uivengqelriaput (Expanding our Yup'ik Circle)*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Indian Education, Native American Language (NAL@ED) 3-year federal grant, $858,431, 10/1/2020-9/30/2023.
- French Embassy in the U.S. FACE Grant, $8,000, 2022-2023
- French Embassy in the U.S. FACE Grant, $4,000, 2021-2022
- French Embassy in the U.S. FACE Grant, $4,000, 2020-2021
- French Embassy in the U.S. FACE Grant, $8,000, 2019-2020
- Anchorage School District Yup'ik Immersion: *Project Yugtun Qanerluten: Speak in Yup'ik!* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Indian Education, Native American Language (NAL@ED) 3-year federal grant, $1.3 Million, 10/1/2017-9/30/2020
- Anchorage School District Alaska Sesquicentennial Curriculum Project: *Seward's Folly: Impact of the Treaty of Cession – Past, Present, and Future,* written with Pamela Orme; Alaska Historical Commission, $44, 441
- STARTALK Teacher Program, Concordia Language Villages, 2014-2018 ($90,000 annually)
- STARTALK Student Program, Chinese, Anchorage School District, 2014-Present ($90,000 annually)
- Confucius Classroom, Anchorage School District, 2015-2019 ($10,000 annually)

**AUDIO/VIDEO**

- *It's About Language, Episode 124: Language Warriors: A Conversation with Brandon Locke*: https://fluency.consulting/2024/04/18/e124-language-warriors-a-conversation-with-brandon-locke/?fbclid=IwY2xjawFkhuxleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHZ1QhtMT09IZkIjjNUaJOp3SZBaadjSi_iydeOI-HbHKXodIUNTvhb4t0g_aem_Gv0IqVykOc4p11UaHSRGfw
- France's *66 Minutes* https://www.entourageprod.com/95-ces-Francais-du-bout-du-monde.html; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74R80bw4gfQ
- US DOE *Promising Programs*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sc0USHf2IU&feature=youtu.be
- KTVA Channel 11 *Frontiers* episode: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPfaOtx4vUM

- ASD's Yup'ik Immersion Program: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=377QkF8OVSc&feature=youtu.be
- ASD's Chinese STARTALK Program: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJu-Md5z9yQ
- ASD Featured in TELL videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kM5bWpNTC90&t=7s; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUvjwSvRT6Q; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTc05lu1EHo&t=2s
- 2020 ACTFL Melba D. Woodruff Awards: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wVPts3ejcQ&list=PLh_cfDwS8mrs_iY4BRxU2M_J5GfdNDxL9 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8HhkBVPVq0&list=PLh_cfDwS8mrs_iY4BRxU2M_J5GfdNDxL9&index=13

## STUDENT TRAVEL ABROAD

- Leader, Student Trip to France, Italy, England, Goldenview Middle School, 2001
- Co-Leader, Student Trip to France, Bartlett High School, 1998 and 2000
- Leader, Student Trip to France and Spain, Goldenview Middle School, 1998

## PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS & AFFILIATIONS

- AATF, American Association of Teachers of French, Member, 1996-Present
- ACIE, American Council on Immersion Education (2002-2011)
- ACTFL, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Member, Public Relations Committee, 2014-2015; Teacher of the Year Selection Committee, 2017), Board Member, 2023-2026; (Treasurer, 2024-present); Member, 1996-Present
- AFLA, Alaskans for Language Acquisition (President, 1998-2002; Member 1996-Present)
- NADSFL, National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (Vice-President 2020-2022; Advisory Board 2014-2020); Member, 2013-Present
- NNELL, National Network of Early Language Learning (Alaska State Representative, 2014-Present)
- PNCFL, Pacific Northwest Council for Languages (President, 2002-2003; 2019-2020; Member, 1996-Present)
- TESOL, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
- NCSSFL, National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, Associate Member (Alaska State Representative), 2016-Present
- NIEA, National Indian Education Association, 2018-Present

## LANGUAGES

- Fluent in English and French; limited Spanish