WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TECHNOLOGY ISN'T UBIQUITOUS: TEACHING DISTANCE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION CLASSES IN RURAL ALASKA

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Overview

- Context of grant/study
- Study design
  - Participants
  - Data Collection
- Course Delivery Evolution
- Themes
  - Student-centered
  - Community of learners
  - Collaboration
  - Balance (Conclusion)
Southwestern Alaska or “Yup’ik Region”
- Rural (air, snowmachine, boat)
- Size of Arizona
- ~23,000 Yup’ik Eskimos
- 60 villages
- Regional hub Bethel-closest city
Alaska Native Languages

Figure 1: Alaska Native Languages (http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/)
Context

- SLATE (Second Language Acquisition Teacher Education) grant
  - USDOE Alaska Native Education competition (S35A060055)
  - Partnership with three school districts
  - AVCP (a local Native organization)

**WHY?**
- Strengthen Yup’ik and English language programs
- Build capacity for local control

**HOW?**
- Support Yup’ik and English language teachers to complete Master’s degrees
Historically, Alaska Native students have had difficulty completing graduate degrees

- Place bound
- Individualized instruction (collaborative learning environments preferred)
- Discourse patterns vary from standard English (Aldrich, 2007; Kwachka & Basham, 1990; Scollon & Scollon, 1988;)
- Lack of ownership in programs (not able to create 3rd space)
Study Design

- Teacher Action Research: Qualitative Case Study of course delivery for grant cohort
  - As a faculty team, we were the decision makers
  - Reflected upon our practice and design
  - Desired to make changes to existing course design to improve learning and meet goals of grant
### Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Native students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native (residents of Yup’ik region for 3+ years) students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of language instruction</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yup’ik immersion teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yup’ik First language teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yup’ik bilingual/bicultural teacher (K-12)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yup’ik language curriculum developer (district level)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yup’ik language (high school)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Yup’ik is the first language of 9 of the participants. 2 of those teachers are English medium teachers.*
## Participants: Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60s</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
## Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Syllabi</td>
<td>Fall 2007-Fall 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Evaluations</td>
<td>Fall 2007-Fall 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Semester Survey (open-ended questions)</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher researchers journals</td>
<td>Fall 2007-Fall 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course artifacts</td>
<td>Fall 2007-Spring 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Course Delivery Evolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2007</th>
<th>Spring 2008</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One course</td>
<td>One course</td>
<td>2 courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 instructors</td>
<td>2 sections</td>
<td>2 instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(team-taught)</td>
<td>2 instructors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 distance students</td>
<td>18 distance students</td>
<td>18 distance students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hour audio conference each</td>
<td>Primarily asynchronous tasks</td>
<td>Hybrid delivery model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week</td>
<td></td>
<td>90 minute audio each week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous Blackboard chats</td>
<td>Asynchronous blackboard discussions, content</td>
<td>Multiple phone lines, Student created blogs,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>video</td>
<td>Wiki, Video tutorials, Synchronous Blackboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>chats, Skype</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No face-to-face</td>
<td>2 face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>1 face-to-face meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes

- **Student-centered**
  - Teaching based on students’ needs, abilities, interests, learning preferences; Student is an active participant

- **Community of learners**
  - Spirit, Trust, Interaction, Common Goal (Rovai, 2002)

- **Instructor collaboration**

- **Balancing act**
Need for Student-Centered Learning

- First Course Struggles (Fall, 2007)
  - Limited student participation
    - Large class size and one phone line
    - Lots of technology glitches
      - Power outages
      - Connection problems

Faculty comment:
“We spent one hour on content material and two hours facilitating technology.”
Student quotes

- “Lots of wait time and transition time.”

- “All of us on the phone at once contributed to lack of visual feedback and cues.”

- “Not enough feedback from instructor.”
Student-centered classroom?

- Spring, 2008
  - More time reading than anticipated
  - Discussion postings were extensive, overwhelming at times (students and instructors) task_list.doc
  - Providing written feedback-time consuming
  - Students felt disconnect from each other despite the discussion board threads
    - Need for a change (Spring, 2008)
    - Focus on Community of Learners (Fall, 2008)
Community of Learners (Fall 2008)

- Importance of face-to-face
  - Including technology training
- Reinstatement of (shorter) weekly meetings
  - Hearing and speaking to each other
- Addition of E-Live, blogs, multiple phone lines, and Skype.
- blog_example.doc
### Meeting Additional Challenges: Teaching Technology

#### Technology content
- Blogs
- Wikis
- PowerPoint
- i-movie
- Garageband
- Podcasts
- Distance Presentations

#### Teaching strategies
- F2F session
- **Written instructions**
- **Video tutorials**
  - Camtasia, Atomic Learning
- E-Live
  - Visual, group work, less wait time, application sharing
Community of Learners

- “I enjoyed the face-to-face. It was fun to listen to others present their method ideas to us. Also, the activities [allowed] us to interact, share, interpret, and the stories were great.”

- “Some audio is important for me. Voicing our concerns is important.”
“Networking with other immersion programs sounds exciting and workable for my students and me. In fact, during one of our class discussions, my colleagues and I discussed with excitement how beneficial networking would be in our programs. We made a pact then that we will follow through with our plan.”

“I totally like to read other students’ work. It gives me ideas and I relate my experiences to their work and have a clearer idea.”
Collaboration

Course Design
- Benefited from strengths of each instructor

On-going discussions and reflections
- Adjustments for serving varying student needs
- Different readings and tasks
- New ideas implemented throughout the courses
Balance

“I like the audio conferences because they help us all stay connected more. However, I also felt that we often got off topic during this conference. But, sometimes I do feel more alone and distanced when working independently.”

- Oral and written feedback
- Synchronous and asynchronous tasks
  - Discourse style
- Distance and face-to-face meetings
- Student-centered and Community of learners
Questions, Comments, Discussions

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