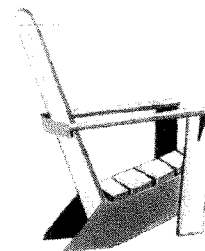


BREAD LOAF

Rural Teacher Network

M a g a z i n e



Alaska—Arizona—Mississippi—New Mexico—South Carolina—Vermont

Language and Culture

**Teaching Away from Home: Language and Literacy
in the Language Arts Classroom 2**

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by Sharon Ladner, Gary Montaña, and Stephen Schadler

Plus more stories about cross-cultural collaboration among teachers and students in rural American classrooms.

A Publication of the Bread Loaf School of English
Middlebury College
Middlebury, Vermont
Spring/Summer, 1997

From the Director

by James Maddox
Bread Loaf School of English
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT

When I last wrote a short piece for the *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Magazine*, I spoke of the approaching end of our grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund; this very issue, indeed, was to be the last of this publication. In March of this year, however, the Bread Loaf School of English received notification that we have been awarded a second generous grant, of \$2.44 million, from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, which will prolong this major project through August, 2001.

Under this second-tier grant, we will be adding two new states, Colorado and Georgia, to our network; we will proceed with recruitment of rural teachers from those states, beginning in the fall of 1997. We will continue our activities in the original target states—Alaska, Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Vermont—but, under the terms of the new grant, we will be recruiting new teachers only from Alaska, Arizona, and New Mexico among the original target states.

We will seek teachers of the same excellent caliber as those we recruited under our first grant; we have committed ourselves to working harder to provide support to the BLRTN teachers who have already passed through the three-year fellowship cycle, to keep them active members of the network; we will also work much harder than we did under the initial grant to bring principals, superintendents, and other administrators into active involvement with our network, so that the innovative changes that take place in the classrooms of BLRTN teachers can more effectively spread beyond those classrooms, to affect the teaching of writing and the uses of technology throughout the school: this school-wide spread of BLRTN is already well under way at many of our sites.

The new emphases of this second grant will be reflected in Bread Loaf's second major conference on rural education, to be held at Bread Loaf, Vermont, on June 20-22, at just about the time that this publication comes off the press. At that conference, there will be many BLRTN Fellows showcasing the work that their students have been doing since 1993; there will also be funders, journalists, and other friends of rural education in attendance; but maybe most strikingly, there will be, as of the date of this writing, some 28 principals, superintendents, and other administrators who have become interested in BLRTN activities and wish to be a part of the effort to extend those activities into whole schools and districts.

There is another event that will be going on as we go to press with this publication: Bread Loaf is holding a three-week institute for 26 Alaska teachers at the University of Alaska-Southeast in Juneau during the first three weeks in June. Assistant Superintendent of the Juneau School District Annie Calkins, BLRTN Fellow and Bread Loaf graduate Karen Mitchell and (especially) BLRTN Fellow and Bread Loaf graduate Scott Christian have helped to put together this effort which will extend even further Bread Loaf's commitment to a partnership with Alaska's teachers. Bread Loaf faculty members Carole Oles, Susanne Wofford, and Jacques Lezra will be teaching courses in the institute, and Middlebury's President John McCardell will visit the institute during the course of its session.

Finally, the Bread Loaf Rural Challenge Network, funded by the Annenberg Rural Challenge (ARC), continues to flourish. Eighteen rural teachers from ARC sites will attend Bread Loaf this summer on \$5,000 fellowships. Principals and teachers from the five core ARC partner schools, who met at Laguna Middle School last December, will hold a second meeting in June in Ketchikan, Alaska, to continue planning for the network's activities.

Dixie Goswami, Rocky Gooch, Chris Benson, and the many other members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network rejoice in the continuing successes that our BLRTN teachers have had—and in the prospect of this network's vital educational mission being extended another four years. ☺

DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

The Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network is funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The mission of the Fund is to foster fundamental improvement in the quality of educational and career development opportunities for all school-age youth, and to increase access to these improved services for young people in low-income communities.

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network

Spring/Summer—1997

Editor

Chris Benson

chris_benson@breadnet.middlebury.edu

Address correspondence to Chris Benson, *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network*, Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT 05753-6115. The Bread Loaf School of English publishes the *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Magazine* periodically.

**Director of the Bread Loaf
School of English
Director of BLRTN**
James Maddox

Coordinator of BLRTN
Dixie Goswami

Bread Loaf Office Staff
Elaine Hall
Sandy LeGault
Dianne Baroz

Consultants to the Project
Tharon Howard
Victor Luftig
Andrea Lunsford
Jacqueline Jones Royster

**Director of Telecommunications
BLRTN**
Rocky Gooch
rocky_gooch@breadnet.middlebury.edu

Director of BreadNet
Robert Lagerman

Technical Consultants
Caroline Eisner
Douglas Wood

Teacher Research Consultant
Bette Ford

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Teaching Away from Home: Language and Literacy in the Language Arts Classroom

by Jacqueline Jones Royster
Consultant to BLRTN
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

After four years as a consultant with the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, I have become keenly aware of several of its obvious strengths: the quality of the teaching, the creative uses of technology for classroom and professional engagement, the ever-expanding body of knowledge and experience in curricular and school reform. What I had not paid much attention to, until one day last summer in my class at the Vermont campus, was how many BLRTN Fellows are teaching "away from home," in communities where they did not grow up. While I certainly knew that many BLRTN Fellows had moved to their current communities from elsewhere, I had not connected this characteristic with the potential for generating cutting-edge insights for educational theory and practice.

Consider the statement made by Sheri Skelton in the 1996 Fall/Winter issue of *BLRTN Magazine*:

When I stepped off the plane in July, 1991, I was an alien. My prior knowledge of village life, weather conditions, food, clothing, shelter, or Eskimo culture was minimal. I differed from many of the teachers traveling to bush Alaska, however, in that I was not fresh out of college trying to land my first teaching job; I was not an outdoors person hoping to shoot a bear or a moose; I was not seeking adventure in the Far North. I had come with a family. (4)

This sentiment is more typical than not in BLRTN and increasingly in the nation as a whole. Being "migrant"

has become part and parcel of new waves of immigration across all of our national borders and in-migration across many of our state borders as well. I am myself an example of the latter, having moved in the last five years from Georgia to Ohio.

The impact on teachers is that across urban, suburban, and rural communities, we face the challenge, at home or not, of holding historical identities that simply do not match those of our students. We can no longer count on teaching within "home" communities or comfort zones (Pratt 1991). Differences across race, cultural practices, belief systems, language, class, and other categories are converging, so that all of us need to operate more flexibly across community boundaries than ever before for jobs, services, entertainment, and other personal and community needs and desires. Perhaps for the first time, the importance not only of similarities across the American landscape but also dissimilarities is becoming more evident. When we live or work in a

community, we can not assume cultural continuity. We must also assume discontinuity, embracing both as credible and inherently valuable.

Teachers in the six target states of BLRTN are in communities composed of Native American, Native Alaskan, European American, Hispanic American, African American, Asian American, and international elements. Within the context of such obvious richness, BLRTN has recognized two principles: that educational processes are not autonomous, separate, or apart from the communities in which they occur; and that classroom and extraclassroom practices must bring the local community into the purview of our thinking and action. As Sheri Skelton also says:

After living in Shishmaref for five years, I know that the success of my teaching is dependent upon my relationship with the community. Bridging the gap between myself and the commu-



BLRTN consultants and Bread Loaf faculty members Jackie Royster and Andrea Lunsford at Bread Loaf, Vermont, 1996

nity is difficult and requires an understanding of the community itself. . . . Knowing little about the community, I entered it with an open mind. . . . Firsthand experiences and gradual day-to-day living provided me with knowledge that helped me to define my role in the community. (4-5)

BLRTN has a special opportunity to make use of the knowledge, experiences, and expertise of English teachers who foreshadow the future as they teach "away from home," "at home," or in cases such as Sheri's "in new homes." Embracing the distinctiveness of their communities and accepting the human variations that their students bring into classrooms provide an occasion for BLRTN teachers to take leadership. In our network, we have in

place the conditions that permit direct explorations of how language arts education in the twenty-first century might be a "community-sensitive" enterprise, and teachers across the network are reimagining educational growth and change.

From the beginning, the BLRTN program has encouraged teachers to be creative and directly responsive to their own communities. Their success in doing so is evident in the pages of the *BLRTN Magazine* in which various members have written powerfully about what they do and how they do it. In my opinion, there is no richer collection of thoughtful and innovative practices chronicled anywhere in the nation. The point, though, is that these are not just thoughtful and innovative practices. They form a base of knowledge and experience for theorizing how schools and communities might connect.

As I began last summer to see BLRTN teachers' distinct potential for leadership, however, I also began to wonder just how much these teachers' thoughtfulness and creativity must

surely be drawing from beyond what teachers might automatically count on from their formal preparation for teaching. What is clear is that American schools are experiencing paradigm shifts, but I was not convinced that the teaching profession is responding at all well to what these shifts indicate about initial training or ongoing professional development. I wondered whether training in English studies is either adequate or systematic enough to guarantee a reasonable level of professional confidence as teachers enter the sorts of classrooms in which some BLRTN Fellows teach.

In BLRTN classrooms, when teachers really know their students and

striking feature of the Network is the extent to which teachers across the states have infused their pedagogies with the richness of local language and other cultural practices.

To satisfy my curiosity, I conducted a small survey, which I entitled "Basic Survey of Language Awareness." It arose from a concern about what happens when we add to the typical mixture of what to teach, how to teach it and how to assess it the messy business of who we are, whom we are teaching, and where we are teaching. What happens when teachers really don't know, even in general terms, who the students, their families, and their communities are, what their

values and priorities are, what their contemporary lives are really like, or what their dreams and expectations for them-

Differences across race, cultural practices, belief systems, language, class, and other categories are converging. . . . All of us need to operate flexibly across community boundaries more than ever before.

the communities in which they teach, their knowledge, and even their knowledge-gathering skills (as in Sheri's case), are likely not to rest on formal training but on the teachers' own capacity to see such knowledge as important and on their personal desires and energy to sustain a commitment to teach themselves. My sense was that BLRTN teachers, and by extension other teachers as well, rely on other life experiences and on their own ingenuity.

To be sure, the BLRTN program emphasizes teacher research, action research, and ethnographic techniques as useful strategies for teachers to learn more about their classrooms and about the communities around them. In BLRTN we assumed from the beginning that teachers could develop or enhance their information-gathering and interpretive skills within a community of teachers like themselves where such inquiries are deemed valuable. I began to wonder, however, how many BLRTN Fellows had come to the Network with direct training in language study since a

selves and their children might be? My sense of things was that American educational systems are probably overly dependent on bold, courageous, and adventurous teachers, like the teachers in BLRTN, rather than on the levels of preparation in language and culture study that contemporary teachers are likely to need.

I divided the survey into three sections:

In Section One teachers indicated the courses (undergraduate and graduate) that they had completed in nine specific areas of English language study, with the option also of identifying other areas either directly or indirectly related to their language training.

In Section Two, they indicated on a 5-point scale the extent to which they felt prepared (defined as "comfortable and confident") to engage in a range of classroom and curricular activities.

In Section Three, they drew inferences from their own responses for teacher training or professional

(continued on next page)

Teaching Away from Home

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development for developing language abilities—given the types of classrooms that they have personally come to know.

All 26 new members of BLRTN in 1996 completed the survey. The findings in Section One were not surprising. There were no courses in the study of English as a *language* that they *all* had completed as part of their *formal* training. Several types of courses were reported, but only three were completed by 15 (57%): Introduction to Linguistics, Grammatical Analysis, and The Teaching of the English Language (with some teachers confirming in follow-up conversations that they confused this *language*-focused course with a more general methods course on the teaching of English). Other courses were well below this 57% figure, not reaching more than 10%.

At both undergraduate and graduate levels, the teachers listed foreign languages, writing, rhetoric, and communications; ESL and teaching students with limited English proficiency; workshops and short courses of various kinds; and life experiences. At the graduate level, there was less consistency. I detected no patterns of training that corresponded adequately to the needs of contemporary classrooms.

The self-reported rankings of comfort and confidence were also not particularly surprising since 83% of the teachers felt prepared to develop their students' language abilities (15%—well prepared; 41%—prepared; 27%—moderately prepared; 17%—under/unprepared). While I wondered about nuances here, even more instructive were the items about which teachers felt less comfortable and confident. Five of the 11 items seem to deserve closer scrutiny, related generally to: incorporating a respect for and knowledge of language variety into classroom pedagogy in a sound way; sequencing classroom activities; using community knowledge

and practice in the classroom; and working across disciplines and across educational levels to build a language arts curriculum.

The clearest accounting of their concerns about such items came in Section Three where the teachers assessed and interpreted their own responses. Listed below are some of the inferences that they drew:

Very little of my understanding or ability has to do with my university experience.

I've learned to do some things, but I haven't been trained.

I think I answered the survey more on confidence than preparedness. I know the resources exist to pull these things off, but as far as being prepared for these lessons I'm unsure.

The teacher training I received gave me a good feel for language issues *for myself*, but did not prepare me to effectively discuss them with my students.

My formal education may be limited as a language arts teacher and I may be unfamiliar with some key vocabulary and phrases in academic theory, but I have communicated extensively, orally and in written form, among a variety of cultural backgrounds.

I don't think many English teachers are asked to take language/linguistics courses, which seems an obvious connection.

Although having limited (if any!) training, I've been able to use my experience as well as trial-and-error methods to adapt.

These preliminary data suggest a need for systematic study of the issues of training and professional development for teachers. What seems apparent is that despite the fact that language/literacy teaching will probably command a considerable amount of a con-

temporary teacher's time, training on the study of language and culture is likely to be varied and limited.

This conclusion does not set my mind at ease, certainly, but last summer the survey did have a positive impact in two ways. First, it promoted productive classroom discussion as we examined the material conditions of what it means "to work well" as a teacher. Second, it encouraged discussion among Bread Loaf Writing Program faculty in planning courses for 1997 and beyond. There was a third impact, however, that I had not anticipated. This latter connection happened a few months later when the "Ebonics" issue reemerged in the media and was discussed by BLRTN Fellows on BreadNet.

With the reemergence of old passions around African American vernacular English, or Ebonics, as it is currently being called, I saw yet another contemporary connection between the need for teacher training in language and culture and the need to view learning as a community-sensitive enterprise. Beyond that, however, I was struck particularly by the amount of cultural and linguistic knowledge that this society has quite simply not internalized over the last thirty years.

I see the Ebonics issue in this way. First, I give the Oakland School Board the benefit of the doubt and assume that they are making an earnest effort to act responsibly by responding to a history of school failure for a significant portion of their school population. Apparently, they recognize a specific disconnection between the language of schooling and the "home" language (i.e. Ebonics) of many, if not all, of their students in this group. The dilemma that the Board faces seems, in fact, all too typical of communities where there are significant social, economic, political, and cultural divides between school and community. The Board's imperative is to find ways to bridge communicative gaps, to cross sociocultural boundaries that have become (or perhaps have always been) deeply entrenched and often highly politicized, and to create

a space that would permit students to learn and to achieve. Because these educational imperatives are so embedded in social, economic, political, and cultural issues, the language and literacy issues inevitably become conflated with them.

Second, linguists and others have known for many decades that language varies across communities, even contiguous ones, and that this variety does not exist on a continuum with "inferiority" at one end and "superiority" at the other. All varieties (or dialects) of a language, any language, are equal. Each dialect is a rule-governed language *system*, not an arbitrary collection of slang terms, and each is capable (by means of its systems—phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantic) of supporting the expressive and communicative needs of the group of people who speak it. Speaking one dialect, or variation of a language, rather than another is not at all linked to cognitive ability or to personal virtue, or a lack thereof.

Problems in language use arise in two particular ways. One is when the speakers of a dialect are people who are not privileged in terms of social status, economics, or political power and influence, and whose language, because of their lack of status, becomes socially stigmatized. Another is when the speakers in such a community actually cross boundaries to participate in other communities, crossings that may be symbolized by geography perhaps (a bridge, railroad track, or street, for example) but that in fact represent crossings of social, political, economic, racial, and cultural barriers.

In coming to school, Ebonics-speaking students (especially those who have not already developed some language flexibility) are called upon to cross several boundaries in order to participate successfully in school activities. What they often, if not typically, find is that schools are simply not well prepared to facilitate these crossings by meeting them at critical points for support along the way.

Third, the fundamental goals in language and literacy development require that we help each child to extend his or her range of language flexibility in speaking, writing, analysis, and interpretation. A flexible range enhances the likelihood that each child can indeed operate effectively, comfortably, and confidently across many communicative contexts. I explicitly place the Ebonics issue as part and parcel of this basic challenge. We shouldn't be overly distracted by the intricacies of the sociopolitical issues in which the Ebonics issue is embedded, for the educational dimensions of it resonate clearly with the most basic questions that exist for schools nationwide: how do we create a space in which students can learn? How can we help them to extend the range of their flexibility as language users?

In this latter regard, I endorse the national language policy that was adopted some years ago by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (an organization within the National Council of Teachers of English). It sets an agenda for language education as a three-part process:

To provide resources to enable native and nonnative speakers to achieve oral and literate competence in English, the language of wider communication.

This part of the policy encourages us to help students to understand the goal of flexibility in language use and to enhance students' abilities to participate in literate practices across multiple sites, needs, and expectations.

To support programs that assert the legitimacy of native languages and dialects and ensure that proficiency in one's mother tongue will not be lost.

This part of the policy encourages us to respect the students and the communities from which they come, and it also encourages us to acknowledge and to find strategies for using the lan-

guage resources that our students have already developed as functioning members of a language group.

To foster the teaching of languages other than English so that native speakers of English can rediscover the languages of their heritage or learn a second language.

This dimension of the policy encourages educators and students to see that we are language users in a global context and that in the interest of many different sets of values (historical, social, economic, political, cultural, etc.) we can and should know languages other than our own.

Ultimately, I acknowledge that the world and its social and political relationships are changing. So too are the paradigms for what educational enterprises need to be. Experience over these four years has demonstrated that BLRTN Fellows have many stories to tell. We should tell them. My sense is that the linguistic and cultural knowledge and experience that we are building matters and that this work is adding significantly to a national conversation in which language, literacy, and learning, as complex *community-sensitive* enterprises, are of critical and passionate concern. ☛

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The Yup'ik Encyclopedia of the Paul T. Albert Memorial School

by *Hugh Dymont*

*Paul T. Albert Memorial School
Tununak, AK*

Tununak, an isolated Native Alaskan community situated on the coast of the Bering Sea, is located 500 miles due west of Alaska's largest city, Anchorage. We are also 500 miles from the nearest road. Our school district, the Lower Kuskokwim School District, serves approximately 3,000 students who live in 25 Yup'ik villages spread out over a region that is larger in area than the state of Ohio. The only way in or out of Tununak and these other villages is via small single-engine plane. During the summer, one can approach Tununak from the Bering Sea in a small skiff; during winter months it's possible to come over the tundra by snowmobile. The 330 residents of Tununak are Yup'ik Eskimo, and their ancestors have occupied this site for perhaps as long as 2,000 years. The village's economy and culture still revolve in many ways around subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering. The language spoken here is Yup'ik, and it has survived its struggle with Western culture in this century; other indigenous Alaskan languages have not been so lucky. Yup'ik is spoken by the majority of Yup'ik people here and is the first language of Tununak's children.

In spite of Tununak's cultural and geographical remoteness, as a teacher and guest here, I have a mandate from both my employer, the State of Alaska, and from Tununak parents to teach the skills that will help students interact with and prosper in the outside world. At the same time, I am also asked to help preserve the Yup'ik culture and language, for there is a fear among many community members that the increasing tide of Western educational, economic, and media

influences will inundate and dilute the Yup'ik culture.

How to balance these two mandates without doing disservice to either is a recurring question among school staff, parents, and community members. The discussion about which language and culture should be given priority in the school has not always promoted harmony between various groups of parents who hold conflicting visions of their children's futures. A parent who dreams, for example, that his or her child will attend college expects and demands a significantly different education from the one who wishes for his or her child to remain in the village living a subsistence lifestyle. As a teacher, I must somehow try to satisfy these diverging expectations.

The most significant result of these debates at the district level is that we now provide a bilingual education for our students. In direct contrast to the previous 40 years of educational practice that called for total English immersion during school hours, my school district now believes that the best way to promote strong skills

in English is to develop and build upon the students' first language. Thus, children in grades K-3 learn primarily in Yup'ik, and English is taught as a second language in increasing amounts in each grade. By the time a student is in high school, however, the ratio of Yup'ik to English instruction is reversed; that is, one period is devoted to Yup'ik and the rest of the student's classes are taught in English. This arrangement seems to satisfy most parents because it prepares children to participate in the "outside world" at the same time that it enables them to develop their primary language and participate in and contribute to their unique culture.

A product of this institutional change is the Yup'ik Encyclopedia project, a school-wide enterprise involving all 90 of our K-12 students. We are creating a bilingual, multimedia encyclopedia of Yup'ik knowledge, skills, stories and lore, and we are storing it on CD-ROM. This encyclopedia will serve as an archive of the knowledge of Yup'ik elders, and will be offered as the foundation for a language curriculum in other Yup'ik



Hugh Dymont of Paul T. Albert Memorial School



Yup'ik youth and elders working together on fishing nets . . .

schools. While we hope the encyclopedia will be an important resource in the Lower Kuskokwim School District, we know that the skills learned during the process of creating it will be as important as the product itself. These skills include planning, researching, organizing, writing, revising, and designing, all of which prepare Yup'ik children to participate in the global society. At the same time, these students are learning and, in fact, documenting a record of Yup'ik culture.

This project grew out of what had been our annual Yup'ik Arts Week. During this week, regular classes were suspended and students instead spent the time with community elders doing various hands-on projects, such as constructing a boat, building fish traps, or sewing ceremonial fur clothing. While students found Yup'ik Arts Week was a welcome break from the weekly grind of classes, it left the school staff and Tununak elders dissatisfied. Many in the community felt that the Yup'ik Arts Week was simply an exercise in arts and crafts; they felt that more rigorous instruction in Yup'ik language and culture was needed. And while the elders welcomed the chance to be in the school, they, too, felt that their role in the school and their contribution to the children could be much larger than

simply teaching a manual skill. Specifically, elders wanted a chance to fulfill their traditional role of being teachers by instructing the youth in the community in certain Yup'ik traditions. They wanted to instruct the children in *yuyaraq*, the Yup'ik way of "being."

Tununak's Yup'ik Encyclopedia project seeks to meet the interests of all. This school-wide project has evolved into a year-round course for all students. During these classes, which are conducted in Yup'ik, students meet with elders to work on a series of projects. Projects have included listening to and transcribing traditional stories and formal lectures related to *yuyaraq*, skinning and preparing mink skins for clothing and the fur market, preparing and mending salmon nets, sewing fur clothing, and traversing the tundra to set winter fish traps.

One of the goals of the project is that Yup'ik students will use their language, cus-

oms, and instructional time with elders in a manner that has an academic purpose. The students are learning to master Yup'ik vocabulary, to write in Yup'ik, and to develop translation skills. We also believe that this class teaches and preserves the local knowledge, traditional skills and customs, and community values that the community feels are important. All interactions with Tununak elders are recorded in written notes, on videotape, or in digital photography, so students are learning advanced technical skills as well. Students at all grade levels are becoming adept users of sophisticated database programs with multimedia presentation features. Students are also learning techniques of converting video to digital images, manipulating digital photographs, and organizing this information into computer presentations.

The class has been a success in Tununak because it combines the educational interests of everyone in the school and community. We've struggled to emphasize the right balance of manual, academic and cultural skills, and we think we are getting closer to the best curriculum for our students. An unexpected and extremely important outcome of the project has been the heightened interaction among students, teachers and elders. By working together, the teachers and elders have learned, in small positive steps, to understand each other and have grown in willingness to support each other's goals. ☺



. . . and traditional Yup'ik clothing

Unity and Diversity in an American Classroom

by Sheri Skelton
Shishmaref School
Shishmaref, AK

Each fall the Chukchi Sea claims a portion of the island of Sarichef in northwestern Alaska, and the village of Shishmaref, which is located on the island, finds itself closer to the sea. Residents watch the waves threaten to wash away land, *initaqs* (wooden meat-drying racks), and even some homes. Worn-out refrigerators, Hondas, and snow machines are dumped along the bluffs in an effort to reduce erosion, and discussions about moving the village to the mainland flourish. But when winter silences the pounding of the waves and the ocean is transformed into a frozen expanse of white, the island seems to expand in size, and the danger of falling into the sea is forgotten. Shishmaref survives.

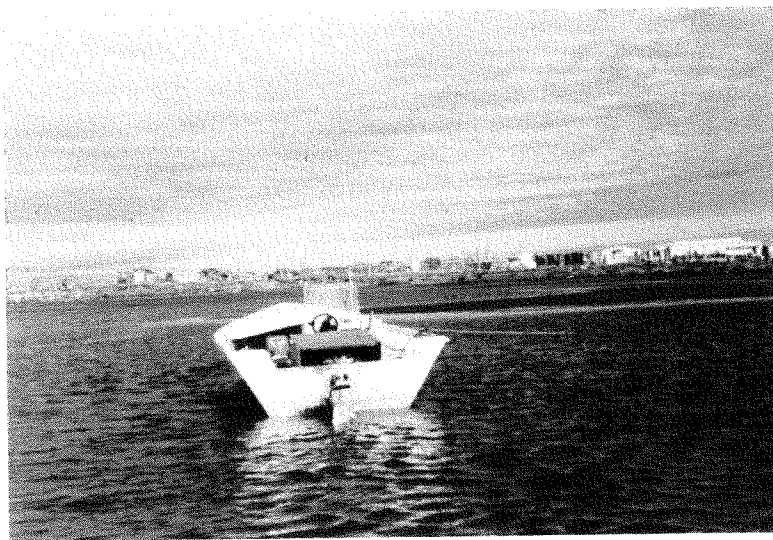
What appears to be a fragile island with an uncertain existence is inhabited by a people who are anything but delicate. On the surface, life seems uncomplicated here, composed of the simple tasks of chopping wood, getting ice for water, fishing, and hunting for seals or moose. But these are actually difficult and complex tasks in an environment where their successful completion could mean the difference between life and death.

The Eskimo culture is based on a traditional subsistence life-style, which involves harvesting game and fish and collecting plants and berries. Subsistence continues to be the predominant

way of life in this region, and the teaching of survival skills and creating a bond among residents are emphasized in the extended family. In the spring, hunters must harvest *oogruck* or bearded seals, essential to the life-style of the island's residents. *Oogrucks* are a source of meat and oil, processed by putting seal blubber in seal skin pokes and burying them in the ground. Seal oil is a dietary staple and is also used as a meat preservative. The hides of the seal are made into slippers, mukluks, mittens, or rope. Spring is the best time to hunt seals as they move north along the beach. They frequently bask on top of the ice in the warm sunshine, a less risky place to shoot them, as they tend to sink rapidly and become lost if shot in the water. But spring also brings tricky and treacherous ice conditions. A hunter venturing too far out on the ice may find the ice closing in behind him, making it difficult or impossible to return to shore. When the tide comes in, the ice pack tightens; when the tide goes out, the ice pack loosens, and wind increases the danger. A hunter must know the currents and the tides.

The subsistence life-style has endured in Shishmaref despite contact with nonnative people and the introduction of a cash economy. One elder recently told me the first English word he learned—at the age of three—was “dollars,” which he picked up from a nonnative fur trapper buying furs from the local people. The nonnative people who have lived in Shishmaref have been teachers and preachers, whose aim has been to impose their values and life-style upon the Inupiaq people. One significant change that did occur was that the Inupiaq eventually settled around the missions and schools established in Shishmaref, rather than remain in smaller, scattered settlements. The Inupiaq have absorbed some elements of the nonnative culture into their everyday living, stocking their stores with “white-man food” and replacing dog teams with snow machines for transportation. The Inupiaq people have watched patiently as white teachers have come and gone, adapting to each new wave of educators in the fall.

Hunting and gathering skills are passed down from one generation to the next. Basic techniques and beliefs have not changed. When a hunter kills a seal, he pours water into the mouth of the seal to ensure that the soul of the animal will continue to live, and as a hunter he will continue to thrive. Elders are revered and respected for their knowledge, and this respect for elders and for tradition ensures the survival of the community. Formal education or schooling succeeds in this rural



Technical subsistence skills, which produced this handcrafted boat moored in the Shishmaref Lagoon, are passed down from Inupiaq elders to youth.

area only to the extent that it embraces the values of the native people: it must be a commitment to and a continuation of the community. "How long are you going to stay?" ought not to be the first question asked by students of their teachers. Although an outside teacher can not assume the role of an elder in the village, he or she can share knowledge, teach skills, develop a mutual respect with students and village residents, and participate in the life of the community.

People in Shishmaref appreciate racial diversity. Because their exposure to different races has been limited to primarily Eskimo and white, they tend to see the world in light of those two

groups. Yet, "Eskimo" in Shishmaref does not denote simply the ethnic origin of a person. "Eskimo" also means a way of speaking and a way of living. My daughter Chelsea, who is blond and blue-eyed, is perceived in the village as a little Eskimo girl because, I believe, she has grown up in the village and has acquired many of the mannerisms and habits of the local residents.

One's acceptance into the community is not hindered by racial prejudice. Although the people may have beliefs about racial differences, these ideas are not automatically applied to nonnatives who come here. Each individual is assessed for his or her own unique characteristics.

The paradox of the connection between the individual and the community is an idea I have explored with my students. As part of an American Literature unit, we read an excerpt from "What Is an American?" an essay by Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman who immigrated as a farmer to New York in the eighteenth century. In the essay, Crèvecoeur defines an American as someone who has abandoned former prejudices and manners and has embraced a new life founded on the principles of freedom and the opportunity

to succeed through hard work. His outlook is optimistic, and he writes that in America "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men ... who will one day cause great change in the world." After reading Crèvecoeur, I ask my students to create a montage based on the question, "What is an American?" I also give them the option of answering instead the question, "What Is an Eskimo?" Interestingly, not one student in the six years I have been teaching here has opted for the Eskimo assignment, but yet they eagerly create their "American" montages. Their finished projects

reflect their definition of an American: someone who drives a luxurious car, eats pizza, plays basketball, watches television, and possesses credit cards. Their "American" is a far cry from Crèvecoeur's American of liberal principles, but it seems to incorporate his idea of opportunity and success (minus the hard work!). What I find most intriguing about the assignment is that my students so enthusiastically perceive themselves as Americans, though their perceptions essentially run counter to their own life-styles. Shishmaref is a cash-poor economy without luxurious cars or credit cards, and hard work is an absolute necessity here.

Technology is currently linking my students with students of different ethnic backgrounds in other places. This electronic connection not only enables students to develop a cultural awareness and to gain insight into life-styles different from their own, but it also allows them to see the similarities that exist between themselves and other people. The similarities, I believe, create the strongest bonds, enabling them to share in the vision of a united America made up of diverse peoples.

Unity and diversity are two concepts that would seem to be at

odds, yet in America they are successfully synthesized. This synthesis was recently made clear to me at a birthday party for a child in Shishmaref. In the village, a birthday is a special event. Hours of baking produce cakes, pies, and doughnuts, complemented with salmonberries and Jell-O, providing a tasty treat for a steady stream of friends and relatives who flow into the house to celebrate. At the party, a village elder sharing his place at the table with me said, "At one time we Eskimos could not sit at the table and watch white people eat. We had to look away. We thought we couldn't

speak English so good. We were so silly." He shook his head and

laughed and then repeated his comments in Inupiaq to include everyone in the room.

The elders in Shishmaref are mindful of preserving their culture and its relation to the land. Traditional hunting and gathering skills are passed down and practiced by each succeeding generation, but at the same time the elders have been flexible enough to incorporate elements of the nonnative culture into their life-style. Formal education in rural northwestern Alaska needs to be flexible also. Our schools need to include elements of Native Alaskan culture in the curriculum in order to ensure that children develop basic literacy skills while they learn their traditional survival skills. As a language arts teacher in Shishmaref, I am immersed in a culture that I use to help students learn communication skills, strengthening both. During the past six years, I have developed an abiding respect for the Inupiaq people of Shishmaref, and I am convinced that respect is the key to community and survival. In the words of one of the elders, "Living in Shishmaref requires a respect for elders, a respect for the beliefs and ideas of other people, and a respect for the polar bears that might wander into the village during the winter or spring." ❧

Unity and diversity are two concepts that would seem to be at odds, yet in America they are successfully synthesized.

Talkin' Proper

by Bette Ford
William Carey College
Hattiesburg, MS

My farthest-back memories are more of sight than sound. I see snatches of episodes first, but the sounds—the words—soon accompany them. Some of these remembered episodes create a maze of sight and sound: a cackle of chickens in the yard, or the chatter of adults and children during my frequent early-childhood visits with kinfolk in the country, where the yards were packed dirt. The talk there is sketchy in my memory. I can't hear my own voice, not even as I romped through the dust with the other children, but I can hear snatches of adult conversations (though we children weren't supposed to):

"O' man Tadum laid Jake off yistiddy."

"Hush yo mouf! Fuh whut?"

"I thank Jake gittin too feeble to han'l dem cross-ties."

"He been down wit 'is back off 'n' on for three or fo yeahs."

"Jake ain't ol' anuff fuh a penshun—wonda whut he guina do. Maebell don' make anuff up at Miss Pope's house to feed haf uh dem chillun."

"O' man Tadum seh he guina look out fuh 'im. Somebody sed de Railroad gittin redy to come out wit some kin' a new penshun fuh sic 'n' ol' foks. I jes hope we kin git it."

It occurs to me now that I probably spent a great deal of the first seven or eight years of my life eavesdropping on grown-up talk. This was before my three younger sisters were born, including twins. I soon got to play the grown-up with them, helping my mother, especially after our father died, leaving her a widow at twenty-eight years old. I loved talking grown-up to my sisters then (sometimes I still do, though I'm sure they don't love it).

But my early talk may have been a little more "proper," as they

called it then, since my mother's accent and usage approached "proper" and since I spent three or four summers with aunts, uncles, and cousins "up north," where all our people were supposed to have talked "proper." (It occurred to me many years later, probably during a high school grammar lesson, that the "proper" way to say this was actually "properly.") Considering my total language environment before I was school age—including the Baptist church, where I'm still a member, my playmates, and the old neighbors such as Mr. Frank and Miss Rosetta, who told us ghost stories and took us blackberry picking—it is quite evident that I heard more "not-so-proper" talk.

Quite often, before I was school-age, I walked to Miss Isabel's house with my mother where she worked as a maid. I don't remember much talk at Miss Isabel's, except that she pronounced iron "arn" and fire "far." Miss Isabel and Mr. Logan—who drove his car through our neighborhood every week, the rear end sagging with chenille bedspreads, curtains, and couch covers to sell to the "gals" (as he referred to women in our neighborhood)—were probably the first white-skinned people I knew.

Then I went to school. At that time, of course, schools in Mississippi were segregated, and all my teachers and administrators were, in the par-

lance of those times, "colored." At school most of our teachers taught "proper" English by the book. I soon determined that the up-north and textbook version of the *proper* were not necessarily the same. From the primers at our school we read aloud, "Sally runs fast. See Sally run." Now we children were "getting it right" at school—from the teachers and the books. Yet everyday and every weekend we went back to our homes and our yards and our churches, where most of us continued talkin' dat talk.

At our elementary school, each grade held an annual school closing program. This was a big community event. I remember having lead roles in plays. In the third grade play, I was Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*; in the fourth, I played Becky Thatcher in *Tom Sawyer*. I'm sure that during that time it was difficult to find plays about African American children. It's still not that easy. I remember how proud I was to be the star—and how eager I was to say the lines right:

"Where are you going in such a great hurry, White Rabbit?"

"Tom, you cut out those she-nanigans!"

I remember snatches of talk as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and costumed schoolchildren walked home from these programs:

"Dem chillun sho done a good job."



Bette Ford discussing writing with two of her students:
Demetra Dawkins and Yariela Rodriguez

"Shonuff day did! An' dat lil ol' Bette!—Dat school teacher didn't hafta tell huh none a dem lines."

"Yeah—and she talk so propah, too!"

Not all the time, though. At home, where we shook the limbs of chinaberry trees for "peas" to play cooking, caught minnows from high-water ponds in our back yards, "hopped-scotch" with broken pieces of colored glass, and played hide 'n' seek around all the houses and trees in the block, I was not quite so proper:

Last night, night befo'
Twenty-fo' robbers at my do'
I got up, let 'em in
Hit 'em inna head wid a rollin'
pen.
Y'all hid?

I also read at home. By the time I was nine, I could walk the mile to our little "branch" of the town's public library. It took up about four shelves in a corner of a room in our community center. I can't remember the books I checked out of the library then, but I know some of them contained poetry by Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar. I don't remember talking to anyone about what I read from books in our library. I wonder if that's why my memories of them are so scant.

Music was always talking to me, though—at home, school, and at church. We played the radio a lot. Monday through Friday the announcers (I don't think they called them DJs then) on the pop stations played:

Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream.
Make him the cutest that I've ever seen.
Give him two lips like roses in clover,
And tell him that his lonely nights are over.

Every now and then they'd insert a little "cultured" *colored* music into the popular mix, such as Nat King Cole's "Mona Lisa."

Sometimes we heard country music, too, like Hank Williams:

Your cheatin' heart
Will make you weep.
You'll cry 'n' cry
'N' try to sleep;
But sleep won't come
The whole night through.
Your cheatin' heart
Will tell on you.

On Saturday afternoons, one of the stations donated an hour to rhythm and blues. I remember Big Joe Turner hollering, "Shake, rattle and roll" and Ruth Brown wailing, "Mama, he treats your daughter mean."

We sang a lot, too—my mother, my sisters and I—but mostly at home, along with the popular, country, and rock and roll artists. Then on Sunday mornings before church, we'd harmonize with the gospel quartet called the "Worthy Four" during their 15-minute radio broadcast.

At church we'd sing some children's songs in Sunday school, such as "Yes, Jesus Loves Me," and during worship service, we began with hymns usually led by a deacon.

Deacon: I love the Lord. He heard my cry . . .

Congregation: (slower and dragging) I love the Lord. He heard my cry . . .

Deacon: And pitied ev'ry groan.

Congregation: And pitied ev'ry groan.

Deacon: Long as I live, when trouble rise . . .

Congregation: Long as I live, when trouble rise . . .

Deacon: I'll has'en to his throne.

Congregation: I'll has'en to his throne.

They continue to sing that hymn at my church today, and the same deacon who led it when I was a child still leads it. I appreciate those words today much more than I did when I was in elementary school, just as now I appreciate the language of Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling, and James Weldon Johnson, whose work I first encountered in high school. We had to memorize some of the poems and recite them aloud:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments.
Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds. . . .

And:

If you can keep your head when those about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
And make allowances for their doubting, too . . .
You'll be a man, my son.

(I don't remember when I began internalizing *woman* and *daughter* in Kipling's poem.)

And:

And God stepped out on space and said,
'T'm lonely; I'll make me a man. . . .

I still know most of the words of these poems, and some from Poe and Henley, too. However, except for Phillis Wheatley, I can't recall reading female authors in high school, though surely I must have. Maybe we just didn't talk much about them or memorize them.

I was a junior in high school when we got our first television. This modern miracle made a big difference in our household talk. We sat around laughing as Minnie Pearl called to us from the Grand Ol' Opry stage: "Howdeee! I'm jes so proud ta be here!" In a way, she reminded me of Miss Isabel, the woman my mother used to work for. Amos and Andy were among our other early television talk models, though we did not know any real people who sounded like either of them.

It must have been during this same period of my youth that my fascination with slang began. Across

(continued on page 16)

Las Tareas

by Alfredo Celedon Lujan
Pojoaque Middle School
Pojoaque, NM

They've sprung forward. The rainbow-colored flowers have bloomed. They're tulips and roses and irises and lilacs. They're apple, apricot, and pear blossoms. They're red, violet, lavender, white, pink, yellow, and orange. They're blue wildflowers and Indian paintbrush. They're dark, and they blush. They've been in our gardens all along.

They're children. Their indigenous language may or may not be English. They're dark-haired, dark-skinned, and brown-eyed. They're blond, fair-skinned, and blue-eyed. They're rural. They pitch hay and feed the animals. They plow the fields, plant, and harvest crops. They go fishing. They work with a pick 'n' shovel. They chop wood. They fix cars. They smoke salmon. They hunt. They collect sap. They snow ski. They dig ditches. They build fences. They're wealthy with work ethic, biculturalism, and bilingualism. They're multit talented. They're native. And they're migrant. They may have an accent. They might be "different."
¡Qué viva la diferencia!

They're in our classrooms and gymnasiums and on our playing fields. They're there to stay. It's certain. They are in the mainstream. How do teachers and coaches navigate the mainstream? We get the most from each student and athlete regardless of his or her cultural background. We teach them to read, write, listen, speak. Pass, dribble, shoot, catch. Teamwork. We promote literacy and court awareness—agile minds and fluid movements. Rhythm.

We sell integrity and lifelong learning to our pupils. We want the student to love herself. We ask the young man to respect himself. We affirm their individuality, their culture. We encourage our students to do it their way, to follow their hearts, to probe their intellects and optimize their talents. We're trained in early childhood and adolescent behavior, so we know these students come to us with prior knowledge. They're experts too. So why not ask them to write about *acequias*?

¿Acequias? Acequias (ah-say'-kee-ahs) are irrigation ditches in northern New Mexico. The Land of Enchantment is a colorful but arid state. Our primary water source is the Rio Grande. Every other river, stream, *riito*, and brook is a tributary to the Big River, *acequias* included. The irrigation ditches are diverted from the larger *ríos*. Every spring the *parciantes* (land owners who have water rights) send a *peón* (laborer) to clean the ditch for the spring runoff and irrigation in all the villages and pueblos up north. The *acequia* needs to be cleaned so the flow of water is unobstructed. If there's debris in the ditch when the water begins to run, it backs up and washes out the bank, flooding a house, garden, or backyard. If the debris isn't cleaned out, the water pushes it down through the *caños* (culverts) and clogs them up. Maintaining the irrigation ditches has been a ritual in this part of the United States for hundreds of years. There are usually 30 to 50 *peónes* who clean a ditch that winds itself through the community. It takes the whole day.

Early on a Saturday morning the *peónes* assemble at the *presa*, the mouth of the ditch. The *peónes* are the sons



Photo by Nicole Ortiz

Alfredo Lujan with students at the acequia

and grandsons, and lately the daughters and granddaughters, of the *parciantes*. The *peónes* are 14-year-old boys, 18-year-old men, those in mid-life, 70-year-old elders, and once in a while there are a couple of girls. They are engineers, iron workers, retirees, lab technicians, dairy farmers, *chile* growers, students, teachers, bums, entrepreneurs, lawyers, legal and illegal aliens, winos, and politicians. Some *peónes* are independently hired by landowners whose own children are in college, or whose kids are too lazy or educated to work with the shovel (the tradition of hard work fades faster than an indigenous language). They drink coffee from their thermoses as they wait for the *mayordomo* to start calling roll.

El mayordomo is the foreman, *el jefe*, the main man. In recent years there have been *mayordamas* too. The *mayordomo(a)* holds the list of landowners who draw water from the *acequia*. As he calls the names off, the *peónes* respond, "*presente*," "yo," "here"—just like a classroom. As the roster is called every *peón* gets a number that represents a *tarea*, or section that needs to be cleaned. The total number is then given to the *rayador*, a man who carries a hoe or shovel on the bank. He takes one step and extends the length of the hoe or shovel to make a *raya* (mark) on the ditch bank. From one *raya* to another is a *tarea*. As the *rayador* marks the *tareas*, he calls the *peónes'* numbers: "*uno... dos... tres... cuatro...*"—as many *tareas* as there are *peónes*. Each *peón* jumps into the ditch when his *tarea* is called, and he begins cleaning it out, squaring the banks, chopping the dead grass that hangs into the ditch, scraping the bed of his *tarea* clear of loose sand, rocks, broken beer bottles, tin cans, clumps of dirt, trash, paper sacks, diapers, plastic bags, Styrofoam cups, and anything that can obstruct the flow of the water.

One's *tarea* is the luck of the draw. Sometimes it's a simple section of ditch, but other times there are cottonwood roots to be chopped, silt to be dug out, or weeds to be burned. One of the worst things a *peón* can hear is "*Una clavada y una limpiada*." Ugh! That command means he has to dig one

spade length down. That is hard-core digging—not just cleaning. That *tarea* is penance for every sin the *peón* has ever committed; that *tarea* is for the *peón* who hasn't yet broken a sweat; that *tarea* is for the *peón* who is hungover; that *tarea* is the hand blister, mister.

The *peón* usually does a good job for two reasons: (1) he or she is proud of the work; and (2) the *mayordomo* or the *rayador* comes back to inspect. There is no fate worse than having one of those wise old birds call you back to your *tarea*. They make you get back into the ditch and admonish you from the bank with scathing sarcasm. This is work for the community, and mediocrity is not tolerated. It's just like school.

Students won't write about *acequias* if they don't live in northern New Mexico, of course. But any community and its customs can provide a rich and satisfying source of subjects for students to write about. If there aren't *acequias* in the community, there are other rituals and other kinds of work at which the students are masters. I know this from my communication with other teachers on BreadNet. Scott Christian says everyone goes down to the river to check the ice as it breaks up on the Kuskokwim Delta in Bethel, Alaska, and many of the villagers migrate to the fish camp, anticipating the salmon run. Carol Zuccaro tells me the teenagers go "muddin'" in their pickup trucks in New England. Mary Burnham in Vermont says the kids are "sapping" or "sugaring" during the early spring when maple syrup is made. From southern New Mexico, Wendy Beserra reports that *los cebolleros* are planting *bolitas* (bulbs) of onions, y *los chileros* are placing tiny green *chile* starters in the fields. In Farmington, Vicki Holmsten's Navajo student writes about her family's spring planting "in harmony with the earth."

Indigenous, colloquial languages are tied closely to the work ethic of a community. Our students are the language users. They're the experts. They're the writers; that's their *tarea*. ☘

Digging Ditches

Digging ditches has been done in my family for as long as I can remember. It has been done in our community for many generations. Digging ditches is something my dad and brother do when the time comes. My routine is to take them lunch. Getting the sandwiches and a jug of ice-cold water is my duty for the day. When I am done making the lunches, I set off to find them—going up the path, following the ditch, searching for them. In the distance, I hear the shovels banging against rocks, gravel, and ground. I know I am to be there soon. I now see the men.

The men talk as they put all their might into their shovels, taking the dirt out of the ditch. They talk in their languages, the languages they grew up with: *Español*, *Inglés* and Tewa. The men are busy getting the ditch clean and ready for irrigation time. My dad smiles as I give him a ham sandwich special-made with jalapeños, and the water with a squirt of lemon juice, just the way he likes it. I give my brother his turkey sandwich and a bag of potato chips. I pat my brother's *cabeza* as I leave. I know he is young, but he loves to do manly jobs. In fact, he feeds my uncle's ten *caballos* every day. He works hard for his age.

I walk back to my house, knowing they will soon be home for dinner. They'll go to bed, and wake up tomorrow to another day of hard work, another day of sweat, manual labor, and dry throats throbbing for ice-cold water. ☘

Monica Duran
El Rancho, NM

Language's Landscape of the Mind

by Janet Tracy
Rampart School
Rampart, AK

I live in Rampart, Alaska, a tiny Koyukon/Athabaskan village on the banks of the Yukon River, 100 miles northwest of Fairbanks. The village has a population of 45 including the 14 children who attend the school where I teach. Because most of the young people eventually leave, the village is becoming smaller, just a shadow of the lively mining town it once was. As a gold-mining boomtown in the late 1800's, Rampart filled with white prospectors dreaming of the mother lode. Eventually, as the prospecting interests fell off, Rampart saw the miners head down the river for other deposits discovered near Nome.

The departing miners left behind log shacks that still dot the hills on the south side of the river, a decaying testimony to their brief stay here. A few men married Native Alaskan women from upriver and settled into the subsistence life-style that is practiced here to this day. After the prospectors left, the Koyukon people moved from their homes on the north side of the river to the camp abandoned by the miners, built their own cabins, and followed the seasons, hunting for bear and moose, fishing for salmon, and trapping fur-bearing animals for the cash they brought at spring rendezvous.

Travel up and down the river was always lively, linking the villages of Beaver, Tanana, Fort Yukon, Stevens, and Minto. A commingling of separate peoples ensued: the Koyukon people intermingled with the Gwich'in Athabaskan and the Inupiaq Eskimo who lived upriver, and with the white men already in Rampart. Although a culturally diverse people, these people retained their heritage and still refer to themselves proudly as Koyukon.



Janet Tracy at Bread Loaf, Vermont

With the blending of cultures, the use of the Koyukon language fell off and English became the primary language of the area. The Koyukon world view, however, remains intimately connected to and defined by the cycle of seasons, the land, and the Yukon River. Even common words such as "break-up," "woodsman," "smoke-house," and "salmon" speak not only to the object but to the beliefs, rituals, and survival of the tribe.

The powerful links between language, thought, and experience were never so clear to me as during an

incident last fall. During the warm autumn days, it had been truly difficult to remain inside the school building all day, and my eight students often became fidgety. In exasperation one afternoon I said, "Everyone go outside and take a walk around the block, and don't come back until you have used up some of your energy!" They went out the back door, and I sat down at my desk to grade a few papers. About fifteen minutes later I heard a tentative knock at the door. Annoyed, I went to the door and said, "What is it?"

"Ms. Tracy, a small voice said, "What is a *block*?" I opened the door and little Jenifer stood there. "I don't know where you want me to go," she said.

Where are the others?" I asked.

I found out that Jesse walked to the airport; Shane and Russell went downhill to the river; the older girls were circling around the school building, and Jenifer had stood by the door wondering where to go. Embarrassed, I let her inside and waited for the

others to return. When everyone came back, I apologized and explained what I'd meant by "block," that it was an urban landscape concept. We all had a good laugh about my "unclear" instructions. Now when someone in our class is confused or doesn't know what he or she is doing, we jokingly say he or she is "walking around the block."

I myself have spent much of my first year in Rampart "walking around the block" as I learn about my students' culture and the way they use language. In teaching English here, I've learned to use the distinctive lan-

guage that my students bring to the classroom. Their language often centers around the environment and reflects a strong sense of place.

At no time is this distinctive language more lively and beautiful than when my students write stories or poems about their lives in this place. They had the opportunity to share these stories when we participated in an on-line conference on BreadNet, the electronic conferencing system provided to me by the Bread Loaf School of English. Knowing their stories would go on-line, my students wrote, revised, and edited their work until it met their own high standards. I never had to require that they do this; the peer audience was motivation enough.

The first line of Jenifer Woods' story — "Up the river and around the bend my dad and Willie shot a moose" — will likely remain one of the most memorable, elegant, and poetic opening lines to a student story I will ever read. For my students, "up the river and around the bend" lies a world that shapes their language and provides worthy subjects for speculation: an eagle on a stump as ravens circle overhead; a fish wheel turning slowly, harvesting salmon to feed the teams of dogs through the winter; ice floes crowding thunderously in the

river. Discovering what is in the landscape, in the culture, and in the heart of the people encourages the best descriptive writing from my students.

Yet when I arrived in Rampart, my students were reluctant to write because of previous punitive writing experiences with teachers. To encourage them to write, I tried a writing exercise modeled on a poem by N. Scott Momaday in which he describes the landscape as he imagines his ancestors might have seen it generations ago. To begin, we went outside in the morning as the thermometer dipped to minus 28. A tenacious frost clung to brittle tree limbs. The sky was a crisp blue, and the river was suspended in ice. We "walked around the block," taking notes. Later, in the classroom, we began to write the first stanza slowly, carefully describing how the morning may have looked to the ancient Koyukon:

First Child
Witness:
the Yukon
sparkles
with ice;
the valley
whispers
with grass.
Forget-me-nots
are fading

on mountains
that shine
and resist
the snow.
Spruce
perfume
the air
and land.

At dusk
the Koyukon
village
postpones
in silence;
the fox is fastened
in his
den.
Moonshine
strikes
the creek,
the sparkling
frozen ice
of Rampart Creek.

In anticipation of sharing this poem on-line with students in rural Arizona and New Mexico, my students worked for hours, consulting the thesaurus to find the right word, arguing vehemently over whether a fox can indeed be "fastened" in its den in the winter, and discussing how to describe the ice freezing slowly on the river or the creeping of sunlight down the bluffs as the sun rises over the mountains.

The only creatures we observed that morning were the coal-black ravens perched high in the bare branches of a birch tree. Why were they there, we wondered, and what were they waiting for? It was striking to observe my students intellectually engaged in describing their observations so their peers in Arizona could imagine a black raven against the stark white winter sky of an Alaskan morning. Proud of their poem and secure that it would meet with an appreciative audience, we posted it on BreadNet, and invited others to use our poem as a model to write a poem about their landscape. We received an immediate response from students in



Janet Tracy's students in Rampart, Alaska, on Election Day, 1996

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Language's Landscape...

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Arizona and New Mexico, each poem a distillation of culture and place. In Arizona, Kevin McNulty's students at Calabasas Middle School wrote:

First human,
attend:
The desert
shimmers
with sunlight;
los cuervos
vuelan en el aire.
The wind blows
the dust devils,
the earth
changes as
the sun
screams
across the
sky.
The birds
are flying
in the sky.
The cactus
stands at
attention
as the sun
gives them
orders.

Sylvia Saenz' students at Sierra Vista Middle School in Arizona wrote:

At sunrise
humming birds
flutter and
fly
toward
ocotillo blossoms
where dew drops
sprinkle
the petals.
Tumbleweeds
sprout
and reach.
Colors
emerge
and glow
at dawn.

Emily Graeser's students from Twin Buttes High School in New Mexico wrote:

The First
Zuni Indian
looks upon
the earth
and sees
glittering
sand and rocks.
The sky
glistens
with rain.
Sand
is blown
in the winds
that low
and lean
upon
mountains.

Yucca plants
glow
on the soft
desert mesa.
Evergreens
blacken
the slopes
of Zuni.

In these poems, my students noted the images and colors of the desert, the lyrical sound of the Spanish language, and the personification of place: a sun so hot it must scream; a cactus standing at attention. They noted the diverse elements in the landscapes, and after several readings, my students ran to encyclopedias and other books in our library to find images to accompany the unfamiliar words in the poems. The language of our peers in the Southwest seemed as exotic as the desert itself. "Tumbleweed," "yucca," and "ocotillo," so common in the parlance of the Southwest, are for us linguistic gems which we've incorporated into our conversation—simply for the fun of using new language and creating new images. Most important, we learned that the English language is as rich and varied as the landscape of America. We've begun to learn that understanding differences among cultures starts with acknowledging and appreciating linguistic diversity. We've begun to understand that language is the tool with which we create our world view and interpret the world views of others. ☘

Talkin' Proper

(continued from page 11)

the years, the same meanings have acquired different slang expressions: *I can dig it, I'm hip, I know what's happening, I know what time it is; groovy, right on, cool; coolin' it, cool out, chill out.* I still like slang. But someone told me it's not always proper.

I think I've always written in the "proper" language. In high school, I did a little writing. I also remember

conjugating verbs and diagramming sentences. Our tenth grade teacher devoted the whole year to diagramming. I still remember the book. It was called *Sentence Structure Visualized*. I was pretty good at diagramming. I made A's in the class.

In most of our high school classes, the teachers talked to us, and a few even invited us to talk with them. Some of them corrected the talk we brought from our homes, churches, and

playgrounds—even while we were in mid-sentence they corrected us. Other teachers let us bring the language of our homes and churches and playgrounds to school.

I have continued going from my home, church, and playground to school, and the words from all these places still speak to me. They always will, for they all hold *proper* places in my head and in my heart. Through all these words, I have been taught. ☘

Uncovering Differences across Classroom Learning Cultures with Telecommunications

by Tom McKenna

Benjamin Franklin

International School

Barcelona, Spain

The word “community” is probably one of the most misleading terms in pedagogical literature. Facile discussion of “classroom community” tends to mask the multiple and, at times, competing cultures that exist there. As we structure telecommunications exchanges to link classrooms, and thus enlarge our classroom “communities,” we have an additional obligation—and a corresponding opportunity—to acknowledge conflicts that reveal the customs of our own classroom cultures. Although the national obsession with multicultural education has initiated valuable reforms, the heavy-handed approaches of some prepackaged curricula often ignore the subtle cultures that form within our own classrooms. In this article, I would like to examine a conflict that occurred between students using telecommunications to exchange their writing. The incident reveals the distinct expectations about quality, process, and audience in writing that participating students derived from their respective classroom cultures. As my own experience with telecommunications projects increases, I’m beginning to see a pattern in what I had previously registered as isolated experiences. To what extent, I wonder, do we unwittingly position students to create partial and distorted representations of their exchange partners?

The exchange took place in February of 1996 between my tenth and eleventh grade students at Unalaska High School in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska and Robert Baroz’s students of the same age at Champlain Valley Union (CVU), a regional high school in rural Vermont. While my

students were beginning their second semester of a writing-for-publication course which produced a monthly literary magazine, Rob’s students had just convened for the semester. Our goal was to publish a series of collaborative, student-edited literary magazines. Rob and I agreed that the first of the monthly publications would be edited by a team of my students.

The process of developing pieces, as I had adapted it from Ken Macrorie at Bread Loaf, began with intensive freewriting. Students wrote five freewrites per week and chose one of those each week to refine, shape, and submit to a group of four student-editors who would choose the most promising submissions. The editors would then, under my supervision, begin negotiating with the writers to make changes in the work. Rob and I each had experience with telecommunications-aided exchanges between students, and so we both believed that students could successfully complete this process on-line, reinforcing the

awareness of audience that is central to good writing.

What happened, instead, was a lesson for me in how the vocabulary my students and I used in negotiating the editing process came to dominate the exchange with the Vermont students and, ultimately, undermine the collaboration. From the first exchange of comments about narratives, my students’ tone and language reflected their frustration with the electronic interactive process that deviated from norms of our classroom experience.

The Unalaska editors, a team of four female juniors, divided the stack of submissions from CVU and took them home to read. The following day, the Unalaska editors expressed disappointment in the CVU pieces. They agreed that only two from the stack were ready for submission. The rest “were *only* freewrites” (emphasis added). The students talked about each piece and decided who would write comments. Then the

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Tom McKenna and Scott Christian at the Conference on the Teaching of English in Rural Schools, June, 1996, Bread Loaf, Vermont

Uncovering Differences...

(continued from previous page)

Unalaska editors wrote a general letter, addressing the "problem" they had with the entire batch of CVU submissions:

Dear CVU students,

We just received and reviewed your pieces. Thank you very much for sending us so many pieces.... We may not have been clear on our process. Usually we bring a rough draft in, read it out loud in small groups, comment, and make some changes. After the changes are made we give them to the editor; for this edition, that is us. *The pieces that are turned in to the editors are Final Drafts!!* "Final draft" to us means that you have done everything you know how to do to make the piece the best it can be. There should be no spelling errors. Pieces should be as the writer would like them to be in published form. We have had pieces turned in from our class that did not follow these guidelines. We turn them back the same as we have yours. We hope that you can try and work with us to create a great publication. It's going to be fun.

Most of the pieces we received seemed to be freewrites.... We would like to suggest that your whole class read the chapter "Creating Form" by Ken Macrorie.... After you have read the article maybe you could take a good look at your pieces and rework them so they follow Ken Macrorie's guidelines. This will make your freewrites into nice drafts. As editors we feel our job is not to compose the pieces; we hope to only add comments on what could be added or cut or changed with sentences and punctuation. The rest is up to the author, until it is time to publish and put in the proper format.

Please understand, while

there are many interesting images in the pieces, we need them to be further developed before we can work with you.

Thank You,

—Unalaska Editing Team

As I was afraid it might have, my students' letter made some waves through its challenge to raise expectations, and through its tone. The letter gives a clear example of how the students' intention to make the exchange function according to their expectations actually served to alienate the two groups from one another.

The tone of the italicized directive "*The pieces that are turned in to the editors are Final Drafts!!*" is unambiguous and indeed underscores the tone of the whole letter, although it is also followed by statements aimed at establishing a friendly, cooperative atmosphere: "We hope that you can try and work with us to create a great publication. It's going to be fun."

In the second paragraph of the letter, the Unalaska students make the radical move of suggesting an assignment to the CVU students: a chapter from one of their own central texts, Macrorie's *Writing to Be Read*. They are obviously applying their own classroom norms to the CVU students. With the intention of refining the process and keeping high standards for publication, they have mistakenly set up an adversarial relationship that would continue for the duration of the exchange.

This letter closes with "we" and "you" clearly held in opposition. Although I'm sure that the editors' intention was to fix the misunderstandings in the exchange, I suspect their message came across to the Vermonters as something like "our way or the highway."

The Unalaska students' implied ideas of the process of writing served to form a rather exclusive culture replete with a particular vocabulary ("freewrite" vs. "submission," for example) for the tasks of learning. For the Vermont kids, especially a writer named Tim, what may have at first seemed like a regular writing assign-

ment, quickly became an exercise in defending oneself and one's ideas.

Sometime after, or simultaneous with, the process of clarifying expectations for submission, Tim's piece came over the wires (some students' names have been changed):

Freewrite: "Dodge Ram" by Tim

Hopefully, someday I'll get a Dodge Ram (1500 Sport) truck with a 350 V8 engine. I have wanted this truck ever since the first ones came out around three years ago. The truck I want is four-wheel-drive and black, with chrome wheels and a roll bar. It is amazing standing next to it because it makes you feel like an ant. This is also the truck that costs 25,000 dollars. After I get it, if I were to get it, I would put a RANCHO 6" suspension lift and 36" x 14.5 SUPER SWAMPER mud tires on it. This series of changes would add an extra three feet to the height of it. The next problem would be affording that. The lift would cost around 3,000 dollars, and the tires are another 3,000 to 4,000 dollars. The truck is rated best in its class by all of the truck magazines. It comes in a wide range of sizes and styles, suspension packages, 4wd or 2wd, etc. There are also many different engines you can get in your Ram, six-, eight-, and ten-cylinder engines, as well as the Cummins Diesel. I would love to have a V10, but unfortunately the smaller Sport truck that I want only comes with an eight-cylinder engine. My reasons for having this truck are, it looks really cool, women love guys that drive mean trucks, and I can drive over people in traffic if I'm in a hurry. I also like to go off-roading and romp through the mud. There is nothing that I couldn't do in this truck; it is great for hauling, and for pulling things as well. All I can do for now is save my money, and keep dreaming of someday winning the lottery.

The Unalaska editing team's frustrations grew as Tim's piece added to a quickly growing stack of pieces that were in their eyes not yet well enough refined for an audience of peer editors. The title of Tim's piece, "Freewrite: Dodge Ram," justified the editors' criticism that CVU was sending "freewrites" rather than the expected "submissions." The girls were taken aback by Tim's hyperbolic claims, and I recall asking them to focus on the issue of audience. I asked the editors to explore why Tim's piece didn't reach them, and what he might do to change that. Cathy wrote the response to Tim's piece, and I believe I glanced at it and—perhaps shortsightedly—approved it before she faxed it to him.

Tim:

So, I take it you like trucks. Here are a few of our suggestions: we feel that your story would be more interesting if you could put it in a context your audience would be more familiar with. Maybe tell us a story about how you first saw this truck, and more of why you want it besides all of the truck jargon I personally do not understand (Dodge RAM 1500, 350 V8 engine). Show me what it looks like, color, size, etc. Maybe write not that you need the money, but how you are going to get it. Ask Mr. Baroz for some more suggestions. I'm sure this could be much better if you kept your audience in mind. The sentence I have underlined ("I also like to go off-roading and play in the mud") sounds funny (HA! HA!) if you think of it as getting out of your truck and playing in the mud. Use description to keep the reader interested—a reader who knows nothing about trucks.

—Cathy

Cathy's reply to Tim contains evidence of many of the tensions that ran throughout the entire exchange. Who is Tim's audience? Is it a set of four editors and possibly a teacher who live at a great distance? Is it the

vaguely imaginable readers of the not-yet-created publication, presumably some people in this distant school, and possibly people beyond the school, as well as people in and beyond Tim's own school? I had not considered the ambiguousness of the term "audience" when I coached the Unalaska girls to respond to Tim. And the result is that Cathy's reply is itself ambiguous. She alternates between referring to herself as Tim's audience, and using the phrase "your audience." Finally, Cathy complicates the sense of audience further by generalizing about it as "a reader who knows nothing about trucks."

My critique here is not to suggest that Cathy's editing instincts are unsound. They are insightful and potentially helpful. The problem, rather, is in the context created by the electronic exchange. Cathy's implicit assumptions concerning correctness, her lack of a definition of a specific audience, and the "final" tone of Cathy's written response (as opposed to the fluid, tone of conversation) annul her potentially helpful guidance, fueling the divisiveness and defensiveness of the exchange. Tim's reply makes clear what Cathy's selective use of personal pronouns and her reliance on imperative comments began to subtly hint at: the deterioration of the collaboration and the polarization of the community of writers into a local "us" and an alien "them," the right "self" and misguided "other."

Dear Unalaska Editors:

To be perfectly honest with you, I really don't care what you think about my story about Dodge Rams. It is a story that I wrote for myself, not for you, and I really don't feel like explaining my truck to you. My suggestion to you is go to a Dodge dealer and learn about the truck and then read my story. Maybe then it will make sense to you.

—Love, Tim

Although there may have been much Rob and I could have done to mitigate

these tensions, I have come to see this type of representation of "other" as a troubling syndrome in most telecommunications exchanges. Though we may continually attempt to infuse into our teaching a sensitivity to remote and different cultures, we need to re-think our "easy" notions of telecommunications communities, and remain mindful of the opportunities these exchanges provide for taking a close look at what's going on right at home.

While I still believe that trans-geographical and cross-cultural communication contains enormous potential for teaching tolerance and refining our understanding of different cultures, I find that the context of exchanges—with their odd mixes of our classroom cultures and depersonalized encounters with others—can create the opposite effect. When we link classrooms with distinct cultural identities, we as teachers are fully cognizant of the tensions those differences create. Yet I wonder if we are as cognizant of the subtle differences that exist between classrooms that seem, on the surface, to have much in common. Ignoring subtle differences of classroom cultures (i.e. how work is valued; how work gets done; how work gets talked about) will usually lead to tensions as I have described in this article. (In our exchange, the geographic separation between the Vermont and Alaska students was more profound than the cultural gap. Most of the participating students at Unalaska had lived elsewhere in the States, and one of the editors had in fact lived in Vermont for some time.) If our differing classroom norms can lead to this kind of miscommunication across a relatively mild gradient of cultural difference, the implications resonate for more ambitious efforts at cross-cultural collaboration with telecommunications. ☺

Inquiring into a Language of Power

As a defining element of a culture, language will always be at the center of debates about cultural issues, and those heated debates can be polarizing to members of different cultures. In order to continue to bridge the gap between cultures, teachers and schools seek not only to understand the language of their students but also to have students learn to navigate the varied currents of language spoken in American society: academic language, street language, and of course a number of dialects spoken in many communities. In their desire to learn more about this situation, Gary Montañño (New Mexico), Sharon Ladner (Mississippi) and Stephen Schadler (Arizona) participated in an on-line discussion with their students about the role of language in schools. They named their interactive inquiry "A Study of the Language of Power," from a phrase used by linguist Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson to distinguish standard English as the language of business, government, professional work.—Editor

"Away with him, away with him! He speaks Latin."
—William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part II*

Code-Switching Skills

by Stephen Schadler
Rio Rico High School
Rio Rico, AZ

The United States has always been a culturally complex, changing country, perhaps never more so than today. During the latter half of this century, immigration from other parts of the world and extensive in-migration within our own borders have changed the makeup not just of cities but of rural communities as well. We turn on the evening news and find our communities in the midst of cultural battles, many of them fought over how language variety is viewed by society. The call for English-only laws in government institutions, for example, is firmly countered by arguments for the legitimacy of Ebonics and other dialects of English. Because we teach language skills, literature, writing, and reading, we English teachers, like it or not, find ourselves engaged in this debate.

On the one hand, we know that students with a command of standard English have an edge over those without it. On the other hand, we see the value in nurturing the language skills a child brings into the classroom. We build from the ground up.

A large part of our discussion about these issues on-line with students revolved around whether there actually is an American "language of power" (LOP). We began by asking our students which language, if any, is needed in our society to be successful. Almost all of the students involved recognized that standard English is the language of power, and most admitted that they would have to learn it to be successful. However, Ricky Romero, a student in my class, pointed out that the language of power might vary from region to region. For example, a business owner in Nogales, Arizona, a border town, might best be served by a strong command of English and Spanish since his or her customers, as well as the community's local decision-makers, will likely speak those languages. Bilingualism, in this instance,

would be a great benefit if not a necessity, yet Spanish would hardly be considered a necessary language in many American circles. Our discussion eventually focused on whether it was fair that the "success" of a culturally varied (and large) part of America's population should be determined by mainstream cultural values, and if so, how should we teach them?

Students in Gary's class echoed our concerns. They asked, "What is American culture? We are all brought together by several cultures. There is no *one* culture that can qualify as an 'American' culture. How can you teach what you cannot define?" If language is indeed the heart of a culture, then these students have raised questions about how English is taught in schools. America is a culture made up of many, and perhaps one strategy for English teachers is to teach standard English while remaining supportive of the variety of cultures and languages within the classroom.

During this exchange, I observed the ways in which my students expressed themselves to Gary's or Sharon's students. Some students wrote in their natural vernacular, for example, while others grabbed the thesaurus to search for "impressive" words. After I drew their attention to these varied approaches, we discussed other observations students made about discourse:

1. Students talk differently with their parents than they do with their friends. (It is even true that their language with Mom is different than their language with Dad!)
2. Mr. Schadler the teacher speaks differently from Mr. Schadler the track coach.

These instances, we decided, are examples of code-switching be-

tween dialects or speech patterns according to situation. Students also agreed they needed to be equipped with the language of power in America, standard English, so they have one more "dialect" in their repertoire as they seek to achieve their own definition of success within whatever culture they choose.

Finally, my students and I were speaking the same language. ♡

* * *

Embracing a Teaching Moment

by Sharon Ladner
Pascagoula High School
Pascagoula, MS

Odd, isn't it? One ethnic group bashes another regardless of our society's obvious need for greater racial harmony. As a teacher in a small Southern town on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I am well aware of the prevalence of negative stereotypes about the South and those who live here. However, I was not prepared for the stereotypes my own students so easily applied to each other as well as those who live in the Southwest.

Our on-line conversation about the language of power with Arizona and New Mexico students, I found, ignited some of the most intense discussions I've ever observed in my own classroom. In fact, the amount of classroom dialogue far outweighed any electronic mail exchanges.

From the outset, it was a heated and often an awkward exchange of personal opinions grounded in little support. From the moment I introduced the notion of a language of power, I discovered my African American students and white students harbored a striking ignorance of and prejudice toward "other" ethnic groups, including the Southwest's Hispanic population, mouthing slogans they've acquired from reactionary political "debate." "They are illegal

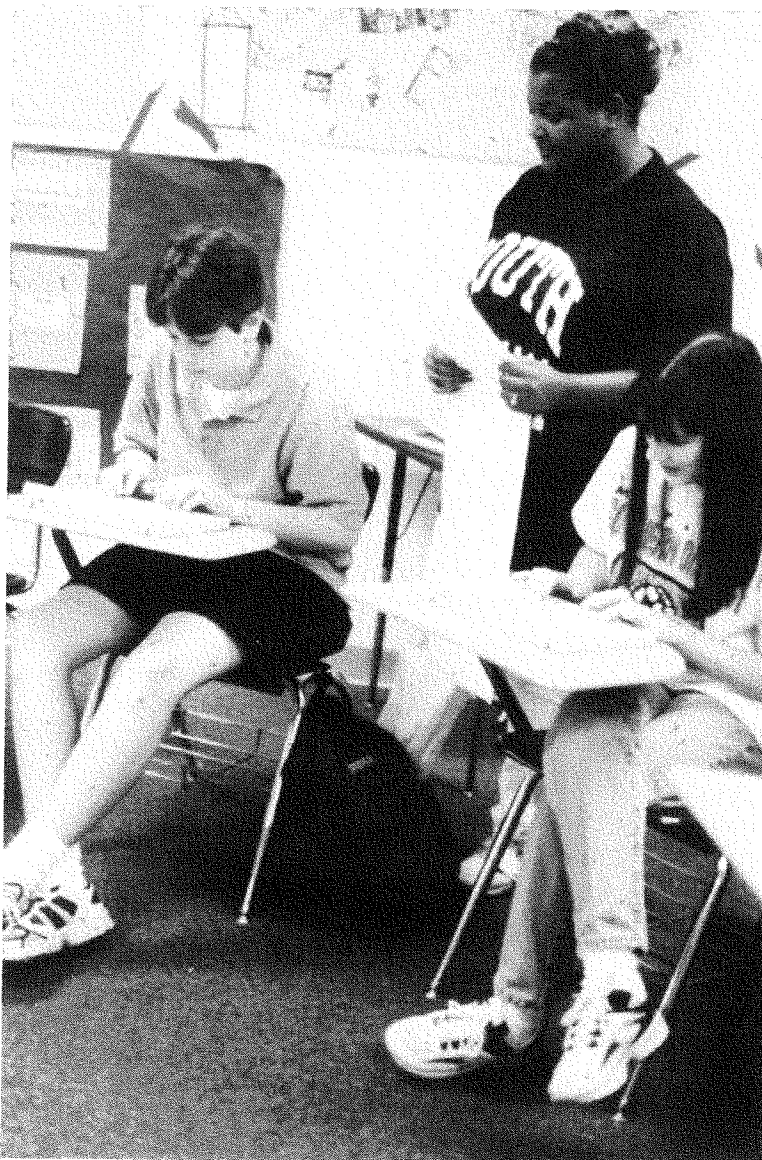
aliens who don't pay taxes," announced one of my most gifted and volatile students one morning during a discussion on the Hispanic viewpoint on the language of power. "It's a black thing!" hurled one of my African American students when Ebonics was mentioned.

I was often stunned at the lack of student awareness but reminded myself that their stereotypical views of ethnic cultures are based on a limited view of the world beyond southern Mississippi. I let them openly discuss their views and successfully employed a Socratic dialogue with

them to help them rethink their positions. Through the Socratic method, the class began to separate ethnic myths from reality and research the demographics of the Southwest. BreadNet and the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network served as a window to the world beyond Mississippi by allowing my students to read and discuss their points of view with "other" students.

One of my students, John, was the most intrigued by the LOP exchange. He talked the moment he

(continued on next page)



A research team in Sharon Ladner's class examines their first draft and makes revisions before uploading their writing into the Language of Power conference.

Inquiring into a Language of Power

(continued from previous page)

entered my classroom each morning. An opinionated young man, John seems, at first glance, a privileged fifteen-year-old child of professional parents. Yet his opinions were as uninformed as they were passionate. Classroom discussions revealed that most of his opinions about the Southwest were based on his exposure to limited print and television media. "I didn't even think that they had computers in New Mexico," he admitted one day as he sat down in front of the computer to type a response.

As the days of the exchange passed, I found myself trying to teach cultural tolerance. I seemed to be making slow progress until Emily, a well-respected student who is the child of a career Navy father, entered my classroom after a long absence. During a heated debate that began as a discussion about the widespread use of Spanish in the U.S., Emily said it right: "What do you know!" she shouted across the circle of desks. "Have you ever been to Arizona or New Mexico? I have, and it is not like you think. Go there someday and see for yourself. Until then don't make statements you can't justify."

"Atta girl!" I thought to myself. No one said a word. Sometimes it takes a student to do a teacher's job.

Emily had brought us to one of those magical teaching moments, one that reminds us all that until we experience something, we cannot truly understand. ☺

* * *

Culture, Heritage, and Personal Identity

by Gary Montaño
Carlsbad High School
Carlsbad, NM

With such a controversial subject as "a language of power," it is helpful to hear many views on the subject, and for that reason we set up the LOP conference in a manner that would invite perspectives from a variety of people. We established one area in the conference where outsiders to the conference—Bread Loaf faculty, students, and associates—could give their views. Doug Wood, a former middle school teacher and now a graduate student at Bread Loaf and Harvard, presented an interesting perspective:

Although one must be able to speak and write in [the language of power], one must always be cognizant of this situation such that one does not assimilate into this predominant culture of power elites.... Once you have shown "them" that you can use the language of power, then you're in a much better position to share your own cultural nuances and contribute to a broader text of language.... We must always be cognizant and use other language

forms to be able to continue to be part of our own communities and to be a part of ourselves. We must never assimilate.

Doug raises an interesting point about how the LOP affects cultural stability. The key to earning respect in American society is to master the LOP, and doing so opens doors for people because when there is respect, others are more accepting of what the individual brings to the table, those "cultural nuances" that Doug refers to. And the "elite" will be more willing to accept, perhaps even use, what Doug calls "other language forms."

Do members of minority cultures in America need to be wary of being assimilated by the mainstream American culture? Assimilation implies losing the characteristics or heritage that make up an individual. Merely learning the LOP will not take that away unless the individual wants to give it up. Heritage is carried within, not worn on a sleeve. Learning the LOP will add to someone's heritage, but it will never take it away. In fact, investigating the issues surrounding the LOP with Stephen, Sharon and their students has helped me to understand the important role that language plays in defining my own culture, heritage, and personal identity. ☺



Gary Montaño and Stephen Schadler

What School Couldn't Teach Me

by Bill Clarke
*Shivers Junior High School
 Aberdeen, MS*

When I was leaving Ole Miss after a summer of graduate study to move to my new home and school in rural Aberdeen, Mississippi, a professor gave me some curious advice: "Make sure you go to church," he said. I didn't give much thought to it, but I did begin going to church in Aberdeen, and after a few months, I realized what my teacher had been hinting at. Churchgoing is an important and regular community activity in the rural South. Sundays and Wednesdays. Not to mention church volleyball, softball, basketball, Bible study, and youth groups. Having lived here for several years now, I'm no longer startled by the often-asked question, "What church do you go to?"

The graduate program where I met that professor was part of the Mississippi Teacher Corps, a program designed to recruit young college graduates with degrees outside of education to teach in rural areas. Though the program focused on teaching methods, the lessons I remember best were informal ones dealing with Southern rural culture. Sure, before moving to Mississippi I had read Faulkner and Welty, but books only taught me so much. I learned much more during the several years of living and teaching within the culture. I learned, for example, that when an elder in the community introduced himself giving his name as "Bob," I was to address him as "Mr. Bob." I learned to greet people with "hey" instead of "hello." And anything short of "Yes, Ma'am" is disrespectful. I've learned more than I've taught during my time here.

The education I value most has come from experiences that opened up new cultures to me, that forced me out of my academic,

middle-class comfort zone. I had, in fact, to become smarter. During the summers after my sophomore year at the University of Texas, I worked as a counselor for a camp for inner-city kids in Boston. Language was the first barrier I faced in trying to reach the kids in the program. African American vernacular was strange to me. Yet my survival and success as a counselor depended on my willingness to interact verbally with my camp kids. From the beginning, the kids made me aware of the language gap and wanted to know why I talked "so funny."

After a time of acclimation, I learned how to talk to kids, organize groups, direct activities, and handle adolescent problems. I also, for the first time, used journals to teach writing in an informal, low-pressure environment. Some of the student writing surprised me, shocked me. The language was vivid, descriptive, and it engaged my imagination.

Later, when I became an English teacher I encountered other non-standard dialects in the classroom. The best way to teach standard English, I discovered, was by respecting the student's dialect. I also learned to value oral communication as an important building block for teaching language. I

adapted my methods of teaching writing and incorporated spontaneous orality—first spoken, then written. My students love to speak and hear and then write it down, rather than vice versa. And after it's written down, they love to hear it again. Their poetry leaps from their mouths to the paper and then back to their mouths.

"It's all good in the hood/
 When they do as they should,"

Quentin spouts, slapping a rhythm on his desk.

"Write it, Quentin. Write it down," I encourage.

I am learning about the culture of my community by working with my students inside and outside of school, and by meeting their parents. Our school population has problems similar to those of most public schools: broken families, absent fathers, substitute mothers. These problems are no longer specific to urban communities. They are the problems of rural America too. It hits me every time we have an open house. "Hey, Mr. Clarke, how's my daughter?"

"Fine. Uh, who is she? Oh, wait, let me guess...."

They love it when I guess right. I've met most of my students' parents. But sometimes they change. Sometimes it's an aunt, a stepfather, or a grandmother. One girl is no longer living with her uncle. Her dad is back in town. I knew her uncle well. Her dad is embarrassed, I can tell.

In my graduate work in education, I was taught what schools should be like ideally. Very few ideal schools exist, though, and it seems wrong to go on preparing teachers to teach in schools that don't exist. Classrooms, even rural ones, are

The education I value most has come from experiences that opened up new cultures to me, that forced me out of my academic, middle-class comfort zone.

changing all the time. Formal training is necessary for teachers, but it's important to realize that informal education—incorporating personal experience, interacting with students outside of school, and adapting on the job—is just as necessary for professional development. I realize now that much of my time will always be spent learning to teach. ☛

Tlingit and Laguna: A Cultural Exchange

by Rosie Roppel

Schoenbar Middle School
Ketchikan, AK

Every summer, Ketchikan, a picturesque island town of 12,000 people situated in the Southeastern Panhandle of Alaska, plays host to thousands of tourists who come to visit the local Native American museums, attend cultural performances, and hear lectures about the history and language of the Tlingit Indians, who have lived here for 8,000 years since migrating from China across the Bering Strait and down the coast to settle in what is now the Tongass National Forest. The Tlingits cater to the tourist trade in Ketchikan, and their culture is a thriving one that is evident all around us.

Out of curiosity one day, I asked my eighth grade students to write what they knew about the Tlingits. Even though most students (some Native) have lived here most of their lives, they couldn't write more than three or four sentences. They didn't know much except that the Tlingits are renowned for carving totem poles. To remedy this lack of knowledge, our interdisciplinary eighth grade team developed a culture

unit to study the history, legends, and language of the Tlingits. What began as a "unit" of study turned into an experience that made a great impact on many students' lives. Our study began with a field trip to Saxman, a Tlingit village one mile south of town.

* * *

In the Saxman village gymnasium, I sat myself among my students awaiting the commencement of

apathetic in my classroom. He's not here. He is absent from school today. I'm disappointed; I had hoped that he would be present for this field trip, that this trip would somehow stimulate his interest in school, improve his attendance, and spur his performance in my class.

A drumming begins. Lights dim and a spotlight finds Tlingit Boy of Eagle Clan crouching in traditional red and black ceremonial clothing. Wearing the carved wooden mask of



Rosie Roppel (left) dancing with students in Beaver Clan House

the Tlingit performance *Tlingit Boy of Eagle Clan Becomes Chief*. I glance around the traditional community house, noticing carved cedar totems, wondering if my students are aware of the cultural artifacts. Two boys fidget and poke each other while a couple of girls paint on bright red lipstick. I scan the audience for Lawrence, a Tlingit boy from Saxman, usually quiet and

an eagle, he acts out the ancient story of a young man who becomes chief. He glares at the audience. He tilts his beaked, feathered mask, flipping his long black hair, and moving in rhythm to the beat of an elder drumming in the background.

Tlingit Boy dances over to an old woman at the left of the stage. The drumming continues. The grand-



Rocky Gooch, BLRTN Telecommunications Director, Lawrence Shields, and Billy White observing Lee Wallace carving a totem from a cedar tree

* * *

The next day at school in the computer lab, as my students were typing their English assignments, an essay about the Tlingit Culture, I noticed Lawrence, Rayana, and Dana sitting idle. I wondered what happened to the enthusiasm they exhibited the day before.

"This is stupid. Why do I have to write this?" Lawrence complained. "I already told all

this information yesterday. Everyone in Ketchikan already knows all this stuff." Before I could give an answer, the bell had rung and they loped happily out of the classroom.

I tried to reconcile Lawrence's changed attitude: yesterday he had been enthusiastic and even led our study of Tlingit culture, but today he seemed uninterested. What was the difference? Yesterday he'd had a real audience of peers to speak to, and he'd spoken marvelously; today he had only his English teacher waiting for him to finish his assignment, and here I was still waiting. I knew that having a real audience had profound effects on student motivation, but how does one create such an audience in an academic environment?

Later in the day, as I was logged into BreadNet, Bread Loaf's telecommunications network, I found a request from Native American students in Laguna, New Mexico, for responses to their stories about their elders. I received permission to down-

mother sits, slowly peeling skins from smoked salmon while the boy tosses pieces to a grateful and starving eagle. A narrator speaks from the side of the stage: "The Chief, angered by the waste of food, banishes the old woman and the boy, leaving them behind with no supplies or riches."

Tlingit Boy covers his painted black eyes with his hands and rubs away tears as Grandmother kneels, bowing her head in starvation. The drum beats. As the boy and old woman lie prostrate, gasping in hunger, the eagle drops onto the floor, cawing and swinging his black and yellow beak slowly from side to side. The drum beats. The eagle screeches loudly, hops over to the boy and the old woman, and drops salmon at their feet. The narrator says, "The boy and old woman feast daily on fresh salmon, regaining strength while the chief and his followers starve. The weakened chief, further angered at the prosperity of the two he has banished, visits them at the Nass River where Chief is thrown to the ground." The drum beats.

The boy carefully lifts the chief's headdress, inspects it and places it on his own head. The boy and the old woman retrieve their stolen beads and beaver pelts from the chief. The elder in the background beats the drum steadily ten times signifying the end of the story.

Remaining onstage, the young actor reaches up, exposing a Schoenbar Middle School T-shirt, and removes his mask. I'm stunned! It's Lawrence, my student. He looks directly at his peers in the audience, and in steady tones he greets them in Tlingit: "Gooh na la sheesh."

The students answer in return, "Gooooooh na la sheesh!"

"I want to tell you about the Tlingit culture," Lawrence continues. "Follow me and listen carefully." Lawrence stands tall, takes long steps, and leads his classmates outside to the forty-foot cedar totem where he recounts stories represented by the carving on it. I look around and see my students aren't snickering, poking each other, or fidgeting; they are listening closely to Lawrence's words.

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Tlingit and Laguna

(continued from previous page)

load them, printed them, and shared them with my students. I didn't know it at the time, but the Laguna students would turn out to be the audience that would motivate some of my students to do their best work. Lawrence, Dana, Rayana, and other students were excited to research, write, revise, and share their stories and essays about their own families. I marveled at my students' change in attitude.

One interesting effect that addressing a real audience of peers had on my students' writing was that they naturally participated in the full range of the process. "Is this O.K.? Am I on time? How do I use the thesaurus? Do I have any run-ons? Will you proofread it for me? I don't think Sam did a very good job. I think I need another paragraph. Do you think it is interesting? Do I have enough facts? Does it make sense?" Students demanded mini-lessons on all aspects of the writing process, and the writing itself improved.

For example, Rayana, a student who hadn't written much for me before, dropped this 500-word essay on my desk and asked, "Is this okay to send to Laguna?"

Tlingit Culture, One of Many

by Rayana White

Saxman is a Tlingit village located 900 miles north of Seattle and 1,000 miles south of Anchorage. Our class went there to share our culture. Lots of kids, including some Tlingits, don't know much about their own heritage. We thought it would help relations around the school and in the community to educate people of our ways: customs, beliefs, arts, language, food gathering, housing, transportation, and potlatches, our ceremonial feasts.

The Tlingit Indians have lived in Southeast Alaska for more than 8,000 years. They exist with the Haida and the

Tsimshian Indians. I am Tsimshian and Haida. Saxman is one of many Tlingit villages. Ketchikan was once where many Native people traveled during the summer. They would set up a fish camp, with temporary housing. They gathered roots, cedar, berries, plants and hunted for deer and caught salmon. They prepared it with fish and meat by drying and smoking. Berries and roots would be dried and/or preserved in *ooligan* grease. Everyone helped prepare the food for winter use. Subsistence was the way of life among the Native people. Few Natives still do this today, but the culture is reviving.

The Tlingits did not have a written language. They used storytelling, song and dance, and carved totem poles to record their history. Family history and great events were recorded, and the stories were passed down from generation to generation.

When the missionaries came and settled among the villages, the Native way of life changed. They weren't allowed to speak their language or practice their customs. Their language and culture were almost lost. All three tribes are currently working very hard to preserve the languages, customs, and beliefs of their culture in written form. Many fluent speakers are very elderly, and there is not going to be enough time to document it all. So some parts of the culture will die.

At Saxman, we listened to storytellers and watched totem carvers. Nathan Jackson is one of our most famous and his son and daughter attended Schoenbar Middle School.

We are writing and telling our stories, and will be sharing some of them with you.

* * *

I was astounded at the quality of this work. In this example, Rayana's sentence structure is average or above. There are few grammatical or transitional errors in spite of the complex development of ideas. In this piece of writing, she surpasses the level of writing she'd demonstrated earlier in the year. It was obvious to me that the new peer audience was at least partly responsible for this improved performance.

Though Rayana's work is exemplary in the degree to which it shows improvement, many other stu-

dents showed a similar improvement in kind if not degree. "What's happening?" I asked my students. They explained, "The Laguna kids have an Indian culture that is different from ours, and they want to know about us. We want to know about their culture too. They live in a different part of the world, and it is fun and interesting to talk with them on-line. They seem like us, but different ... and they want to know about us."

The following Monday Dana timidly handed me the following biographical sketch she'd written about her grandmother (this was the first assignment she had finished all year).

Esther Shea

by Dana Jackson

My grandmother, Esther Shea, was born in Quadra, Alaska, on April 24, 1917. Her father was a fisherman. Her family lived off the sea and hunted wild animals such as porcupines, fish, mountain goat, bear, and deer. They also found natural medicines in the forest.

In the 1920's Native Americans weren't allowed to attend public schools. Most Indians were sent to government schools known as Indian schools. These schools were located on remote islands. Esther was sent to Sheldon Jackson in Sitka, where they weren't allowed to speak about their culture or use their language. If they did, they were shamed and put into a place called the "meditation room," which contained only a bed with no covers. They had to stay in this room for a long period of time. Esther said she was put in this room often. After a period of time, she just stopped speaking Tlingit. Soon, all of the other Indians did too.

For forty years Esther kept her knowledge of her language and culture locked inside. Then, one day at the age of fifty she was asked to teach the Tlingit language to children. She said, "Yes." She said that she was scared to teach, that she had to go back to school to learn how to teach the Tlingit culture, that she was scared of the kids. But she sweated it out, and it changed her life.

Grandma Esther said that she lived in Saxman for a number of years as a child, and that they taught children not to lie and steal. They also taught children to

respect people and property and to respect yourself so that other people would respect you too.

In the 1900's, Esther's ancestors consisted of only a handful. She is the only one living that understands the value of her culture and knows it extremely well. She says that you can never walk away from your culture. No matter how many times you wash your face, you can never wash off your culture. No matter how high you go in life, no matter where you live, you should never forget who you are and what your culture is.

Esther walks in two worlds.



Dana Jackson of Schoenbar Middle School

She's come a long way. She's seen and done more than most people would at her age. She says she doesn't want to feel old. Esther is well-known and is very much respected. She has passed on the Tlingit culture. Something that will be passed on for generations to come. She will also be remembered. We must never forget Esther Shea.

* * *

Prior to this essay, Dana had done less than ten percent of the out-of-class writing assignments.

Lawrence, Rayana, and Dana shared their writing with other students in our school and inspired others to join what we began to call our "culture exchange." In total, thirty Native American children participated in exchanging their writing on-line. Nonnative students participated in the exchange, and all students interviewed their oldest living relatives and devel-

oped a written portfolio detailing their personal family histories.

Students' enthusiasm for the culture exchange was unusual. Substitute teachers told me that some students asked for permission to work on their culture exchange project when they finished with other work. Students came to class eager to get started on the next written exchange. In many students, I noticed a sense of pride that had not been there before.

For some students, the culture exchange offered the first contact with someone who wanted to know about them, their culture and families. Students gained knowledge about their grandparents, and learned to use this knowledge in an academic activity.

The grandparents, in turn, assisted their grandchildren in organizing their papers and enjoyed closer union with them throughout the exchange. By the end of the year, Lawrence and Dana had become outstanding speakers and leaders in the class. Through this exchange with Laguna Middle School, my students gained self-confidence and greater in-

terest and success in communicating with others. The respect, attention, and feedback that the Laguna students gave the Ketchikan students served to strengthen my students' belief in learning. And I'm happy to say that my students' new appreciation for learning helped them to bond with me as a teacher.

I still see Lawrence, Rayana, and Dana. They drop by or call to let me know what is going on. They have grown and look more mature. They are performing well in and out of school. Dana spoke to the PTA and presented the anthology that Phil Sittnick of Laguna Middle School published, which included much of our students' writing. Dana herself initiated a very successful exchange on BreadNet this year with a Navajo class in Rock Point, Arizona. She is interested in applying to become a student at the Native American Preparatory School in Rowe, New Mexico. Rayana has steadily improved her grades and is successful in high school. Lawrence is now at the high school too and still regularly performs and leads tours at Saxman. Recently, when I saw him at the video store, he said, "Hey, Ms. Roppel, are you bringing the kids out to Saxman again this year?"

"Are you still the big cheese out there giving tours?"

"Yep!" He laughed.

Goon ah la sheesh! ☺

Worlds Apart: Bridging the Gap between Rural Vermont and Urban Singapore

by Mary Burnham
 Waits River Valley School
 East Corinth, VT

Vermont has lately been known as the progressive state that elected the only independent representative to the United States House of Representatives and then reelected him twice more. We are also a state with a relatively homogeneous population. Although Vermont declared against slavery in the eighteenth century and sent more men per capita to fight for the Union than any other state, we are not a state of broad racial diversity. While our state has shown an historic willingness to be open and accepting to others, the lack of diversity in our rural population makes it difficult for Vermont English teachers to find places in the curricula where we can demonstrate and explore the diversity of cultures of the wider world.

Using the BreadNet telecommunications system in a recent collaboration with Anna Citrino, who teaches in Singapore, I observed my students begin to articulate a greater world view through the environmental concerns they shared with the Singaporean students. While learning to value the environment from a global per-

spective, my students developed an appreciation for their home state of Vermont. Our partners in Singapore also brought cultural and racial diversity to our isolated corner of Vermont.

Our collaboration on BreadNet presented a double challenge for my students and me. Though we are avid users of telecommunications, we had never conferenced with a class outside of the United States. I wondered at the outset if we would find enough in common to make for a viable learning experience. I also wondered if the differences in economic class between my students and Anna's would create a barrier to communication. Anna's school was quite affluent. Mine was not. Her students were the children of American professionals living abroad or of Singaporeans who wished their children to receive an "American" education. My middle school students were a mixed bag of farm kids and the children of newcomers who have come to our state seek-

ing a rural life. My students were surprised, after we had exchanged maps, pictures, and tourist brochures, to discover that Anna's school had swimming pools and groomed playing fields. Although they were envious, it didn't change their feelings of connection in any substantial way.

Anna and I began our electronic "Conference on Ecology" by having students respond to a short survey and asking them to write about specific natural places they had visited and about their views on the future of the planet. Later they exchanged descriptions of their favorite natural places. For those cynics who complain that middle-schoolers are capable only of egocentric discussion, I am here to tell you that given opportunities for discussion on serious subjects these students will rise to the occasion with mature responses.

Vermonters learned that Singapore, an island country the size of Maui, has many different cultures and languages. Huanani Yap, one of Anna's students, wrote to tell us that "Chinese, Malaysians, Indians and other 'foreigners'" live in her country. For the first time, my students realized that in Singapore they would be regarded as outsiders. This opportunity to con-



Kerri Nelson and Ashley Young using the BreadNet telecommunications system at Waits River Valley School in Vermont

sider oneself as a "foreigner" or "the other" provided some stimulating discussion, enabling some students to rethink their egocentric view of the world.

We learned that various religions are practiced in Singapore too: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam. Many languages are spoken in Singapore as well: Mandarin, Cantonese and various other Chinese dialects, Tamil, Bahasa Malay and English. Huanani told us that she speaks a bit of Hokkien as well as English because "it is easier to get along" and it helps "if you can understand what people say to you."

One student wrote us that living in Singapore was safe because the laws are very strict: "if you are caught spitting in public you have to pay a \$500 fine. There is hardly any crime because the punishments are so harsh. If caught bringing in drugs, you get the death penalty." After receiving this information, my students debated the merits of a system of laws that ensures the safety of the society at large by trading off individual freedoms.

My students told their colleagues in Singapore that we truly lived in the middle of nowhere; that we had little crime; that we had few pollution problems; but that we needed to reconsider the wisdom of a logging industry that clear-cuts timber in our state. How many would guess that a seventh grader would know about clear-cutting and be conscientious enough to take a stand on this issue? Through my students' writing on-line, I began to observe their appreciation for the natural beauty of Vermont, and their concern about environmental threats.

From the beginning, the very tentative, preliminary writings of "I like..." and "I hate it when..." began to evolve into a focused and serious discussion. Andrew Noble from WRVS wrote: "I think the over-logging here destroys the natural environment. Loggers could change, but they want more money so they cut down more trees. Maybe we could learn new techniques from people in other locations. Otherwise, I see a future world with no trees."

Jon Sirand from Singapore wrote to Ben Cilley in Vermont that he "would love to sit on the beach, but unfortunately when we litter here it goes through the drains and onto the beach. This ruins the earth and my favorite spot in nature."

Suzanne Massey from WRVS replied to Jon: "I know what you mean about the ocean. I love it too. You should go to Maine; it's beautiful and clean."

After several of Anna's students wrote about the conditions at water

spots, one of my students, Chris Leno, wrote: "I always took things for granted like swimming in clean lakes. It wasn't until I read what you wrote that I realized that some people have a less fortunate environment. Even as I write this, the hole in the ozone layer is getting larger because people pollute." The maturity of concern in this discourse surprised and pleased me.

Responding to Marc Guin in Singapore, my student Jared Bianchi wrote: "Your letter was awesome, but parts of it, I respectfully disagree with. First, I don't believe humans are superior. If we were, wouldn't we know how to treat the environment and be in tune with nature? Look at animals; when do they pollute?"

Finally, from Singapore Katie Arseniadis wrote that an individual's actions can set an example that has far-reaching effects: "This is the way I see it: if you start an anti-pollution group or club, and your whole community gets involved, the ideas spread. You can set an example for other countries to follow. As for me, a city girl living in one of the fastest growing countries in Asia, . . . I see no plan here to help our environment, but still I recycle, save water, try not to waste things, and definitely do not litter." I offer Katie's quotation from the student discourse because I think it offers hope for the future and shows that students at middle school age are capable of and ready to engage in serious dis-

cussion about important issues. They are also capable of selecting topics for study that interest them as well as meet the demands of the curriculum. When given the freedom to pursue some of their own interests within a curricular framework, I believe that students are able to set goals and meet challenges previously thought impossible by their teachers.

As the exchange evolved, I looked carefully for any evidence of

This conference bridged gaps of culture, race, and class. . . .

the vast differences in our two classrooms: urban/rural, private/public, rich/poor. Even in the students' informal correspondence, I found little indication of difference between these two groups of middle schoolers in their attitudes toward the environment. They all cared deeply about the future of the earth and hoped to do some things to preserve it.

Yet I don't think that teachers ought to expect consensus among students in on-line conferencing. In fact, telecommunications exchanges between schools in remote places often bring cultural differences into focus; however, I have discovered that the subject of nature serves to unify students in collaborative inquiry. This subject usually strikes a common chord with middle school children and motivates them. Perhaps they feel more comfortable and knowledgeable in nature than in academia. Anna's and my venture, the Conference on Ecology, evolved into an interdisciplinary conference that confirmed my belief in the ability of planned telecommunications projects to transform and elevate the quality of work that my students produce as well as to open the world to them in new and engaging ways. In particular, this conference helped to bridge the gaps of culture, race, and class, uniting students in seeking solutions to a common problem. ☺

Our Place Is Like Yours, Only Different

by Sandra McCulloch
Chief Paul Memorial School
Kipnuk, AK

Kipnuk, on the tundra in the Kuskokwim Delta in southwest Alaska, just three miles from the Bering Sea, is one of the most remote and unique places I know of. To reach Kipnuk, you fly from Anchorage to Bethel, and then board a small plane for the final leg; there are no roads out here. Flying out of Bethel in winter, you see the white landscape stretch out all around you, eerie and surreal. Frozen streams snake across the land, connecting myriad lakes on a frozen delta. Out ahead there is no sign of life, and you wonder if the pilot is on course. Suddenly, a well-worn snowmobile trail is visible below, and in the distance a few dots appear on the horizon. That is Kipnuk. The dots grow larger until you realize they are houses and a school nestled together near the frozen sea.

If you're lucky enough to be in this land when spring breaks in mid-May, flocks of geese will pass overhead on the way to their nesting grounds. Long grasses sprout across the landscape. Later the grass will be harvested, dried, and woven into intricate baskets. Salmonberries, blueberries, and low bush cranberries begin to bud. With nearly 24 hours of sunlight per day, life explodes across the land in bold colors. Yet all too soon, you know in your bones, a brief autumn will follow. By late October the land is again locked in the white grip of winter.

The Kuskokwim Delta has been inhabited for millennia by the descendants of Siberian Yup'iks who crossed the Bering Land Bridge. Only relatively recently has the *kass'aq*, the Yup'ik word for "white man," appeared on the scene bringing with him Western ways and languages. First came the Russians; *kass'aq* probably comes from the Russian word *kazak*,

or cossack. With the sale of Alaska to the U.S., new immigrants to Alaska brought English, which gradually became the dominant language. Most people in Kipnuk are bilingual, speaking both Yup'ik and English, but there is a tendency to favor English over Yup'ik due to the influence of TV, radio, and schooling.

Children in Kipnuk begin school with varying degrees of fluency in both Yup'ik and English, depending on their home experience. Kindergarten in most schools is taught in Yup'ik. Students gradually make the transition to an all-English academic program by high school, and the Yup'ik language is supported through orthography and life-skills courses.

Our location on the earth, both in the Pacific Rim and circumpolar regions, makes it especially important both economically and politically for the Yup'ik people to be fluent communicators in both English and Yup'ik. Virtually all business is trans-

acted in English, yet Yup'ik life skills need to be passed on in Yup'ik. Recently, to encourage communication in and a knowledge of the circumpolar region, the Lower Kuskokwim School District set up a sister-school program with schools in an area of the Northwest Territories, Canada, soon to be the new



Sandra McCulloch (at left holding paper) conferring with students of Kipnuk

Inuit Province of Nunavut. Participating schools used e-mail to exchange writing about our respective places and cultural activities. Students in Kipnuk and at her sister-school decided first to exchange descriptions of our communities: where we lived, what it looked like, what was special and unique about our place.

This experience using telecommunications to connect to students in other cultures got me thinking about the effect of peer audiences on student writers. So when the chance came to arrange an exchange via BreadNet with Anne Gardner's students at Georgetown High School in South Carolina, I was excited about the possibilities. I proposed our students exchange descriptive writing about the physical aspects of the communities where they lived. To examine the effect that peer audiences had on my students' writing, I resisted the urge to correct the drafts they sent to the Georgetown students.

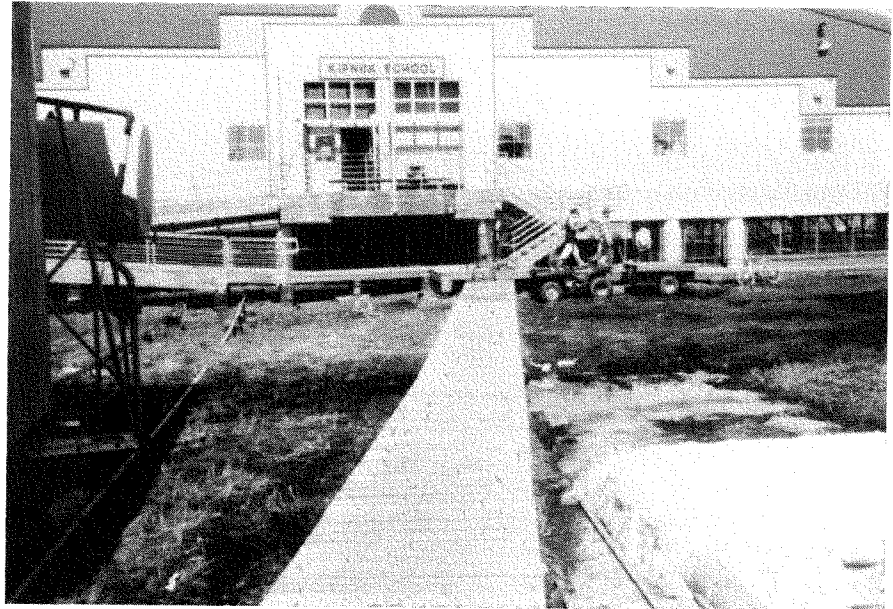
Anne and I hoped, too, that our exchange would foster some multicultural awareness and appreciation of others, as the ethnic populations of our two communities were so very different. What I was not prepared for in the resulting exchange was the degree to which our students' narrow assumptions about each other's culture would hamper the exchange.

We began writing in September. Students worked in groups to write a description of some part of our village. One description, entitled "Boardwalks," by D. M. and D. J., went as follows:

Since the village of Kipnuk is small there are boardwalks instead of roads for you to go to certain places you want to go. They are made out of wood and they are in all sizes. The biggest size in width is 10-15 feet. I think the smallest size is two feet wide. These boardwalks are like roads in the city, but cannot hold up a car or truck.

As scheduled, I e-mailed this description and the others and joyously waited for a response from the South Carolina students. On the day they arrived, I happily passed out the responses, expecting my students to read them carefully and use them to hone their first drafts. What actually happened was something else again.

Here are three of the questions asked of the "Boardwalk" group:



Boardwalks outside the Kipnuk School in Kipnuk, Alaska

From: M.P. and N.C.

1. How many people have cars?
2. Do you get CDs and video games?
3. What kind of television do you watch?

What you might notice here is that there are no questions about the boardwalks. The response from South Carolina seemed not to be building on my students' original description of the boardwalks. And when my students began to set down a response to the South Carolina students, I noticed they gave short answers that wouldn't seem to encourage further discussion. I suggested they try to answer the questions as thoroughly as possible. The result was the following response to the above questions:

To: M.P. and N.C.

Well, to answer your questions...

1. Only one person has a truck here and they hardly use it. Most of the people here use four-wheelers and in the wintertime we use snow machines.
2. Of course we get CDs and video games here! Most people order from catalogs or either go to Bethel or Anchorage and get them.

3. We watch the same thing you watch on television. But there are only thirteen channels here that include news, music channel, movie channel, Discovery, TNT, etc. Some people here have satellite dishes, too. I think there are only eight.

In answer two, the words "Of course" were scribbled large and followed by an exclamation point. The tone of this response implies my students' exasperation with the all-too-common perception that living in a remote place like southwest Alaska is synonymous with living behind the times. It's a perception that we often encounter.

(continued on next page)

Our Place . . .

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Cultural differences were perhaps the cause of other instances of miscommunication between my students and Anne's. Here is one example from Anne's students, followed by my students' response:

From: J. J. and M.

I think the best thing to write about is girls because with the hot weather they get to wear short dresses and shorts. And y'all can't do that 'cause it's cold. They have nice tans and certain parts don't get frozen. We can go swimming.

And the response:

To: J. M. and J.

From: D. A. and I.

The description you wrote was received by two ladies and you wrote about women! Couldn't you write about something other than women? Anyway, it's not that cold here, in fact, on some days it gets to about 60-70 degrees here in the summer. We're so used to the climate here that when it gets that hot it's warm enough for us to go swimming.

The tone and content of my students' response to the South Carolina students indicate that the cultural or life-style differences that the exchange brought into focus were an inadvertent cause of miscommunication and divisiveness. I know that the South Carolina students' detailed description of a Wal-Mart and Blockbuster Video, for example, was meant to be informative and descriptive. After all, they could not know that most of my students have flown to Anchorage and shopped at Wal-Mart or rented a video at Blockbuster. They also could not have known that we see these places advertised on TV.

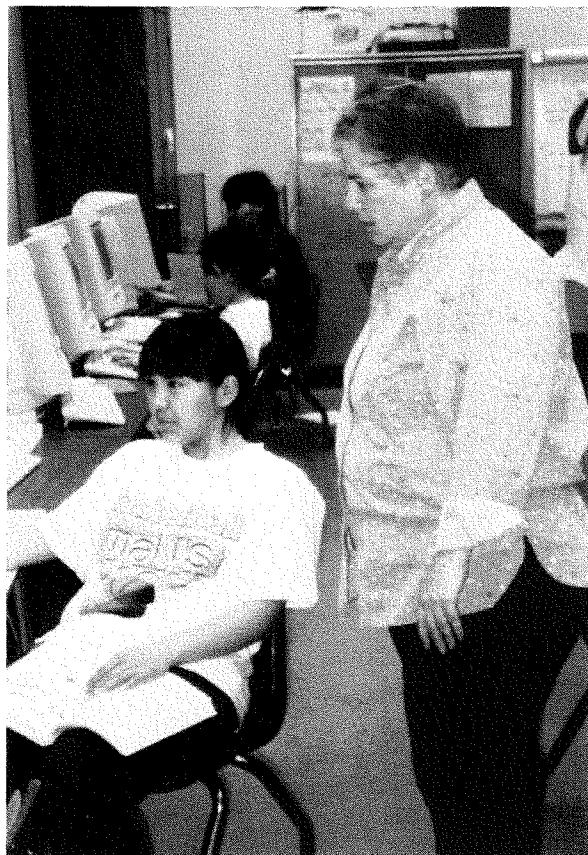
While many students made attempts at cultural sensitivity, for the most part cultural misunderstandings and false assumptions got in the way

of a positive exchange of ideas, and these obstacles caused both my students and Anne's to lose interest in the project.

My students and I have reflected on why the cultural exchange foundered and what we might have done to prevent that from happening. During one discussion, we agreed that we needed to know more about each other's culture *before* engaging in a writing project that exposed cultural differences to each other. We needed a way to get to know one another first, to share some interests perhaps, before we examined differences. One method of getting a telecommunications cultural exchange off on the right foot might be to exchange videos of our classes and town or village before writing. Before a writing exchange begins, teachers might work with their own classes to examine erroneous cultural assumptions. My students suggested we should create a booklet entitled "Answers to Most-Often-Asked Questions About Eskimos." Also,

rather than highlighting the differences between our cultures, we should look for ways to exchange writings that celebrate our similarities and find the common ground.

The misconceptions and misunderstandings in our exchange with South Carolina probably would have cleared up naturally through further exchanges, but in the real world of time constraints and curricular demands, semesters end and students vanish. It makes sense, therefore, to build some cultural understanding in advance for students whose lives are so different, whose only frame of reference may be their culture and their immediate local surroundings. Perhaps by carefully preparing my Yup'ik students for another cross-cultural exchange, they and their peers on the other end of the information super-highway will become familiar enough with each other that their responses on-line will yield detailed, accurate descriptions that promote understanding of the unique places where they live. ☺



Sandy McCulloch assisting a student at the computer

Dos Voces: Using Culturally Responsive Technology

by Wendy Beserra
Title I Coordinator
Deming Public Schools
Deming, NM

Teaching is a delightful series of “aha” moments, those small milestone discoveries that mark the development of our teaching styles, our curriculum planning, and our own growth as professionals. Indeed, our philosophies about teaching can be changed forever by the continual accumulation of such incidents. So it has been for me.

The most recent discovery has come through observing bilingual fifth and sixth graders communicating over BreadNet in English and Spanish. Though I have long believed in making schools places where children and adults feel valued and welcome, observing these students communicate on-line has helped me understand that students need also to make connections between what they know when they come to school and what we ask them to learn at school. These children speak two languages daily—with their teachers, parents, and friends and in everyday interactions at the grocery store, the video store, and the gas station. Therefore, it is quite natural and beneficial for these children to practice their bilingual skills at school, using BreadNet technology to communicate with other bilingual children in other parts of the country.

It is true that bilingual education is controversial in many school districts, including my own. A quarrelsome discussion continues in this country regarding the causes of the poor educational achievement of some of our students who come from diverse cultures. Although there is clearly no single cause and, therefore, no easy solution that will improve school performance among children

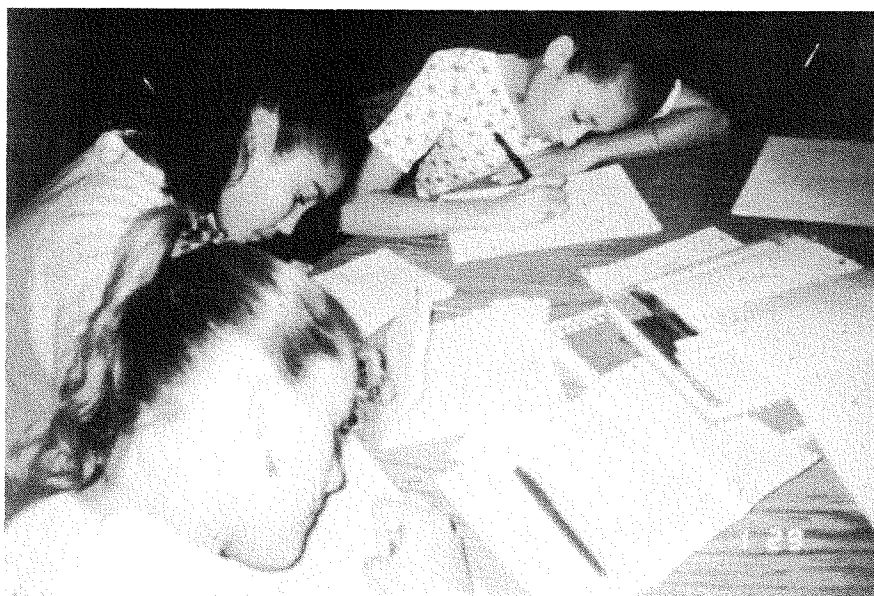
whose primary language varies from the dominant one in the classroom, there is abundant research to support the creation of classroom environments that are responsive to *all* children.

In a recent article, “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: An Imperative Approach to Instruction,” published in the 1996 fall issue of *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, authors Maria E. Reyes-Blanes and Ann P. Daunic call for a pedagogy based on “an awareness of the profound and pervasive influence of culture” (107). Among various recommended instructional strategies that serve the needs of all children—including those whose language or culture is different from the mainstream children—are collaborative learning, participatory learning, and content that is contextually rich and presented holistically. Many teachers know this and create receptive and supportive environments that enhance the quality of school life for all children. Proponents of bilingual

education believe that such environments are equally significant and necessary for minority children who feel out of place because their language and their home culture are not those of the school institution.

This semester when Norberta Vigil, Roseanne Lara and I created a bilingual on-line conference on BreadNet, I was struck with the ease with which the participating students adapted to the use of Spanish in their on-line conversations. Through the technology of BreadNet, a fifth grade bilingual classroom in Deming, New Mexico, communicated with a seventh grade bilingual classroom in Anthony, New Mexico, using *dos voces*. These “two voices,” Spanish and English, are spoken with equal regularity in southern New Mexico. Roseanne Lara and Norberta Vigil, bilingual educators who remember a time when children were severely punished for speaking Spanish at school, promoted respect for every child by acknowledging the language each brings to the classroom. At the same time, they revealed technology’s ability to remove cultural and language barriers. I like to imagine the joy young Veronica Marquez felt when she saw her words across the

(continued on next page)



Amy Mayes, Leah Santana, and Ashly Means respond to letters from Gadsden Middle School students

Dos Voces

(continued from previous page)

computer screen as she introduced herself through this "bio-poem" to students at Gadsden Middle School:

Veronica
 Chaparrita, alegre, gordita, y
 inteligente
 Hija de Antonio y Dolores
 Marquez
 Lo mas querido es mi familia, mi
 perro y los animales
 Me siento alegre, excitada, y
 amable
 Necesito a Dios, mi vida, y vida
 para todos
 Tengo miedo a Chupacabras, a
 La Llorona, y a las películas
 de terror
 Doy amor, compasión, y abrazos
 Me gustaría ver a mis hermanos,
 a mi papá, y a mis tíos
 Vivo en Deming, Nuevo Mexico
 Marquez

Veronica's pride was no greater, of course, than that which Ashly Means experienced completing the same assignment in English:

Ashly
 Faithful, enjoying, exciting, and
 funny
 Daughter of Obie and Carmen
 Means
 Lover of animals, spiders, and
 gymnastics
 Who feels happy, mad, sad and
 normal
 Who needs a different Nintendo
 game, a pet cat, and more
 CDs
 Who fears racism, crime, and
 death
 Who gives money, gum and
 laughter
 Who would like to meet Demi
 Moore, Dominique Dwaz,
 Jean Claude Van Damme and
 Carrie Strug
 Resident of Deming, New Mexico
 Means

Introductions like these bio-poems are common tools used by Bread Loaf teachers to initiate new on-line conferences and get students talking to each other; this particular form challenges the beginning writer to identify what is most important about himself or herself. Like most good writing assignments, this one allows the writer to explore ideas as they relate to himself or herself. That some children speak and write in both Spanish and English is an important part of their personal story, and they say a great deal about themselves when they introduce themselves in the language of their home.

When Norberta invited her fifth grade students to ask their parents or grandparents about the traditional folk story of "La Llorona" or "The Crying Woman," many versions were told in *dos voces*. Students transcribed the stories and shared them with bilingual students in Anthony, New Mexico, who could savor and explore the different nuances of the story as it is told in two languages.

La Llorona

—by James Oranen

A long time ago there was a very beautiful woman who had beautiful dark brown eyes and long flowing black hair. She married a very handsome man. They were a very good couple and they had two children together. Her husband was such a very handsome man that everywhere they went all the girls would stare at him. Once when they were in town walking around, there was a very beautiful woman, and he left his wife for that woman. After he left her, his wife went crazy and didn't really think that there was a purpose for living anymore. She decided that she would kill her children...

La Llorona

—by Ivan Majalca

*La Llorona es una señora
 que cuando ella tenía hijos, ella*

*los tiró al río. El lo que hace es
 cuando está lloviendo, ella grita
 por sus hijos. Pero ella lo que es,
 es un fantasma. Pero de todos
 modos, ella llora por sus hijos.
 Aunque sea fantasma, no más
 llora por sus hijos y grita - "¡Mis
 hijos!" Pero ella los tiró al río.
 Tiró dos hijos de ella y por eso
 siempre que llueve, llora por los
 hijos. Ella llora mucho cuando
 llueve. Y por eso aunque esté
 muerta, ella llora por sus hijos.
 Eso es por que ella llora tanto.
 Pero yo no creo en La Llorona y
 no le tengo miedo...*

So there it is—another "aha." In a world that continually threatens our humanity, these children celebrate theirs. In their classrooms, two teachers promote literacy in the broadest possible sense, teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the languages of the children and teachers who study and work there. Such commonsense approaches to teaching language don't favor the child's primary language over standard English; but they do value the primary language as an important building block for developing the child's abilities with standard English. And this commonsense approach is supported by recent research on bilingual classrooms that claims children can learn two languages simultaneously without difficulty or confusion, and that by endorsing the child's two languages in the classroom we validate the child.

The Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, which makes the *Dos Voces* project possible, serves as a significant partner to New Mexico teachers, empowering communities of learners to discover new useful paradigms and abandon old prejudices. BreadNet, particularly, is a vehicle for promoting cultural literacy, cultural sensitivity, and respect in and among schools. ☞

Dos Voces: Making Language Connections for Bilingual Students

by Norberta Moreno-Vigil
Sunshine Elementary School
Deming, New Mexico

In a rural New Mexico, bilingual fourth/fifth grade classroom, 24 students work quietly: some complete spelling assignments while others write in their journals. Suddenly, as if synchronized, students raise their eyes to the clock on the wall. Whispers circulate through the classroom. "It's almost time!"—*¡Mira, ya mero es tiempo!* Amidst a shuffle of books and paper, I return the attentive gaze of ten waiting students. "Okay, Group One, come to the reading center," I announce. Students carrying chairs, journals, and books rush to the corner of the room.

"What are we going to do today?" ask the students.

These students are a smart group, and they keep me on my toes: they read at or above a seventh grade level, based on the results of several assessments. All these students are fluent in the English language and are proficient in Spanish as well. This seemed to be the perfect opportunity to design a pilot project to help students retain their primary language at the same time they improved their English skills.

Wendy Beserra, a BLRTN Fellow, organized the project using BreadNet, the telecommunications system of the Bread Loaf School of English. Her dream was to create a place in cyberspace where students would write responses to literature as well as post their own essays and poetry in English and Spanish. Wendy recruited another BLRTN Fellow, Roseanne Lara, a bilingual teacher with many bilingual students at Gadsden Middle School in Anthony, NM, to join our pilot project, which was funded at Sunshine Elementary School through the Title I Program.

And now my fourth and fifth grade students are on-line daily with classrooms from Deming and Taos, New Mexico, and Kipnuk, Alaska.

* * *

It's early morning and students are arriving. Several of them gather around the lone Macintosh computer, anxious to hear from their peers in far off places. One student moves the mouse swiftly across the mouse pad, but not quick enough!

"Can't it go any faster?"

"Do we have any mail?"

"¡Pronto!"

Click, click, click. We're connected to BreadNet. Click, click, click. We're in the *Dos Voces* conference area.

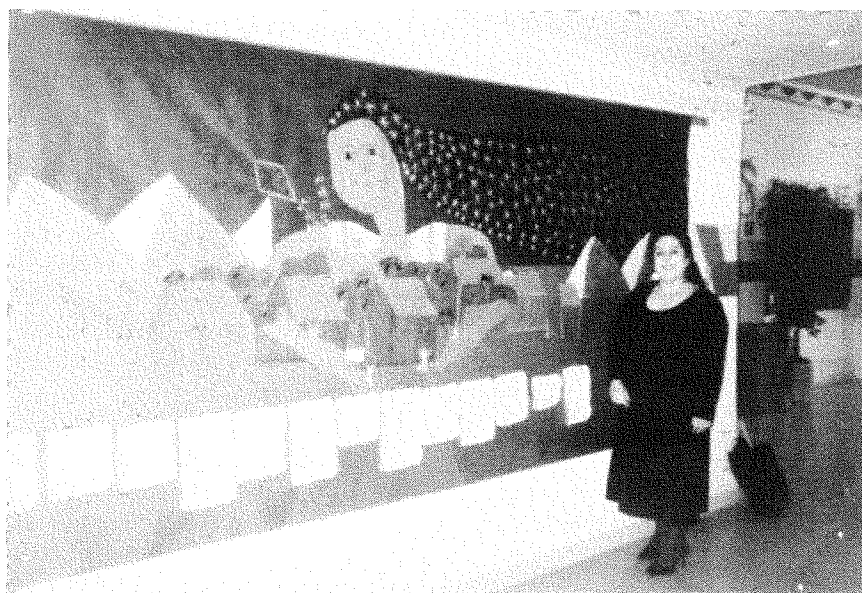
"Yes, we *do* have mail!" I smile.

"All right! This is *awesome!!*"

"¡Que suave!"

* * *

The students' eagerness to engage in bilingual learning was infectious throughout the classroom. From dreams come ideas and from ideas come successes. The students from our classrooms have shared literature, responses to literature, poetry, and their own compositions on-line. Via "snail mail" we exchanged photographs of classroom projects and students. Through this collaboration, my students have become proficient in their technological skills and have demonstrated an enhanced self-image and a genuine love of reading and writing. Most important, they have an eagerness to be in school as learners, an attitude I feel will help to ensure their academic success. ☺



Norberta Moreno-Vigil standing next to a mural her students constructed as a response to the story "The Woman Who Outshone the Sun"

Gender, Learning, and Classroom Culture

by Rob Baroz

Champlain Valley Union H. S.
Hinesburg, VT

During this past year, my eleventh grade Writing Prose class used telecommunications technology to participate in a writing exchange with a high school class in Sierra Vista, Arizona, focusing on memoir and descriptive essay writing. In this project my students exchanged drafts of essays and responses to those drafts with students in Sierra Vista. This relatively new peer dynamic, using telecommunications to link students in collaboration, has made me reconsider some basic questions about gender and the teaching of writing. A spontaneous conversation in my class one day, for example, made me consider the effect that a reader's gender has on student writing.

Looking at a draft of an essay by a student in Arizona, Hillary asked me, "Is Jerry a guy or girl, Mr. Baroz?"

"It's a girl," Mary answered, looking over Hillary's shoulder.

"How do you know?"

"She spells her name with a 'J'; that's the way girls spell it."

"No, girls spell it with a 'G', right, Mr. Baroz?"

"Well, when I was a kid, I remember the Mets had a catcher named Gerry Garote," I said. "He spelled his name with a 'G'. But Jerry Seinfeld spells his name with a 'J'. Does it matter if it is a boy or a girl?"

"Yes, I think it does," Hillary said. "I'd like to know where they're coming from."

At this point another girl overheard our conversation and added, "Jerry's a boy. I remember reading his memoir, and he wrote about mountain biking. Girls don't mountain bike."

At this point, I had several questions swirling in my mind. What did Hillary mean by "know where they are coming from"? And if girls don't mountain bike, then what *do* they do? Are there *guy* stories and *girl* stories? Before I could sort these questions out, the bell rang and class was over.

With these questions in mind, I read over the students' descriptive essays and letters to the students in Arizona, grouping them according to gender and looking for patterns. I could not quite find substantial differences in the writing. Yet I kept my mind open to what the students might find. In our next class, I had the students work in small groups analyzing the writing just as I had done according to gender. The groups mostly generalized, saying "girls are more de-

but most people seem to have been curious.... We shouldn't have had to spend the whole class time on that subject." But others had a different view:

I have always been confident I knew the gender of the writer by the things they wrote about, the objects they chose to describe. Now after all this analyzing I realize that I was wrong. My assumptions about the writer's gender may weigh heavily on my acceptance of the writing and may influence my response to it.

Clearly, some students adopted a more reflective stance on the issue, reexamining their ways of thinking and writing. This was good. Looking critically at assumptions that shape our thinking and reevaluating them can promote a higher level of understanding about

This technology has potential for raising all sorts of questions that can lead to substantive conversations among students and teachers in America about gender, culture, and learning.

scriptive" or "boys write mostly about objects."

One student stated aptly the difficulty of the issue, "I think it is hard to put papers and genders into categories . . . not all boys and not all girls write the same." With the class nearing an end again, I asked the students to answer two questions, in writing, to survey my students' opinions.

The first question was "Do you think there are differences in the ways boys and girls write?" The responses represented a range of viewpoints, but they suggested the value that students placed on the inquiry itself. For instance, one student expressed frustration: "I really don't think it matters what gender they are,

ourselves as writers.

In the responses to the second question, "Does the gender of your audience have any effect on the way you write, and why?" I noticed a few assumptions that girls had about each other, such as those expressed by Kari:

I don't think there is a conscious difference in the way I write to a boy or a girl; you can't really help the way you write to either one. Girls respond and relate to girls differently than boys do and vice versa. It's human nature. Sometimes what a girl writes is easier for a girl to relate to.

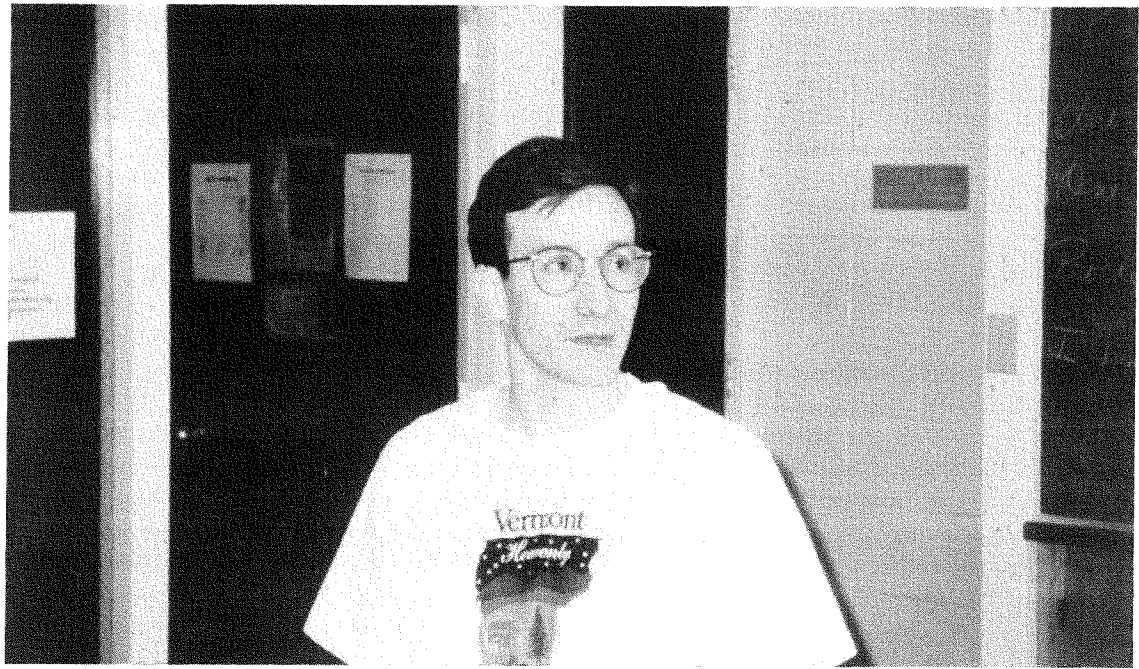
What Kari says here about "human nature" creating a difference in the way male and female students respond

suggests the possible ways that gender bias is subtly woven into the culture in the stories we hear, the messages and images we receive from the media, and the ways we customarily interact. And it's also possible that the degree of significance a student writer places on the gender of his or her audience (con-

sciously or not) may be based on his or her own personal experiences.

While some girls and boys said the gender of their audience "made no difference" in the way they responded to their peers' writing, some girls like Sarah did not share this viewpoint:

I think, for me, my reader's gender does change the way I respond because I feel girls may



Rob Baroz of Champlain Valley Union High School

Sarah suggests the interesting possibility that boys and girls view criticism differently. Her underlying assumption is that girls share experiences that enable them to respond to each other with criticism in a way that boys might not be able to. In viewing the correspondence between the students in Arizona and my own class, I saw a few examples of what Sarah suggests. For example, in a letter to Vanessa,

stepping-stone to constructive criticism. I need to research this further. But I do see this kind of personal connection as a valuable trust-building step for students using telecommunications across state lines to respond to the writing of their peers.

This brief review of my students' writing demonstrates the subtlety and complexity of gender issues in the classroom, especially when we begin using telecommunications to connect culturally distinct populations that may view gender differently. My students are among the first in my school to use telecommunications, and I see the potential that this technology has for raising all sorts of questions that can lead to substantive conversations among students and teachers in America about gender, culture, and learning. It's a subject that merits more study by teachers and students. In fact, the very technology that raises such questions is a valuable tool enabling us to collaborate on inquiries that can include diverse perspectives from around the globe. ☺

My students' writing demonstrates the subtlety and complexity of gender issues in the classroom, especially when we begin using telecommunications to connect culturally distinct populations that may view gender differently.

take my criticism and help more seriously. Also I think that it is easier to write to people of the same gender because you basically go through the same stuff as them and it's easier to relate to them.

Shanda writes, "I can totally hear you.... It sounds like you love the game of basketball. Me too, I love this game so much I play all year round." Shanda then goes on to offer constructive criticism to Vanessa. I'm not going to suggest that boys do not engage in this kind of "rapport-building" as a

Harvard Educational Review: A Special Issue on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Education: A Review

by Moira Donovan
Peoples Academy
Morrisville, VT

Despite legislation such as the "Defense of Marriage Act," signed into law in September of 1996, which federally denies same-sex marriage and the benefits associated with marriage, we have a culture where homosexuality exists. And despite the insistence of some that heterosexuality is an absolute norm in our culture, homosexual students exist in our classrooms, urban and rural alike.

Although the media portray lesbians and gays more candidly and consistently in the 1990's, most schools will not acknowledge that gay and lesbian students want information. At my rural school there are no organizations, forums, or school-related activities that could serve to inform and educate the student population on lesbian and gay issues. I have never heard a faculty or staff member address this absence of information. Our curriculum does not prohibit discussions about homosexuality, although rarely does anyone engage in a positive discussion on this subject.

Before I worked here, an organization called Outright Vermont, based in nearby Burlington, visited our high school and spoke to the entire student body about lesbian and gay issues with the hope of creating an attitude of tolerance. I am convinced that such an event is an unusual occurrence in most rural schools. The event received a mixed reception at our school; some were positive and others were negative, and the Outright group has not been asked back.

The Harvard Educational Review: A Special Issue on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Education, I'm pleased to say, provides teachers with much needed information, and it features the voices of students as well as educators. The voices speak about real life

and real experiences. When the *Harvard Educational Review (HER)* sent out a request for manuscripts, they received 125, a remarkable response. The introduction states:

This tremendous response amazed, impressed, and overwhelmed us. It made evident the sociosexual transformations that have been occurring in the United States over the past twenty-five years. This response also validated our view that a growing body of knowledge is being developed in lesbian and gay studies, and that social changes in the perceptions and experiences of sexuality have left many people with reflections, research, and ideas to share. (v)

The tone set in the introduction is academic and straightforward. There are no angry or apologetic pieces in the collection, although many are heartfelt and discuss the different levels of oppression that lesbians and gays have experienced in a variety of settings.

Included in *HER* is an essay titled "What Difference Does It Make? The Story of a Lesbian Teacher" from a woman who came out to her elementary students, her colleagues, and her administrators. In many schools, even ones with tolerant environments, such an action would likely provoke condemnation of a teacher, especially from people who view homosexuality as deviant. My own daughter painfully reminded me of this common reaction when she came home from school and told me about a rumor: several female classmates told her not to change her clothing in front of a certain female gym teacher, whom they classified as lesbian. Even my daughter, who knows many lesbian and gay people and is tolerant, was apprehensive. We discussed the "myth" of the "predatory" lesbian or gay personality, and her apprehension was alleviated. She understood. But I could tell by her re-

sponses that her peers held considerable sway over her opinions.

The essay clearly states how the fifth grade teacher prepared her students all year for her "coming out" by teaching units and lessons on prejudice and discrimination. In speaking with colleagues she exposed the overwhelming sense of vulnerability she felt in revealing her orientation. After this experience, this teacher's stance clearly made a significant difference in the attitudes of others in the classroom and school building. The article identifies three specific growth areas:

The first shows Rosemary's efforts to create a safe place in which her students can be "who they are." The second discusses her long-term interest in questioning the dominant culture and shows how she uses this critical stance to help her students raise questions and deal with the world. The third includes some of the ways Rosemary encourages her students to speak up and to speak for themselves. (265)

In the collection, Rosemary's story is critical because it not only reveals the hatred and prejudice that lesbian and gay individuals experience, but shows a real-life situation where appropriately informed students and coworkers benefit from honest interactions.

A similar sentiment in combating prejudice echoes through Steven Z. Athanes' essay "A Gay-Themes Lesson in an Ethnic Literature Curriculum: Tenth Graders' Responses to 'Dear Anita.'" (In this particular article the names of all the students, the teacher, and even the school were changed to protect those involved.) This detailed study tells how a teacher deliberately included in his unit on ethnic stories and essays a piece of writing that deals with gay issues. In his essay, Athanes defines the ethnic makeup of the classroom, states the teacher Reiko's objectives, and analyzes the students' responses.

Again, preparation was the essential element ensuring the positive outcome of even such a slight change in curriculum. "Reiko's class norms enabled her tenth graders to respond with curiosity, candor, and, at times, anger" (232). Athanes provides transcriptions of the class discussions and an analysis of students' language and physical behavior in the classroom. Students examined many stereotypes and cultural fears during these class discussions. What were the results of including such discussions? Empathy, understanding, and—for some students—a validation of who they are. Don't these outcomes suggest the need to include similar appropriate materials among other units of study?

"Toward a Most Thorough Understanding of the World: Sexual Orientation and Early Childhood Education" is a collaborative essay written by five educators from the Bank Street College of Education in New York City, and it raises some provocative questions. For example, as educators, what are our conceptions of lesbian and gay people? Are the needs of lesbian and gay students ever addressed in our education courses? How do we respond, for example, to parents concerned about their child's orientation? What is the message we give lesbian and gay students? When teaching the children of a lesbian or gay union, what concerns do we afford them?

This essay challenges our ideas and assumptions. One educator states, "If we value the importance of making children aware [of] being understanding and compassionate to others who are different from themselves, the need [to talk about gay and lesbian families] exists" (289). I would add that this dialogue needs to happen in more schools, especially those in rural areas where tolerance is sometimes undermined by the homogeneity of the population.

The *HER* collection begins, as it should, with "Youth Voices" because, as stated by the editors

[I]t is a well-known irony that youth are rarely given a voice in setting educational policy, even though it greatly affects them.

Youth are usually not invited to sit on school policy-making boards or town councils, nor are their thoughts or opinions regularly solicited. The editors of this *Special Issue on Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Education* have purposefully sought to reverse this trend, as these youth have powerful lessons to teach the adults around them—their parents, teachers, neighbors, and ministers (173).

Each of the five students represented in this collection tells a tale of personal struggle with the negative fallout he or she experienced as a lesbian or gay person. As educators we can learn much by reading their individual stories. "It is clearly the part of educators, administrators, politicians, and community leaders to provide aid to the scores of GLBT youth who are in every city and town of this nation, and all too often confined to silence" (196).

I cannot think of a better gift to give our rural students than preparing them for the world—both inside and beyond our communities. In my school there is currently a great emphasis on installing more computers in the classrooms, on spending more money on technology, on preparing

our students for the technological challenges of the next century. These are important initiatives, but I would add teaching tolerance to the list. Students today must be prepared, for example, to work for a female supervisor, to work beside a gay coworker, to perform at a job that requires collaborative effort. Once they move beyond our classrooms, our students will meet lesbian and gay people, and showing tolerance in such situations will be a key to success for them. As educators we need to prepare our students for these situations, and we do that best by informing and educating ourselves first.

For anyone wondering where to start educating herself on these questions, this special issue of *HER* is a good place to begin, especially the section "Book Notes," which summarizes over a dozen books that offer insight to parents and educators. This issue of *HER* also includes an extensive "Resource Guide" that provides current addresses and phone numbers for both national and regional organizations. For rural educators, such resources are often hard to come by. As part of the movement to open doors we must be responsible to add this conversation to our lesson plans, our faculty meetings, and our town meetings. ☺



Sue Locarno, Moira Donovan, Mary Burnham, and Vicki Wright of Vermont BLRTN

1996-97 Meetings, Classroom Visits, and Announcements

Renee Moore of East Side High School, Cleveland, MS; **Phil Sittnick** of Laguna Middle School, Laguna, NM; **Scott Christian** of the University of Alaska-Southeast, Juneau, AK; and **Dixie Goswami**, BLRTN Coordinator, joined Research for Action staff **Elaine Simon** and **Eva Gold** in a panel discussion at the March 8, 1997, 18th Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum at the University of Pennsylvania. Their session, "The Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network and BreadNet: A Small-Scale Site for On-Line Literacy Learning among Communities of Teachers and Students," was part of the Teacher Research Day. **Shirley Brice Heath**, the Forum's keynote speaker, attended and responded to the panel presentations.

Sylvia Saenz and her interdisciplinary teaching team were named Middle Level Educators of the Year at Sierra Vista Middle School at a banquet sponsored by the Southern Arizona Middle Level Association. Sylvia and fellow members of the Technology Enhancement Team at Sierra Vista Middle School received a Literacy Award from the Huachuca Area Reading Council for their work in securing, refurbishing, and installing computer equipment in their school and in training students and teachers in the use of technology in the classroom.

Tim Dorsey, of the Navajo Preparatory School, and **Dorothy Brooks**, of Ojo Amarillo Elementary School, have made frequent "site visits" to each other's school this year. Tim and his high school students visited Ojo Amarillo Elementary, joining the elementary students in get-acquainted activities, reading, and writing. A district minigrant supported a publication of the students' writing. In April, Ojo Amarillo Elementary students visited the Navajo Preparatory School for a two-day cross-age writing workshop with Tim's high school students.

As part of the Bread Loaf Rural Challenge Network, teacher **Natasha O'Brien** and principal **Anthony Kennedy** of Ketchikan High School; and teacher **Rosie Roppel** and principal **Dick Clement** of Schoenbar Middle School, Ketchikan, AK, visited **Susan Miera's** desktop publishing classroom at Pojoaque High School, Pojoaque, NM. While in New Mexico, the Ketchikan group visited Laguna Middle School, where **Phil Sittnick** and **Lauren Sittnick** are teachers, and toured the Native American Preparatory School, one of the summer Bread Loaf campuses. Natasha also visited **Pat Truman's** classroom this spring in Palmer, AK, to conduct a poetry workshop for her students.

Sondra Porter, of Susitna Valley Junior/Senior High School, Talkeetna, AK, visited **Rosie Roppel's** eighth grade classroom at Schoenbar Middle School, Ketchikan, AK.

Erika Brett, of Hatch Middle School, spent three days in **Vicki Hunt's** classes at Peoria High School, Peoria, AZ, as visiting quilting artist, helping Vicki's students create quilts representing their personal and school histories. Two memoir quilts, one African American history quilt, and one Peoria High School history quilt were created. Students learned art and quilting techniques to illustrate memoirs written in Vicki's history/memoir writing class.

On April 18-19, **South Carolina BLRTN** held its spring meeting at the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, historic site of the first school for African Americans in the United States. Over 35 students of BLRTN teachers attended the two-day meeting with their teachers and presented the results of their year-long participation in BLRTN projects. Presentations included descriptions of "culture exchanges" between South Carolina stu-

dents and students in other states, collaborative research on the effects of the nuclear fuel industry on rural communities, and cross-age collaborative writing projects. In addition to reporting past activities, students planned projects focused on "heritage" for academic year 1997-98. **Phil Sittnick** of Laguna Middle School, Laguna, NM, participated in the conference and visited **Janet Atkins's** students at Wade Hampton High School, who are working on telecommunications projects with his students at Laguna. A film crew of **South Carolina Educational TV** recorded the event for an upcoming documentary on BLRTN. **Elaine Simon**, of Research for Action, evaluators of the BLRTN, also attended.

New Mexico BLRTN held its spring meeting, March 22, at Pojoaque High School, Pojoaque, NM. Forty students from various BLRTN school sites in New Mexico gathered with their peers at Pojoaque High School for a student-directed workshop on using telecommunications and desktop publishing. The workshop was held in **Susan Miera's** desktop publishing lab. Students selected poetry and prose from BreadNet conferences, edited, and laid out an anthology including student writing from several BLRTN projects. All participants received a copy of *Compadres II*, the anthology. While students were holding their workshop, BLRTN teachers met to plan a variety of initiatives: increasing student involvement in the BLRTN; developing BLRTN expertise in technology and telecommunications to help interested teacher groups in New Mexico; and generating writing projects for the *BLRTN Magazine*. A film crew from **South Carolina Educational TV** recorded the event for an upcoming documentary on BLRTN. After the meetings adjourned, student groups from Laguna and Navajo Prep went to the State Capitol building where they received a tour from Stephanie Gonzales, NM Secretary of State.

On April 5, the **Vermont BLRTN** met at Champlain Valley Union High School. **Dixie Goswami, Betty Bailey, Doug Wood, and Rocky Gooch** also attended the meeting. Dixie and Rocky updated the Vermont teachers on the continuation of the Dewitt-Wallace grant and reported on the Bread Loaf Rural Challenge Network as well. They also shared ideas for developing on-line courses.

The majority of the meeting was devoted to three agenda items: the Vermont state-wide Conference on Literacy, grant opportunities, and reports from individuals on current issues in their schools. Dixie encouraged the group to include students as they begin analyzing the data collected in their literacy study, and plans were made to identify students to participate in the research. The Vermont BLRTN discussed ways to approach several foundations that might be interested in funding this study as a state-wide, collaborative, teacher-research project.

Janet Atkins, Chris Benson, Bette Ford, Rocky Gooch, and Priscilla Kelley presented a telecommunications workshop, "Computer Conferencing and the Revival of Storytelling" at the spring NCTE conference in Charlotte, NC, April 11, 1997. Bread Loafers **Tom McKenna** and **Alison Gray** participated from a remote site in Barcelona, Spain. BLRTN Fellow **Lauren Sittnick** also participated. On April 12, **Raymond Cook, Gary Montaño, Bette Ford, Dixie Goswami, and Chris Benson** presented a panel discussion entitled "True Confessions: The Age of the Teacher Memoir."

The **Arizona BLRTN** held their Northern meeting on Saturday, April 26, near Flagstaff at Vicki Hunt's cabin. A lively group of 12 attended and were pleased to host **Jim Maddox, Doug Wood, Sandy LeGault, and Hazel Lockett**. Teachers reported on projects that highlighted this academic year: **Chad Graff** reported on his continuing work on the reservation and his several writing projects; **Jill Loveless** talked about the challenges of switching to a high school setting; **Erika Brett** reported on her prison music exchange; **Vicki Hunt** showed samples of quilts her students had made in their memoir writing class; **Nancy Jennings** reported on the Spencer Teacher Research project ongoing in her school, which has 10 teachers involved in classroom research and writing. **Judy Tarantino** was welcomed to the Arizona BLRTN.

From the Editor

by Chris Benson
Clemson University
Clemson, SC

In this issue of the *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Magazine*, we focus on "language and culture," two closely related issues that are central to the teaching of English, especially in remote rural places where BLRTN teachers live. Our leadoff article "Teaching Away from Home," by BLRTN consultant Jacqueline Royster, posits that ever-changing social conditions require teachers to involve themselves in innovative professional development activities. This new kind of professional development, as modeled by BLRTN members, is based on flexibility and collaboration: the former enables individual teachers to shape their teaching goals according to the community where they teach; at the same time, the collaborative, small-scale nature of the BLRTN en-

ables all members to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the teaching of English in rural schools.

As this issue of *BLRTN Magazine* attests, several of our teachers are finding success in teaching writing and literature while promoting and preserving community standards or customs. In "The Yup'ik Encyclopedia of the Paul T. Albert Memorial School," Hugh Dymont explains how his Native Alaskan students in Tununak learn vital literacy and technology skills as they create a multimedia archive of the Yup'ik Eskimo culture. Sheri Skelton's essay "Unity and Diversity in an American Classroom" speculates on the uniquely American paradox of a unified country composed of a diverse population. These stories and others show how teachers practice the teaching of English in communities that have a long tradition of oral culture and a language of their own.

Bette Ford's reminiscence "Talkin' Proper" shows the wealth of

linguistic knowledge children possess before ever attending school, and Alfredo Lujan's essay "*Las Tareas*" explains how to multiply that wealth of knowledge, using appropriate, community-oriented writing assignments.

Three pieces—Tom McKenna's "Uncovering Differences across Classroom Learning Cultures with Telecommunications," Rob Baroz's "Gender, Learning, and Classroom Culture," and Moira Donovan's review of a recent *Harvard Educational Review*—analyze implicit norms of behavior that constitute the "culture" of a classroom. Such invisible classroom customs have significant effects on the quality of learning.

And, of course, there are many stories about BreadNet, the telecommunication system of the Bread Loaf School of English, which is used by many teachers to connect students and teachers in a variety of collaborations that cross cultural, geographic, and language barriers. ☛

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network
Bread Loaf School of English
Middlebury College
Middlebury, Vermont
05753-6115