**Learning to Hunt: Mini Case**

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**Abstract:** *This mini case study seeks to extend our understanding of the processes of learning that occur within and at the intersection of diverse world views and knowledge systems, drawing on experiences derived from across Fourth World contexts, with an emphasis on the Alaska context in particular. The case outlines the rationale behind a comprehensive program of educational initiatives that are closely articulated with the emergence of a new generation of indigenous scholars who are seeking to move the role of indigenous knowledge and learning from the margins to the center of the educational research arena and thus take on some of the most intractable and salient issues of our times.*

An Inupiaq elder stood up and explained through an interpreter that he was going to describe how he and his brother were taught to hunt caribou by their father, before guns were commonplace in the upper Kobuk River area of northern Alaska.

The elder described how his father had been a highly respected hunter who always brought food home when he went out on hunting trips and shared it with others in the village. One day when he and his brother were coming of age, their father told them to prepare to go with him to check out a herd of caribou that was migrating through a valley a few miles away. They eagerly assembled their clothing and equipment and joined their father for their first caribou hunt. When they reached a ridge overlooking the nearby valley, they could see a large herd grazing and moving slowly across a grassy plain below. Their father told his sons to lay quietly up on the ridge and watch as he went down with his bow and arrows to intercept the caribou.

The boys watched as their father proceeded to walk directly toward the caribou herd, which as he approached began to move away from him in a file behind the lead bulls, yet he just kept walking openly toward them. This had the two brothers scratching their heads wondering why their father was chasing the caribou away from him. Once the father reached the area where the caribou had been grazing, he stopped and put his bow and arrows down on the ground. As the (now) elder told the story, he demonstrated how his father then got into a crouching position and slowly began to move his arms up and down, slapping them against his legs as though he were mimicking a giant bird about to take off. The two brothers watched intently as the lead bulls in the caribou heard stopped and looked back curiously at their father’s movements. Slowly at first, the caribou began to circle back in a wide arc watching the figure flapping its wings out on the tundra, and then they began running, encircling their father in a closing spiral until eventually they were close enough that he reached down, picked up his bow and arrows and methodically culled out the choice caribou one at a time until he had what he needed. He then motioned for his sons to come down and help prepare the meat to be taken back to the village.

As the elder completed the story of how he and his brother were taught the accrued knowledge associated with hunting caribou, he explained that in those days the relationship between the hunter and the hunted was much more intimate than it is now. With the intervention of modern forms of technology, the knowledge associated with that symbiotic relationship is slowly being eroded. But for the elder, the lessons he and his brother had learned from their father out on the tundra that day where just as vivid when he shared them with us as they had been the day he learned them, and he would have little difficulty passing a graduation qualifying exam on the subject 70 years later. The knowledge, skills and standards of attainment required to be a successful hunter were self-evident, and what a young hunter needed to know and be able to do was both implicit and explicit in the lesson the father provided.

Discussion questions

1) What are the lessons from this case about traditional ways of learning ?

2) How does this differ from contemporary ways of learning?

3) How could some contemporary approaches embody traditional approaches?

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