

Uvvatuq Naluallangniaqtugut (I Humbly Hope We Run Into Game): An Iñupiaq Research Process

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Abstract

Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut (I humbly hope we run into game) is a phrase an Iñupiaq person would say before going out hunting in the Selawik dialect. We believe all things have a spirit, including animals. If a hunter announces they are going out hunting, the animal spirits will hear that and the hunter may have bad luck. Another phrase said in English is “I am going out for a ride.” The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation. The name of the project is Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Teaching in Rural Areas using Cultural Knowledge Systems (TRACKS). The UAF team, known as the UAF Development Team, is working with the Northwest Arctic Borough School District to develop STEM lessons utilizing Iñupiaq knowledge systems and university research for middle school-age students in three villages. The UAF participating programs humbly reached out to local community members to establish a TRACKS Team. However, the UAF participating programs wanted the TRACKS Team to identify what is important to teach their children. The community were the ones to identify the research topic, utilizing an analogy Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut (I humbly hope we run into game) for an Iñupiaq research process.

Keywords: *Indigenous research process, Iñupiaq knowledge*

Uvvatuq Naluallangniaqtugut (I humbly hope we run into game): an Iñupiaq research process

Tamatkunuuna amiuvva piruktuat itna tunaatigun aglaan uqaquritlaitchut taipchua, taana lawjukmatun ittuq, taipchunani. Lawliqsuutigigaat anjuapiaq itna ukiumi suvaluk, pisruktuat Makua uqautigilugich, itna arguanasrigautigilugich sulugich, qanuq ami uqautigilugich, pitqungitlugich, nalupqinaiqsruqungitlugich. Atmiksruqlugich pitqungitugich. Taimñagguuq tusraapluni taimma ilisimaragigaa. Qakugu nalautchuklugu isrumaraqtuq taimña anjun.

Today the hunting laws are different from those which we were taught. For, example, the Elders taught us not to talk about the bears. This was just like a law and people respected it as a law. They told us not to brag about outwitting a bear. They did not want hunters to face a bear with that kind of attitude because they believe that a bear could eavesdrop on human conversations. (Peter Aaquuraq Atoruk as cited in Northwest Iñupiaq Elders, 1990, pp. 142-143)

Land acknowledgment (Kobuk dialect): Kanjigsirugut savaktugut suli iñuuniaqtugut Iñupiat nunaqat.

The introductory uqaaktuun (historical story) was shared by Aaquuraq from Kiana, Alaska, during an Elders conference in the 1980s. The Elders spoke Iñupiatun (Iñupiaq) during conferences, the uqaaktuutit (historical stories) were transcribed and translated by Iñupiat in Northwest Alaska, and a series of books was published by the Northwest Arctic Borough School District. Aaquuraq's uqaaktuun is in the Kobuk dialect. As I was growing up, Elders told us never to mention one is going out hunting, since Iñupiat ilitqusriat suli ukpigikkaqat taimakña makitatlugu (our people believe that animals have spirits) (Gray et al., 1981). When we go out hunting, we announce that we are going out to look around. In this article, a brief example of research with the Iñupiaq will be shared, the planning of a funded research project and how it was developed, how an Iñupiaq research design Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut (I humbly hope we run into game) applies to our research approach, and how our community relationship evolved between a research institution and community members to work together with the Iñupiat.

Aullagñiusaaq - Beginning

There are at least 21 distinct Alaska Native groups and languages of the Indigenous people in Alaska, and the Iñupiaq people are originally from the Northern part of Alaska (Krauss, 1982) (see Figure 1). The word Inuit translates to

“people” and includes Indigenous people in eastern Russia, northern Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. Iñupiat means “genuine people” and is specific to the Indigenous people in northern Alaska, the Alaskan Inuit. We northern Alaskans prefer to call ourselves Iñupiat rather than Inuit.

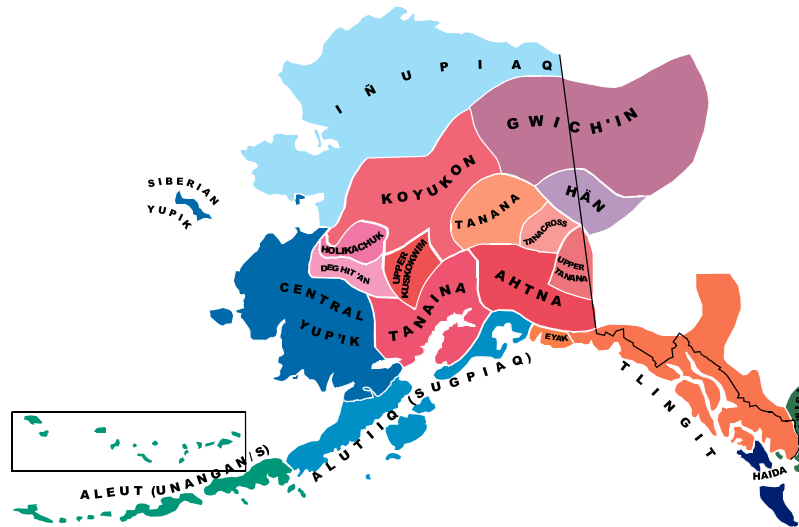


Figure 1: Alaska Native Language Map (Krauss, 1982)

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) has been working with Indigenous communities locally, statewide, nationally, and worldwide for decades. One of the many programs at UAF is the Geophysical Institute (GI). UAF's GI received a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education:

Learning Through Cultural Connections: The Northern Lights weaves together science concepts about the aurora borealis with Iñupiat culture and language. The project includes three key products: classroom instruction kits, interactive museum exhibits and a 25-minute video, “Kiuguyat: The Northern Lights.” (<https://culturalconnections.gi.alaska.edu/>)

This project included research throughout the Iñupiaq region, from Northern Seward Peninsula to the North Slope. Iñupiaq dialects are different throughout the Iñupiaq region (MacLean, 2012; Seiler, 2012). It was a challenge for the Northern Lights project to respectfully represent all dialects from each of the communities involved with the Alaska Native Education Program award. The partners included the three school districts as well as the Native Village of Barrow, Iñupiat History,

Language and Culture Commission, Alaska Native Language Center, Iñupiat History, Language and Culture Center, Carrie M. McLain Memorial Museum, and UAF Museum of the North.

Throughout the Northern Lights project, the GI was told by various Iñupiat that researchers would usually come up with a research topic without even consulting villages. This has been common practice since non-Natives came into contact with Alaska Native communities. There are Iñupiat, as well as other Alaska Native groups, who feel they have been “researched to death,” a feeling that might be common among many Indigenous people worldwide. There are also historical experiences where Western researchers would come into a community, take Indigenous knowledge, and publish without participants’ consent or acknowledgement. Thankfully, the Northern Lights project, as well as many projects from UAF’s GI, gives educational materials to the stakeholders to steward their knowledge systems and build upon the resources.

After the North Lights project ended, GI recognized the importance of true co-production and a Western institution being transformative by approaching a project driven by an Alaska Native knowledge system. They wanted to limit the number of dialects in order to provide the depth of Iñupiaq knowledge systems, rather than attempting breadth with numerous dialects. GI has already established relationships with various communities throughout Alaska, but they wanted to focus on one school district to build an authentic, intimate rapport with community members. They also wanted to start by working with one school district serving predominantly Iñupiaq students, the Northwest Arctic Borough School District (NWABSD) located in Northwest Alaska (see Figure 2 below). NWABSD is one of about 50 school districts in Alaska. GI identified two UAF collaborations to work together and apply for a National Science Foundation (NSF grant). The two additional UAF programs include K-12 Outreach and an Iñupiaq faculty member who conducts research in the Iñupiaq region, Sean Asiqluq Topkok.

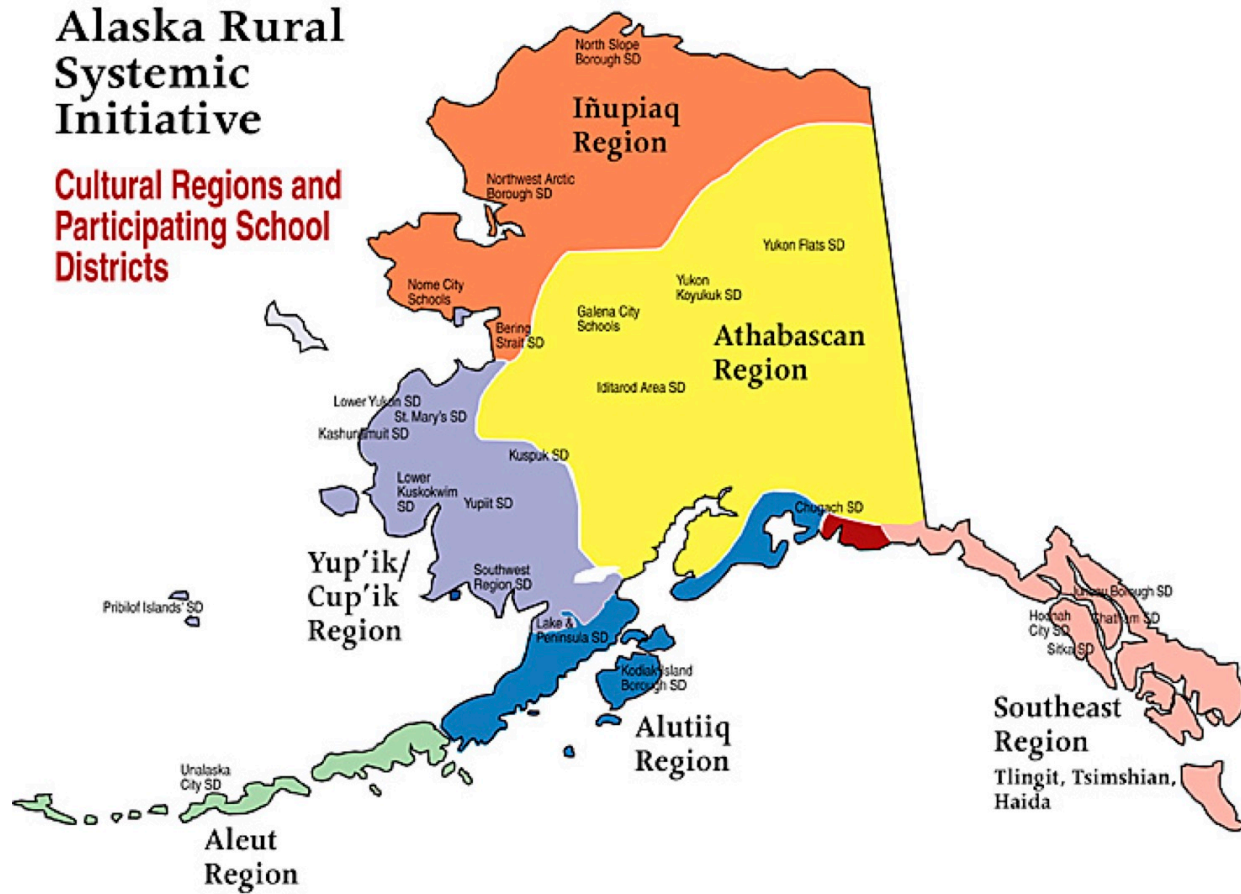


Figure 2: AKRSI Participating School Districts (Hill et al., 2006)

To remind the reader, this article is about *Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut* (I humbly hope we run into game) and about positive relationships between institutions and Indigenous communities. However, the NSF-funded grant merits a brief description: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Teaching in Rural Areas using Cultural Knowledge Systems (TRACKS). STEM TRACKS is initially implemented in the NWABSD to develop a Cultural Connections Process Model (CCPM). The CCPM is built upon a theoretical framework of place-based and community engaged education. The first step of the CCPM is to establish a local committee known as the TRACKS Team. The TRACKS Team include: Iñupiaq educators, cultural/tribal leadership, Elders, and/or cultural knowledge bearers. Instead of a Western institution coming into a community, the TRACKS Team identified what was important to teach the Iñupiaq youth and their descendants. The process of identifying the research and educational topic was completed by utilizing '*Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut*'.

Turaamarusi itna uqaqsimaruumik - You have heard what has been said

purposes of the grant, it is lesson plans. This reciprocity process includes Savaqatigiiyuḷiq (Cooperation), Savvaqtuḷiq (Hard Work), Iḷisimaliq Uqapiaḷigmik (Knowledge of Language), Kamaksriḷiq Nutim Iḷiqtanik (Respect for Nature), Kamakkutiḷiq (Respect for Others), and Piqpaksriḷiq Iḷiḷgaanik and Piqpaksriḷiq Iḷiḷgaanik (Love for Children).

Asiqḷuq completed a draft transcription of the initial STEM TRACKS meeting from November 11, 2018, in Qikiqtaḡruk in Nikaitchuat Iḷisaḡviat. The purpose of the meeting was to determine what the research topic should be to teach as a geophysical science unit in middle school in the NWABSD which focuses on Iḷiḷupiaq knowledge. The transcription begins with introductions of the UAF Development and the TRACKS Team. Questions were asked about the purpose of the meeting. Team members began suggesting ideas for potential research topics, and eventually the TRACKS Team decided to focus on “snow.” The meeting lasted about an hour and 54 minutes. The topic of “ice” was mentioned 30 times throughout the meeting; “snow” was mentioned 65 times. The word “learn” was mentioned 15 times, “teach” was mentioned 40 times, “research” 10 times, and “know” 48 times. Thus, the research topic is how to blend Iḷiḷupiaq and Western knowledge together to implement a middle school lesson about apun (snow).

The draft lesson plan is called “Qanniksuq [Selawik dialect]: It is Snowing” All of the lessons are based on the Iḷiḷupiaq cultural values. The following are the Iḷiḷupiaq cultural values, formalized by Northwest Iḷiḷupiaq Elders (Northwest Iḷiḷupiaq Elders, 1990; Topkok, 2015) and written in two Iḷiḷupiaq dialects by Lorena Williams, an Iḷiḷupiaq language expert and community member:

were not fully taught in classrooms due to a global pandemic. The lessons were digitized, so that students can pilot them in spring 2021.

A unique opportunity happened in the 2019 fall semester. One of the Elders, Hannah Paniyavluk Loon, who is on the TRACKS Team, was offered an adjunct faculty position through UAF's Chukchi Campus to teach Conversational Iñupiaq. It is rare that an Elder is offered the opportunity to teach at the university level. Keep in mind, Elders continually teach their heritage by living the life. Two Co-PIs from the UAF Development Team, Lori Schoening and Sean Asiqłuq Topkok, decided to enroll into Professor Paniyavluk's course. Schoening and Asiqłuq's reasons for taking the class were many: 1) an Elder was teaching her heritage language; 2) Schoening and Asiqłuq want to learn more about the Qikiqtagruk and its surrounding villages' dialects and cultures; 3) this opportunity would benefit the CCPM topic of Qanniksuq; and 4) Schoening and Asiqłuq wanted to support and learn from Elder and Professor Paniyavluk as a local Iñupiaq expert.

The course was offered through audio and video conferencing. Unfortunately, Asiqłuq was not able to continue with Professor Paniyavluk's class during the spring semester due to his teaching workload. However, Schoening, who is instrumental with the development of the Qanniksuq lesson plans, was able to learn from Professor Paniyavluk throughout the academic year. The unintended result was taking community relationship-building to another level. Professor Paniyavluk had an opportunity to intimately get to know and spend quality, cultural time with Schoening and Asiqłuq. It was while Schoening and Asiqłuq were taking class that they learned from Professor Paniyavluk he Selawik saying, Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut (I humbly hope we run into game).
Naarrutaa – It is ending

Even now, as this article is written, Asiqłuq and Paniyavluk are the co-authors. When the abstract was due, Asiqłuq asked Paniyavluk to be co-authors. Paniyavluk was living at camp near Selawik and was not sure if she could commit to writing. Asiqłuq asked her permission to write about Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut as an Iñupiaq research design deciding on the CCPM research topic of Qanniksuq. Paniyavluk gave Asiqłuq permission to write. Paniyavluk returned to Qikiqtagruk in August 2020 and asked about co-writing the article. Asiqłuq created a draft and sent it to Paniyavluk for corrections, edits, and/or additions. Schoening is still engaged in the Fall 2020 Iñupiaq language course offered by Professor Hannah Paniyavluk Loon.

Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut is a sacred saying in the Selawik Iñupiaq community. It is a metaphor for developing a research design, where the research question gives itself. When done properly, Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut is conducted with Iñupiaq cultural values in the forefront. Paniyavluk uses expressive language on local knowledge encompassing weather, land, ecosystem of beaver dams, mouse caches, etc. Uvvatuq naluallangniaqtugut can and should be replicable for anyone

conducting research with and for Indigenous people. The last suggestion is to recognize and support local knowledge-bearers by learning their heritage language and culture.

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