

CAN I TELL YOU WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?: LEARNING TO MAKE DECISIONS IN
RESPONSE TO INDIGENOUS STUDENT VOICE IN A HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS
CLASSROOM

By

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Abstract

This study focuses on engaging high school students in reading and the decisions I make to sustain that engagement. I learned that one way to enhance the engagement in my classroom is to listen to my students' stories and to incorporate culturally relevant texts. All of the students in this study were previously in our school's language intervention program: *Read 180*. While teaching this intervention-based class, I noticed this class was a behavior management nightmare. The students' challenging behavior led me to question the intervention program's ability to sustain my students' engagement through the prescribed texts.

This study aims to describe my observations in a 10th grade Language Arts II class in Chefnak, Alaska. Specifically, this thesis describes my findings and analysis as it relates to how students show engagement and how I make (and revise) decisions in response to my students' voices.

I used teacher action research (TAR) to research the events in my classroom. During an 11-week period, I collected audio recordings, student work samples, and teacher action research journal entries. At the end of the research, I also wrote memos about the data. I used constructive grounded theory (CGT) to make sense of the story the data tells and to see what kind of patterns were present.

This research is important to me because it helps me to understand the weaknesses and the strengths in my own instructional planning as well as how I interpret students' participation in class. After this research, I am convinced that learning outcomes are preceded by learner engagement, and that learner engagement is complex.

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Chapter 1

It is the fall of my first semester as a full-time teacher in rural Alaska. I take a deep breath as the students from my last class of the day trip through the door and into their seats. One look at the board, and students see that “silent, independent reading” is first on the agenda. A cacophony of “tuallam English” and “tuallam reading” is muttered throughout the room. This is my daily invitation to work toward shifting my students’ attitudes about reading.

I learned early in my time in Alaska that “tuallam” effectively means “damn” in Yugtun, my students’ first language. So, the challenge of inviting my students to enjoy reading in the classroom was clear to me at the start of the year. Students had resisted reading so much that by March of my first year, I had given up on maintaining the silent reading routine because it was a classroom management disaster.

As I considered why reading was such a difficult practice for my students, I saw that students had little confidence accessing the available classroom texts and conjectured that perhaps the lack of confidence lent itself to a lack of motivation or willingness to persevere. However, I also understood that the students’ relationship with reading could also stem from their historical trauma with language and inconsistent application of reading intervention and content teaching as a result of teacher-retention. Within the context of this school, the students are the children and grandchildren of those who were first sent out of the village for an education. With the push to attend school came an emphasis to know English, this emphasis on learning English has created an on going fight to preserve the Yugtun language. As a result, some families over-emphasize English over Yugtun while others de-emphasize the importance of English in favor of their heritage language. It is uncommon for families to have books at home or have designated reading time which makes reading an exclusively school-based practice.

Additionally, the school district struggles to retain teachers which results in inconsistent teaching practices over time. The larger issues surrounding teacher turnover are complex, but at the classroom level its effects are clear: Non-Native teachers from the lower-48 come with little experience, fight to master their classroom, and leave. New, well-intending teachers come in, and the cycle repeats. As a result, my students arrived to my class with a broken relationship with reading, and I knew I had to take action based on my classroom observations.

In Fall 2016, I returned to the classroom with a mission to challenge my students' disinterest in reading by confronting it with a book. I was convinced that my most important decision as an English language arts teacher was the choice of texts. I chose to introduce my freshman English class to Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2011). I selected this novel for three reasons: 1) it takes place on an Indian reservation and I thought students could relate to their lives in the village; 2) it deals with relevant coming-of-age experiences like bullying, identity, and addiction, and 3) it contains words like "bastard" and "ass" which meant students could cuss in class when they read it, and I anticipated this would increase engagement. While students often latched on to the language choices in the book, the humor and surprise of the words intrigued the students enough to pull them into the story.

The same students who once bemoaned at the expectation to read were now begging for *more* time to read. After completing the novel, I re-instituted the daily silent reading time. When students pushed back, I asked, "Why do you think I ask you to do this?" I'll never forget Caleb's response: "...because you want us to be quiet." While I had been tempted to use the 20 minutes to do last minute prepping and adjustments for the day's lesson, I took the cue to read along with my students during this time to demonstrate that I personally value this time spent reading. As

we established a daily routine, the act of reading became increasingly communal, and the students' engagement with the activity improved when compared to the previous year.

This shift in the students' perception of reading was monumental. One student, as a freshman, was among the most resistant to reading; he would roll around on the floor, distract classmates, and avoid reading altogether. As a sophomore, this student would enter class lobbying for additional reading time. At first, I was suspicious of this request until I realized that reading had become an attentive practice for this student. The once fidgety student was causing less distractions; he was not sleeping; and he was negotiating with his classmates to keep a regular rotation with his favorite books.

While in the reading intervention program, *Read 180*, during the previous year, I found that students were often disengaged with reading and were not consistently demonstrating strong reading comprehension. This program was slated as its own class and precursor to Language Arts I. Most freshmen were enrolled in *Read 180* as an attempt to recover their reading levels (<https://www.hmhco.com/products/read-180>). My mission for teaching was much like *Read 180*'s mission: independent, grade-level reading; however, as I tried to implement the program, I noticed that my approach to reading did not align with the program's approach. This tension led me to wonder more about my own teaching practices: was my approach really better than the prescribed curriculum? Could I leverage my own practices to increase students' academic outcomes?

As I began to investigate my students' relationship with reading, it became clearer that their struggles to comprehend also led to struggles in other content-area classes. It did not take long for me to realize that my students' relationship with written texts was complicated and problematic in terms of their academic goals and expectations. Because the current interventions

(*Read 180*) and practices of previous teachers did not seem to *stick* with students, the problems that manifested in my language arts classroom followed them into their other content areas. I felt both pressure and desire to reverse this trend of broken relationships with reading.

Each semester, I had four distinct courses to plan and prepare; these preparations included one reading intervention and one grade-level Language Arts course. I noticed over time that my students in the grade-level course had higher engagement and interest in class than the intervention class despite the fact that the intervention class was typically smaller. This difference in engagement made me wonder how teacher-selected texts influenced students' relationship to reading and related classroom activities. I first noticed my text selection leading to more exciting classes in which learners seemed to be enjoying the reading when I introduced *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007). I noticed students being engaged a second time when we read *Nothing But the Truth* (Avi, 1997). My interpretations of students' responses to these novels made me think there was a deep connection between the content of a text and the interested students showed in class.

Guiding Research Questions

This teacher action research seeks to understand more about these questions:

1. What does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged?
2. How do I make instructional decisions to enhance and sustain my students' engagement?

Through this research, I hope to understand how my instructional moves and structure of activities elicit different types of responses from students during and after reading and how I can best leverage the structure of assignments and tasks to increase both engagement and comprehension. This research first and foremost benefits the learners in my class; however, the conclusions and subsequent questions from this research may be of interest to teachers who teach

bilingual learners and/or learners with diverse learning styles. I also think this research may participate in larger discussions surrounding *how* reading is assessed in schools.

Reading Ahead

In consideration of these research questions, this thesis focuses on the following topics and themes: comprehension and meaning-making processes in relation to student engagement and teacher decision making. In Chapter 2, I will define, explain, and cite foundational and current research that sheds understanding on comprehension and the ways in which teachers can leverage engagement for students. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology implemented during this research cycle. I will then present my analysis through three narratives. This thesis will conclude with what I have learned, what I wonder, and what I see as appropriate actions in moving forward in the bilingual language arts classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to cite founding and current research in literacy and second-language acquisition as it relates to teaching secondary Language Arts in a rural classroom in Alaska. In this chapter, I will address relevant views of literacy learning and teaching and attempt to draw from these intertwining views to articulate the foundational assumptions, beliefs, and research that supports this teacher action research.

My research stems from my initial questions about the relationship between learner engagement and learner comprehension in the meaning-making process. As I considered the collected data, I realized that not only had my text selections elicited evidence of students' comprehension and meaning-making, but also how my students showed engagement and how I made decisions based on my interpretation of that engagement. The questions that emerged during my data collection and analysis are *What does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged?* and *How do I make instructional decisions to enhance and sustain my students' engagement?*

Three Views of Reading Comprehension

Weaver (2009) asserts that “there is a significant correlation between *teachers' approach to reading instruction* and children's understanding of what reading is and what it involves” (p. 3, emphasis added). The implication of this is that the teacher's definition of reading is important. The instruction can influence how students understand the purpose of reading. In many approaches to literacy, a guiding practice or belief about learning is that the “mastery of bits and pieces of language are essential before meaning can be addressed” (Weaver, 2009, p. 3). However, founding literature and my teacher action research suggest that comprehension is more nuanced. Weaver's (2009) sociopsycholinguistic model, Rosenblatt's (1978) Reader Response

Theory, and The New London Group Multiliteracies Framework (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008) collectively assist in the construction of my beliefs about literacy learning. In short, these three stances can be summarized simply as *reading for meaning is a transaction*.

This definition of reading comprehension as a meaning-based transaction is highlighted by Weaver (2009):

reading is indeed a *cognitive process* during which the brain makes instantaneous and multiple decisions in the attempt to construct meaning...because no reader, however proficient, ‘gets’ exactly the same meaning that was in the author’s head when he or she was composing the text. Reading is a *constructive, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic process*. (p. xxiv)

With this definition in mind, it follows that reading as a process is both nuanced and non-linear; my instructional decisions seek to uphold and accommodate such an interconnected process.

Another key feature of this explanation of the reading process is that multiple readers can approach a single text and extract different meanings from that interaction. Weaver’s (2009) sociopsycholinguistic model, Rosenblatt’s (1978) Reader Response Theory, and The New London Group Multiliteracies Framework (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008) support this general definition of reading comprehension and all three have guided my instructional decisions. See Table 2.1 for these three views juxtaposed.

In examining these three views of comprehension, I find that they follow a logical arch. Chronologically speaking, Rosenblatt is a seminal literary theorist who, along with John Dewey, took a radical stance on teaching and learning, with a particular focus what it means to read literature. Second, Weaver’s work, which has been re-published most recently, most resembles accepted reading instruction practices used in schools today. Third, The New London Group’s

Multiliteracies theory is of timely relevance given the influence of media and mediated communication of today.

Table 2.1 *Three Complementary Views of Comprehension*

	Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt)	Socio-psycholinguistics (Weaver)	Multiliteracies (New London Group, Luke & Freebody, Cope & Kalantzis)
“Meaning is not in the text itself, whether the text be literary or otherwise. Rather meaning arises during the transaction between reader and text, while the author can only hope that the reader will bring similar knowledge and experiences (similar schemas) to a reading event” (Weaver, 2009, pp. 23-24).			
The reader	The reader is the person who is actively reading a text in order to make meaning.	The reader is the receiver of written or oral language; they are the receiver of a message. The reader brings experiences and prior knowledge to the reading event, and samples cues (grapho-phonemic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) to predict and confirm meanings.	When a reader interacts with a text, the text becomes an available design with which they can construct meaning.
The text	“ <i>The Text</i> is the collection of word symbols and patterns on the page, the physical object you hold in your hand as you read” (Weaver, 2009, p. 23).	The message is constructed and sent out by a sender. Linguistic messages integrate “cues” to create meaning.	Academic notions about texts are evolving to include multiple modalities. Texts are no longer confined to written and oral speech, but also include visual, gestural, aural, and spatial cues to express meaning.
The emergent meanings	The emerging meaning of a text is called a poem; the reader creates a poem as they interact with a text.	Meaning is made during transactions with a text and the receiver of the message. The reader uses the cues to make predictions about those emergent meanings.	Meaning is constructed through a design process in which includes different modalities of language.
Instructional Implications	These three separate views of comprehension and meaning-making work together to place responsibility on the reader to demonstrate comprehension of a text through making meaning or expressing an understanding of a text through various discourses rather than arriving to a designated meaning as typically expected in standardized testing and reading assessment. All three views assume that readers are actively engaged in the meaning-making process.		

Before I explain the reader, the text, and the meanings in relation to these three theoretical constructs, I want to make it clear that these constructs do not compete in the context of my

research, but rather work together to explain the nuances and complexities that emerged from the events in my high school classroom.

Embracing response to literature.

Literary theorist, Louise Rosenblatt (1978, 2005), asserts that reading is a transactional process between the reader and the text. She complicates this transactional relationship with reading by explaining the continuum of reading purposes and how these purposes influence the transaction. In her own words, she explains:

The reader transacts with the particular aspect of the environment which is the text, the pattern of signs on the page. It is not possible to summarize here the dynamics, the interplay, the fusions, of the to-and-fro process as it proceeds in time, the constant activity of choice and revision, the structuring and testing that constitutes the total transaction. (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 57)

To me, Rosenblatt is suggesting that reading is not a linear process nor a one-way transaction.

The reader approaches the text and actively participates in extracting meaning from that reading process. As I continue to unpack these three views of comprehension, I will borrow from Rosenblatt's language about the components of the transaction--the reader, the text, and the poem--to describe the moving pieces that join together to create meaning.

The reader

The central element in Rosenblatt's stance on the reading process lies within the reader of a text. While the text is certainly a non-negotiable element in the search for literacy, "no one of the subjects, literary conventions, technical devices, types of discourse cited as determinate was essential to all literary works of art" (2005, p. 56). Rather than believing that experiencing and expressing literacy resided in trusted and canonized texts, Rosenblatt argues that literacy

“resided in what the reader does in these two kinds of reading [efferent or aesthetic]” (2005, p. 56). In an analysis of Rosenblatt’s work, Dressman and Parker-Webster (2001) also point to the central role of the reader when they say that “the ultimate meaning of texts and so of their consequences and implications is indeterminate, always a matter of the circumstances of perception, it seems” (p. 111).

An illustration of the relationship of the reader to the text begins with the question *why*? *Why* is the reader reading the text? Is the reader participating with a text because it has been assigned? Is their goal to recall and paraphrase the “intended” meaning? Or is the goal to “focus primarily on what is being personally lived through, *during* the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 56). More specifically, Rosenblatt argues that there are two distinct types of reading: efferent and aesthetic. Simply stated, efferent refers to reading for the purpose of taking away something from the text. An example of this efferent reading is a student arriving to a text in order to understand the cause of WWII. They are reading the text in order to glean information. Aesthetic reading, on the other hand, during aesthetic reading, “the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, pp. 24-5). In aesthetic reading, there is not a prescribed outcome of the reading; the reader is invited to have an inner dialogue with himself and the text. So, in this transactional relationship with reading begins with the readers’ perception of her purpose and ends with what remains with the reader post-literacy event. As I think about the aesthetic and efferent reading, I feel compelled to believe that aesthetic reading is more likely to enhance and sustain students’ engagement. As I learned from Newkirk (2008), informative texts *can* also be read from an aesthetic stance, so it is varied category and not limited to just creative works of fiction.

The text

Within in Rosenblatt's transactional theory "text" refers to a set of verbal signs. The poem, the novel, the play, the story--the literary work of art, comes into being during the aesthetic transaction (2005, p. 58). What I think Rosenblatt is saying is that the text is effectively *nothing* until it is before the eyes of a reader and the reader begins to assign purpose and meaning to the text. She continues her explanation of the transactional theory by saying "This lived-through current of ideas, sensations, tensions, becomes shaped into what the reader sees as the literary work or the evocation corresponding to the text. This is what the reader starts reacting or responding to *during* the event" (2005, p. 58). The way I understand this is that when a reader approaches a text, they have a conversation with the text as they read. During this conversation, the reader is in active discourse with the text as she establishes her relationship to the text. Does she agree? Disagree? Is she moved? Is she reminded of her lived experiences? During this transaction, the reader is in the driver seat of discerning what the text is saying in that moment--arguably more so than that author herself. In order for a person to interact with a text with this depth of personal discourse, it is imperative that the reader is also engaged with the task of reading.

The emergent meaning

In Rosenblatt's view of reading as a transaction between a reader and text, the meaning emerges not from the text alone, but the relationship the reader holds with that text. Moreover, it is consistent with Rosenblatt's transactional theory that a reader may approach the same text multiple times and leave the reading experience with new meanings each time. As I reflect on Rosenblatt's foundational work in establishing words that capture what it means to be a reader, I remember Oscar Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "All art is quite useless"

(1993). I want to add to that with one important caveat-- all art is quite useless *until given meaning by a reader (or viewer or listener)*.

Understanding literacy through the socio-psycholinguistic model.

Constance Weaver's work offers a holistic overview of many established literacy bases as she synthesizes the work of previous scholars into accessible terminology and practices for understanding literacy. Weaver's stance on reading (and meaning making) is best described by what she terms the sociopsycholinguistic process of reading. In her book, she describes this view of reading by explaining that:

Reading is a strategy-driven process, with skills orchestrated together strategically in the drive to construct meaning from text. And it hints at the notion that reading is an event, a process of *comprehending* that necessarily precedes comprehension (recall and all that). In such a transactional view of the process: reading and comprehending are clearly not the result of reading linearly. The text is not in total control. The whole is more than the mere sum of individual parts. (Weaver, 2009, p. xix)

It could be argued that Weaver's stance gives updated language to Rosenblatt's stance on reading in that both focus on reading as a process and a transaction between the text and the reader.

The reader

Weaver first defines reading as "a process very much determined by what the reader's brain and emotions and beliefs bring to the reading: the knowledge/information (or misinformation, absence of information), strategies for processing text, moods, fears and joys—all of it" (2009, xiii). In this definition of reading, Weaver clings closely to Rosenblatt's emphasis on what the reader *brings into* a reading event. One of the pillars of Weaver's (2009) reading practices is a reading interview in which readers are asked about what they think reading

is and what happens in their minds as they read. According to Weaver (2009), “children’s concepts of both reading and writing often reflect the kind of instruction they have received...Whatever the instructional approach, it is likely to affect many children’s implicit definitions of reading, and hence, their strategies for dealing with written text” (pp. 3-4). With this in mind, it is important to remember when readers approach texts, they are bringing in all the previous contexts (academic, cultural, and otherwise) into that experience. Readers, then, are more than just persons with acquired skills; they also embody lived and perceived experiences that inform the strategies they use when reading.

In Weaver’s terms, reading “is a sociopsycholinguistic process because the reader-text transaction occurs within situational and social contexts” (2009, p. 26). This stance on reading is embodied in the prediction cycle described by Weaver. This prediction cycle begins with the graphic cues (letters) as they are strung into intended words and sentences. The reader employs these syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, graphic cues alongside their personal schemas in order to both predict and confirm the emerging meaning. More specifically, the reader “*thinks back* to what has just been read, in order to confirm or correct, and also simultaneously *thinks ahead* to predict the possibilities for what will follow” (Weaver, 2009, p. 62). In this prediction cycle, readers make meaning primarily through two things: the external cues (in the text and situation) and their internal knowledge and intuition about the thoughts and ideas evoked by the cues. This is not unlike Rosenblatt’s stance on reading as a transaction; in fact, Weaver even borrows the word *transaction* when describing the sociopsycholinguistic process and readers’ ongoing comprehension.

The text

When discussing Weaver's sociopsycholinguistic model, the "text" is almost always consistent with the "old school" definition of text: ink and paper. In this view, the text largely consists of the written word; images are supplemental to the words and not intended to be exclusively for meaning making. When examining the redundancy model of the reading process, the reader encounters visual cues from *written* texts to create meaning. In this recursive process, the reader takes in visual cues and combines them with grapho-phonemic knowledge, context, semantic knowledge, and personal schemas (Weaver, 2009, p. 115).

The emergent meaning

In consideration of Weaver's redundancy model of the reading process, the creation of meaning and comprehension is not linear but iterative as the reader absorbs external cues, connects them in their schemas and knowledge of language, and meshes them together in a way that makes sense.

- Words take on specific meanings as they transact with one another in sentence, text, social, and situational contexts.
- Meaning is not in the text, nor will the meaning intended by the writer ever be perceived--or rather, constructed-- exactly the same way by a reader.
- Readers make sense of texts by drawing upon their schemas-- their entire lifetime of knowledge, experiences, feelings, and beliefs (Weaver, 2009, p. 36).

A couple examples from Weaver's work that help to make these points salient include a discussion on the word *run* and an excerpt of a short story. There are almost 40 possible meanings for the word *run*, so, as Weaver suggests, the word *run* does not have meaning alone but within the situational and pragmatic context in which it is used (pp. 15-16). The second

example that makes Weaver's explanation of reading clear is the reading of a letter from one male student to another in which the reader describes an exciting event in the cafeteria during lunch. Depending on the reader's schema, it may appear that there was a physical altercation *or* a heated and playful exchange of words. The letter *looks* the same as it is passed from one reader to the next, but each individual reader assign *meaning* and significance to the text based on their schemas. In the context of my teaching and this research, this is important to keep in mind. In a rural village, we do not have sidewalks or paved roads. A reader may be able to recognize the phrase "sidewalk" and pronounce it correctly, but they may not have the schema to know what is meant by that phrase.

Making meanings with texts.

Kalantzis and Cope (2008) contextualize the Multiliteracies Framework by first explaining how the "old education systems" were reminiscent of the demands of the workforce of the time before explaining how a shift in the work culture elicited an equal shift in education. The previous work environments were characterized by factory work and assembly-line structures that required rote memorization and little other specified skill. As Kalantzis and Cope (2008) explain:

the 'basics' of old learning were encapsulated in the 'three Rs'—reading, writing and arithmetic. The process was learning by rote and knowing the 'correct answers'.

'Discipline' was demonstrated in tests as the successful acquisition of received facts and the regurgitation of rigidly defined truths. This kind of education certainly produced people who had learnt things, but things which were too often narrow, decontextualized, abstract and fragmented into subject areas artificially created by the education system.

(p. 199)

In the old view of education (and in some current teaching practices), literacy is contingent on learners' ability to read, remember, and regurgitate meaning as intended by the curriculum. This view contrasts with Weaver and Rosenblatt because the sociopsycholinguistic model and Reader Response theory are not interested in the curricular goals. Within this view, reading comes with prescribed interpretations and outcomes before the texts has even reached the readers' hands. Within the multiliteracies framework, there is an inherent push to move past the product of reading and instead marinate in the processes at play when reading.

The reader

Within the multiliteracies framework, the reader is more complicated than simply a student or learner or as a direct recipient of a text-mediated message. The reader is part of a larger, more global context. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) focus on the reader as part of a capitalism-driven society. Readers, then, are workers, citizens, and persons. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) suggest that:

perhaps even more central to the case for Multiliteracies today is the changing nature of everyday life itself over the past decade. We are in the midst of a profound shift in the balance of agency, in which as workers, citizens and persons, we are more and more required to be users, players, creators and discerning consumers rather than the spectators, delegates, audiences or quiescent consumers of an earlier modernity. (p. 8)

The implication of this statement is that people are no longer *just* consumers of texts in their many forms out of pleasure or obligation. Texts now carry heavy consequences for the reader and the reader now holds a larger responsibility to do something with their understandings of a text. For the Multiliteracies framework, it is a call to action for the reader-- the reader is not a consumer but a designer and an agent through engaging and responding to texts.

Freebody and Luke (1990) further elaborate on the role of the reader within the multiliteracies framework through their explanation of the Four Resources Model. Within this view of literacy, they argue that “a successful reader in our society needs to develop and sustain the resources to adopted four related roles” (p. 7). Freebody and Luke call these roles: codebreaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst. These roles are not hierarchical and a reader takes on these roles iteratively when they transact with a text. Adapting those roles listed by Freebody and Luke to digital context, Serafini (2012) argues that “in order to create an informed, literate citizenry, reader must be able to navigate, interpret, design and interrogate the written, visual, and design elements of multimodal texts” (p. 152).

When Freebody and Luke (1990) first described the roles of the reader, their focus was primarily on written texts-- their stance did not yet include other modalities. The roles are defined as:

- Code Breaker: successful readers understand the letter-sound relationships of words and the nuances of the English language in terms of its vocabulary, grammar, and phonics.
- Text Participant: successful readers employ knowledge of genre-specific text features such as headings, chapters, and other genre-specific reading strategies (ie: elements of a narrative, structure of an argument, etc.).
- Text User: Readers understand that texts are socially situated and ask themselves *what the text is for, here and now*.
- Text analyst: Readers take a critical stance on the text and dissect and interpret the choices made by the writer. The reader is consciously aware of the social, situational, cultural, and political discourses at play within a text (Freebody & Luke, 1990, pp. 8-13).

When my students were in *Read 180*, I felt as though these roles were presented in a segmented and sequential way. First, the intervention wanted to reinforce the “code-breaking” by focusing on letter sounds and blends and *then* focus on readers becoming “text participants” by guiding students into labeling specific text features. Within this program, there was not time or space allocated for making personal connections or taking an analytical stance. I learned in my LA classes that these roles should not be seen as sequential, but recursive and supportive of each other.

The text

As a result of the emerging stronghold of technology, literacy is now about more than just the plain text and symbols on a page. According to the multiliteracies framework “the capabilities of literacy [now] involve not only knowledge of grammatical conventions but also effective communication in diverse settings, and using tools of text design which may include word processing, desktop publishing and image manipulation” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, pp. 202-203). In recognizing that literacy has moved beyond the page, the New London Group allows for the many modalities embedded within the ‘texts’ in our lives. No longer is literacy limited to grapho-phonemic cues, but now it includes visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial cues for creating and suggesting meaning.

The emergent meaning

The New London Group’s Multiliteracies framework proposes that a way to make and express meaning in a multimodal world is through the design process. Using their terminology, “knowledge and meaning are historically and socially located and produced [as] ‘designed’ artefacts” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, p. 203). In the context of this research, there was an implied pressure to adhere to a traditional view of literacy in which writing, reading, and speaking often

were practiced separately--if not by design, by circumstance. As part of ongoing progress-monitoring, students would complete assessments that measured their learning; however, these assessments were not teacher made nor directly related to the local teaching. As “research in comprehension and metacognition suggests, reading is a far more complex process that involves reasoning and problem-solving rather than simply the accumulation of skill” (Wade, 1990, p. 442). Within the multiliteracies pedagogy, there is an inherent recognition of the power different modes of communication resonate with different learners. While traditional and isolated methods for teaching literacy unintentionally “favor some types of learners over others,” the incorporation of a multiliteracies pedagogy would “extend one’s representational repertoire by shifting from favored modes to less comfortable ones” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). The outcome of such a literacy practice is that “conscious mode switching makes more powerful learning” and thus increased problem-solving (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). With this in mind, I learned during the course of my research that *language mediates learning*; however, during my data analysis I learned the importance of opening the term *language* to include multiple modalities and not just written text.

In a language arts classroom, this pedagogy manifests itself in multimodal and multi-genre explorations of themes and guiding topics. The nature of this literacy framework is that the text is not in control of the reader, but rather the reader is able to make something new from the text. In terms used in the multiliteracies framework, meaning-making comes from the design process. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2009), the design process includes three critical components: available designs, designs, and the redesign. Available designs are “findable resources for meaning: culture, context and purpose-specific patterns and conventions of meaning making” such as genres, letters, grammatical features, and symbols that are

communicative. The design refers to “the act of meaning: work performed on/with Available Designs in representing the world other’s representations of it, to oneself or others” or otherwise a *response* to a text or design. The redesign references “the world transformed in the form of new Available Designs, or the meaning designer who, through the very act of Designing, has transformed themselves” or otherwise a *representation of learning* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 12).

Similar to the design process outlined by the New London Group, Healy (2008) explains the relationship of the design process to the learning of indigenous, multilingual learners:

when students are given a range of tasks and text construction opportunities that permit the expression of *known* and *new* knowledge through visual, verbal, spatial, gestural, and audio elements, the students have a choice about how to think about and construct their texts for particular purposes and audiences. (p. 71)

Here, Healy makes salient the relationship between choice, modality, and text creation. The invite to construct known and new information in a variety of modalities disrupts the “sameness” and standardization of typical western frameworks for responding to and creating texts.

As a result of this transactional nature, each reader is transformed uniquely and individually before, during, and after the collaborative discourse surrounding a reading event. As students read and digest information and begin to formulate their tentative *designs* or *responses* to texts, they collaborate with peers and teachers to refine and solidify their understandings of a text.

The crux of these definitions of comprehension can be synthesized into one word: Transaction. For my research, I am interested in this transactional view of comprehension and meaning making within the learning culture of my classroom. Because of the local and cultural

contexts, I tried to consider first my students' schema--or prior knowledge. My teacher action research and the instructional decisions behind my work, are best described by Pardo's explanation of reading as a transaction when she says "the reader brings many things to the literacy event, the text has certain features, and yet meaning emerges only from the engagement of that reader with that text at that particular moment in time (2004, p. 272). This view places the reader in an important role that goes beyond a mere consumer of text, but rather a person who has continuous agency to assign meaning and value to a text. This view also emphasizes the important connection between engagement and comprehension, a connection that, in part, prompted this TAR.

Making Instructional Decisions to Enhance Engagement

Early in my teaching career, I knew I had to revisit my beliefs and practices about culturally relevant education and how to get and maintain student engagement, with the goal of improving reading comprehension. Stewart (2017) helped me by providing an acronym for language instruction: R.E.A.L.; this acronym stands for four criteria for instructional decision-making. Stewart asks: "Is it *relevant* to students' lives? To what degree does it *engage* students' interests within a community? How does it *affirm* students' cultural and language identities? Does it lend itself to asset-oriented *literacy* instruction?" (p. 2). In this research, I asked myself these questions, while also investigating my research questions about how my students show engagement and how I make decisions in response to student "voice." My initial understanding of engagement matched the definition used by McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004): "wanting to understand, motivated to interact with text, viewing reading as a thinking process . . ." (p. 36). In my instructional design, I tried to connect students to relevant texts and topics, to engage them,

while also trying to affirm their cultural identities and provide meaningful literacy instruction. In the following paragraphs, I examine research that addresses these instructional issues.

Selecting texts with reader engagement in mind.

One of the critical components of the instructional decisions during this research was text selection. I knew that in order to engage students, I needed to choose texts that were the right combination of challenging, accessible, interesting, and relevant. According to Raphael, et al. (2001), “to learn to read well, all students need to read thought-provoking, age-appropriate books. They also need to respond thoughtfully to these books in talk, writing, and as they read other texts” (p. 159). As Rafael asserts, reading is multidimensional; it is not adequate to *just* read and respond in a singular way. The texts that students read should offer a shift in perspective, a reflection of their values, or a window into another way of understanding the world around them. Students need to also have a chance to respond to texts as a way to build connections outside the text.

One way to facilitate such a relationship to reading is by inviting critical literacy into the decision-making process. In general, critical literacy can be characterized as: disrupting the commonplace, examining multiple perspectives, focusing of sociopolitical issues, and taking action (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015). While critical literacy was not an explicit guide in my own lesson planning, elements of critical literacy fueled the engagement and discussion during the research. So, in selecting texts, it is important to recognize that offering a critical lens may ramp up the engagement of learners.

Inviting engagement through revised instructional plans.

After hearing the chorus of *tualum English* (damn English) from my students a dozen or so times, I had to stop and think: *what’s the deal with English*. It did not take long for my

investigation to reveal a broken relationship with reading. Students had not learned that reading was something they could learn to do, and they certainly did not know that it was something that could bring them joy. Culturally, the families and rural village seldom own literature or model independent reading. This cultural divide is further compounded by the frustration students encounter while in the classroom. At Lower Kuskokwim School District, secondary students are either enrolled in a reading intervention (*Read 180*) or in a grade-level Language Arts class with a prescribed curriculum. According to Newkirk (2008), even though “the rituals of textbook use are so familiar as to be part of the American landscape...textbooks typically fail to provide the most basic conditions for readerly engagement” (p. 20). Newkirk continues by saying that there are four conditions for engaging readers: authorship, form, venue, and duration. Having a conglomerate of authors or a having a single author establishes the humanity and connectedness in a text. The way a text is presented (graphic heavy or text heavy) disrupt or promote sustained reading. Venue refers to where a text is found; for example, if a noteworthy young adult novel is on a bookshelf or featured in an anthology. The placement of text impacts the engagement of a text. Finally, Newkirk cites duration as a factor of engagement; he compares the impulse to guzzle the lengthy Harry Potter books, but the weeks of a class reading of a canonized text. In many ways, students in my classroom did not see the prescribed curricula as an invitation to learning or indulging in literature.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) characterize engaged learners as: wanting to understand, motivated to interact with text, viewing reading as a thinking process, sharing knowledge through discussion, reading for different purposes, and using background knowledge to construct meaning (p. 36). Teachers have a responsibility to “nurture engagement by encouraging students to read for authentic purposes, make personal connections, focus on

comprehension, and respond in meaningful ways” (p. 36). This portrait of student engagement incorporates elements of Reader Response theory and the sociopsycholinguistic model in the emphasis on personal connections and authentic meaning making.

Using a meaning making tool: Question answer relationships.

Language arts researchers and teachers recommend a wide range of instructional practices and strategies to invite students into engaged transactions with texts of all kinds. Because my research question focuses on the relationship of meaning making and because I was interested in assessing students’ comprehension. I chose the QAR (Question Answer Relationships) framework to guide my construction of text-based questions and assessment of student comprehension post-reading. The goal of the QAR framework is “to help teachers guide all students to higher levels of literacy” (Raphael & Au, 2005, p. 206). One of the features of this comprehension framework is the provision of common language for teachers and students to use when approaching text-based questions. Additionally, the language of QAR helps to guide students into specific strategies that will support their use of texts to support their comprehension of texts. There are four question types: *on my own*, *right there*, *think & search*, and *author & me*. “On my own” questions are prompts that can be answered without reading a text; these questions generally invite students to make personal connections to a general idea or activate prior knowledge. “Right there” questions support recall of facts and details; these questions ask for definitions. “Think & search” questions ask the reader to skim and review multiple parts of a text to explain an answer or process. “Author & me” questions require the reader to use the text to leverage or explain a personal connection or to make informed predictions or inferences based on the text. Table 2.2 outlines these question types and their comprehension strategies (Rafael & Au, 2005, p. 214).

Table 2.2 *Question-Answer-Relationship Comprehension Strategies*

QAR Question Types	
In the book	In my head
<p>Right There (RT) : Right there questions can be answered with a specific line, phrase, or word in the text. In other words, the reader can point to a single place in the text in order to answer the question. These questions tend to be surface-level questioning such as: <i>What color is the man's Jacket?</i> Or <i>List the three types of chocolate used in baking.</i></p>	<p>Author and Me (AM) : Author and me questions ask the reader to use the text to establish, and support an opinion or belief. These questions assume that the text has some sort of influence on the reader's thoughts on a subject. For example: <i>Would you have reacted the same way as the main character?</i> Or <i>Why do you think white chocolate is less expensive than dark chocolate?</i></p>
<p>Think and Search (TS) : Think and search questions require the reader to consider how the answer is revealed in multiple parts of the text. These questions ask readers to look at a text as a whole or as a larger part; think and search questions generally refer to processes or more nuanced developments in a text. For example: <i>In what ways did the main character change from the beginning of the story to after his dog's death?</i> Or <i>Summarize the process used to create white chocolate.</i></p>	<p>On My Own (OMO): On my own questions are not text dependent. Readers can provide a response to these questions with or without reading. These questions support the activation of readers' schemata. These questions tend to be open-ended or experienced based, such as: <i>How do you feel when things don't happen according to plan?</i> Or <i>What is your favorite dessert?</i></p>

From the teacher perspective, this framework helps teachers to plan and teach comprehension strategies that support learners, as Weaver recommends. As I will explain more in Chapter 4, this framework held me accountable to *how* I phrased questions and learned about my students' reading strategies at the secondary level. From the students' perspective, QAR "provides a framework that students can use to link strategies at appropriate points in the reading cycle" (Rafael & Au, 2004). In a secondary classroom, this approach to text-based questioning lends to student autonomy as they learn to be text users in academic settings and build a repertoire of strategies for when they encounter challenging reading tasks. From a students' perspective, the QAR approach to questioning reinforce students' knowledge of genre-specific features and help draw students' attention to the structure of the text and its related questions. The QAR framework reduces ambiguity for all parties and, for that reason, is useful for assessment purposes.

Planning instructional designs to enhance student engagement.

As the leader of the classroom, I had to be aware of how my choices impacted learning. I am in regular dialogue with myself and other colleagues about what works, what does not work, and *why*. In order to establish and maintain an asset-oriented classroom that upholds students as important agents in their learning, I sought to collaborate with my students by “giving and taking as much as necessary to creating meaning” while working toward the ultimate goal which is “students taking on more and more responsibility as they become more confident, knowledgeable, and capable” (Pardo, 2004, p. 278). In order to build students’ esteem and independence, I relied heavily on their cues to make and revise instructional decisions to best meet their needs.

A catalyst for the instructional events captured in my TAR was classroom conversation. Through whole class conversations, I was able to gauge where my students are and reflect on how I would leverage students’ interests to benefit their learning. “Oral language is a cornerstone on which we build our literacy and learning throughout life,” however, “lessons dominated by teacher talk tend to be the norm in many classrooms,” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011, p.7). I aimed to pull students’ voices into the center of instruction. One of the draws to classroom conversation for me is the ability to provide in-the-moment feedback on how students construct and express their ideas. When there is a writing task, it is not unusual for the writing to be succinct and vague. When engaged in conversation, I noticed I was able to ask clarifying and extended questions in the moment to invite students to elaborate.

Garcia, Johnson, and Seltzer (2016) specifically advocates for translanguaging to be a part of a language classroom. Translanguaging invites language learners to use their whole language repertoire with fluidity and choice. In a classroom that promotes translanguaging, tasks

and learning are not boxed into categories for first language and second language, but rather students are able to leverage their knowledge of each language to co-construct and demonstrate understanding of classroom content. The structure of the conversations and assignments in this research were solely focused on the meaning of the texts rather than “getting it right.” Also, students were allowed to employ different strategies and uses of language in order to participate in the discussions.

As a teacher of emergent bilingual students, it is important that instruction includes the many types of language input and output for learners to practice language skills. By including conversations as an instructional design, I encouraged students to practice *listening*. This is important because through listening, students “learn to interpret intonations, facial expressions, silences, and other cues in a variety of other people” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011, p. 11). By not limiting listening experiences to contrived audio or teacher-lead talking, students are able to observe other students practicing language and infer about what works and does not work in oral communication.

The research also recommends the integration reading, writing, listening, and speaking to support students’ engagement in meaning making. These four means of using and understanding language are not segmented or hierarchical; it is important to me that students do not see boundaries between the different types of language but rather see how each language skill informs and develops another. According to Pardo (2004), “teachers help students see that reading and writing are parallel processes and that becoming good writers can help them become good readers” (p. 278). In my particular TAR, students were shown this parallel relationship by seeing that becoming a good reader can lead to become a good writer.

Along a similar line of thinking, I consider how modes of language are at play in engagement and voice. Multimodality refers to an understanding that communication is “more than about language” as it is all about “the full range of communicational forms people use—image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on—and the relationships between them” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 14). As I learned through collecting and analyzing data, not all modes held equal accessibility for all my students.

Research Question

This literature review establishes a research base that helps to explain the possible significance of the classroom events, my instructional decisions, and my data analysis are related to meaning making and engagement in language arts classes. Through my research, I aim to join the conversation with the authors above while examining possible explanations for *what does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged? And how do I make instructional decisions to enhance and sustain my students’ engagement?* The underlying takeaways of this literature review are:

- Reading is a transaction between the reader and a “text” in which the reader informs the meaning of the text and not the other way around.
- Readers respond to literature in a variety of ways (modalities).
- Students are the primary agent of learning; their engagement should guide instruction and text selection, and their voices should provide ongoing feedback to inform teachers’ decisions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examines the relationship between learner engagement and my decision making in a secondary language arts classroom in rural Alaska. My research centers specifically on students' engagement during reading and their responses post-reading both in collaborative and individual classroom events. My research questions that guides this study is *What does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged?* And *How do I make instructional decisions to enhance and maintain student engagement?*

These questions seek to build my understanding of how students show they are engaged in classroom activities in a post-reading intervention classroom at the high school level. This inquiry is especially relevant because many of the students in the Lower Kuskokwim School District are enrolled in reading interventions before transitioning into credit-bearing language arts classes. In Chefnak, as in much of the district, students typically test below grade level in reading according to the annual criterion referenced test and this perceived learning deficit informs the yearly school-wide and district-wide goal-setting.

Study Design

In developing the study design, I decided that the best research approach for this study was teacher action research (TAR) and that I would interpret my data through the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) framework and multimodal analysis. In the following two sections, I define each of these designs and explain why TAR, CGT, multimodal analysis are appropriate for this classroom study.

Teacher action research.

This research project is a qualitative study aimed at describing and reflecting on the events in my Language Arts II classroom during the spring 2018 semester. I chose to use teacher

action research (TAR) for my qualitative study because it is an inquiry process that allows teachers to build knowledge of their own teaching. According to Mills (2014), “as a teacher researcher, you challenge your taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning” (p. 15). In teacher action research, the researcher is a stakeholder in the classroom being studied; the researcher may be a teacher, an administrator, or another person responsible for the educational outcomes of learners.

The goal of TAR is to better understand how specific instructional practices, curriculum implementation, or other educational decisions influence student outcomes. The outcome of TAR is improved learning for the students and improved teaching practices for the stakeholders. Mills (2018) provides the Dialectic Action Research Spiral to support teacher inquiry as a visual explanation of TAR (p. 26). This iterative process includes four steps: 1) identify an area of focus, 2) collect data, 3) analyze and interpret data, and 4) develop an action plan. These four cyclical steps are similar to teaching in that a teacher comes into a classroom with a goal (focus), collects data from students (assessment), makes decisions about students’ learning (mastery), and makes decisions about what to do next to support learning outcomes.

A key distinction between TAR and being a “good” teacher is the emphasis of data collection. As a “good” teacher, I can reflect actively on my teachings and make vaguely supported ideas or guesses about the events in my classroom, but as a researcher, I take the extra time to interrogate the data, listen to classroom recordings, and become closer to the actions in my classroom over time in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the events in my classroom and the makings of student learning.

The focus of my research promotes the interests of many stakeholders. First, it elevates the learner by working toward increased comprehension as a means to increase students’

autonomy and agency in their local and larger community. Secondly, my research is congruent with my goals as a teacher to support students as they work toward independence in reading and writing at grade-level as a means to prepare for high school graduation. Thirdly, this research upholds Chaputnguak's school-wide initiative entailing that "50% of students will meet or exceed MAPS target growth rates in Reading." And finally, this research supports the Lower Kuskokwim School District's mission to provide a "culturally appropriate and effective education for all students, thereby providing them with the opportunity to be responsible, productive citizens" ("Welcome to the Lower Kuskokwim School District," n.d.). The results of the research will not only shape (and reshape) the practices used in my classroom, but also may support the instructional choices of other teachers in similar classrooms.

The data collected for this study is qualitative and includes data such as video and audio recordings of in-class episodes, teacher journal entries, and student work artifacts. While a qualitative approach is less reliant on numerical data and experimental work, "qualitative designs are more appropriately applied to action research efforts compared with the application of an experimental pretest-posttest control group..." (Mills, 2018, p. 110). The outcomes of this research primarily serve personal, local, and district-specific learning contexts, but may be generalized for teachers of other classrooms in which students are language learners, have perceived language deficits, or have generally low (perceived) interest in academic performance.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness in this TAR, my research addresses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Mills, 2018, p. 154). In preparation for this study, I spent extensive time in my research setting, checked my perspectives with colleagues and program faculty, and collected multiple types of data. In my analysis, I am able to present data that may help other teachers in other contexts better understand their classrooms.

Analytic Frameworks

In order to draw conclusions and reach new understandings from my data, I use constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and multimodal analysis. These two analytical frameworks work collaboratively to demonstrate students' meaning-making processes through the different modalities of language and allow me, as a researcher, to be informed by the data as patterns emerge.

Constructivist grounded theory.

I am analyzing my data through the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) framework. CGT is an analytical framework through which researchers can code, analyze, and categorize qualitative data as a means to create an analytical product or theoretical understanding of the data. Implementing grounded theory means that the researcher systematically moves “back and forth between data and analysis” and “keeps [researchers] interacting and involved with [the] data and emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). Charmaz (2014) explains constructivist grounded theory by acknowledging the relationship between the researcher and the interpretation of data; the assumed belief is that “knowing and learning [are] embedded in social life” (p. 14). This analytical framework complements my research design (TAR) because both TAR and CGT emphasize the perspective and expertise that teacher researchers bring into data collection and interpretation.

Like TAR, CGT does not seek to be widely generalized, but rather grounded in the events recorded during the study. As data are analyzed, the researcher revisits assumptions, theories, and past analysis to build and strengthen a fully analytical understanding of the data. In the iterative process embedded in the CGT framework, the initial data coding informs the subsequent

data coding in a recursive manner. The product of this process is a theoretical, abstract understanding of the analyzed data. Charmaz's explanation of CGT (2014) recognizes that data does not point to one specific theory, but rather creates a pathway to multiple understandings that arrive during the analysis.

Constructivist grounded theorists work within a cyclical process to compare and analyze data in order to identify categories. This process includes initial coding and focused coding. During the initial coding process, I used gerund phrases (-ing verbs) to describe the data. During focused coding, I tried to assign categories that established relationships and patterns among the initial codes; because of the fluid nature of this framework, the initial coding was revised to reflect the emergent patterns in the focused coding. The result is general categories that describe the patterns in the data. These categories and codes are not defined *before* data analysis, but rather emerge *from* the analysis. Through this process, researchers sample theories by looking at data through previous research or by constructing theoretical insights that explain the studied categories (Charmaz, 2014).

As the teacher researcher of my study, I am very close to the collected data; this means that my analysis is subject to my memories, perceptions, and experiences in my classroom. I need to use my knowledge and my concrete data in order to code and *re-code* as categories and significant events emerge. As Charmaz (2014) explains, the analytical approach I am using “means more than looking at how individuals view their situations. It not only theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation” (p. 239). My final analysis and conclusion must be connected directly to the data before it can be used in conversation alongside established and emerging theories. To see how my data analysis is rooted in CGT, view Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 *Constructive Grounded Theory Steps and My Teacher Action Research Steps*

Actions of researchers using CGT according to Charmaz (2014, p. 150)	How I used the steps in my TAR
1. Collect and analyze data repeatedly	I collected multiple types of data on multiple days of instruction and analyzed the data for approximately three months.
2. Analyze what the participants do and say (including gestures, movement, and facial expressions, as well as the spatial relationships in the classroom). Don't look for patterns yet	During initial coding, I described what I noticed in student and teacher moves. I did not evaluate or assign meaning to these labels.
3. Use comparative methods	I recorded memos and reflected on how the different types of data revealed different types of information. I initially analyzed each piece of data independent from other data, and returned to the initial codes to compare and view emerging relationships within the data.
4. Use data to create conceptual categories	When initially coding my data, I started to consider the themes and patterns that seemed to be present in the data; from there, I began thinking of these general themes and patterns as my conceptual categories as it described my data.
5. Develop analytic categories	After creating my categories, I again examined what the categories were showing me about my research question and my participants; from there, I started to categorize data based on possible meanings and theories that offered an explanation to my research question.
6. Emphasize theory construction	I tested beliefs and ideas about the data and compared my theories against the available analyzed data.
7. Engage in theoretical sampling	
8. Search for variation within the categories	I looked for significant events or pieces of data that was particularly unlike the other data.
9. Develop a category instead of pursuing a specific empirical topic	I used the data to point me toward three narratives that resided in the data. I used these narratives to establish an understanding of the data.

Setting

This study focuses on a rural Alaskan classroom in Chefnak, Alaska. The students in this classroom are emergent bilinguals with various personal and academic goals. Chaputnguak School is a K-12 school and part of the Lower Kuskokwim School District.

The community.

Chefnak, Alaska is a Yup'ik village in the southwestern coast of Alaska. Its community consists of approximately 450 people. The families in Chefnak remain close to their cultural practices of subsistence (hunting and gathering), Yur'aq (dance), and art (basket weaving and carving). Locals today have various preferences for Yugtun (ancestral language), Village English (local vernacular), and Standard English. Generally speaking, elders and older adults use Yugtun with more regularity than the young adults and enrolled school children; however, all the students enrolled in Chefnak can communicate somewhat in both languages regardless of exposure and use of language at home.

Members of the community find work at one of two local stores, CVRF (Coastal Village Regional Fund), post office, as airline agents, IGAP (environmental preservation), tribal council, as health aides and other miscellaneous positions. According to City-Data, 75.3% of the community's residents have at least a high school diploma and approximately 11% of the community has unemployment status (Chefnak, Alaska, 2016).

The local culture.

Chefnak lies along the coast of the Bering Sea; its distance from the tundra region has prolonged the visitation of various missionary groups. As a result, the village seems to have struck a balance between practicing Catholicism and maintaining some cultural practices. It is not an unusual site to see men travelling by four-wheeler with a gun slung around their shoulders

enroute to a hunt or returning home after a day in the river. In the evenings, families light up their steam houses to cleanse their bodies after a laborious day. Occasions and memories are celebrated with family feasts in which people gather at a loved one's house to share a meal of different meats, soups, and bountiful desserts such as akutaq (Eskimo ice cream). As a kassaq, or white person, I would say that the cultural characteristics that stand out to me most are generosity, humor, and resilience.

One of the Yup'ik values is generosity. This value manifests in a few different ways. First, it is a cultural tradition that hunters share their first catch with families in need. As novice hunters become expert hunters, they share their abundance of fish or meat with families in the community. This act of sharing is not done by request, but rather by the intuition or desire to share. Another way I have seen this in the language of my students. At first, I found myself offended by the fact that my students never said *please*. As I connected with local women, I learned that in Yugtun, there is not an equivalent word for please. They explained that this is because the cultural expectation is: "If you have something I need, you will share it with me, and when I can, I will share with you," While I taught in the village, adults and children alike made gestures of generosity without expectation.

The school.

The underlying assumption that guided my instruction is that students graduating from Chaputnguak School and the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) are participants in a literate, text-driven world which demands certain levels of reading comprehension in order to participate fully. Ultimately, graduates from LKSD may have different educational and work-force trajectories; however, the Yup'ik people are impacted by the inescapable influences of

Western, English-using society and need to be comfortable with using the English language to be stewards and advocates of their land, language, and community.

Chaputnguak School serves students in grades K-12 in a Yup'ik village. Chaputnguak also participates in the school district's dual language program which entails that students in kindergarten through fifth grade, students are taught content in both Yugtun and English. Kindergarten and first grade are taught almost exclusively in Yugtun, and starting in second grade, learners are introduced to instruction in standard English. By fifth grade, all content areas are taught in English except for the Yugtun language block. By ninth grade, students are required to take at least one semester of Yugtun each year while all other classes are taught in English.

As a result of many external factors, students are typically considered "behind" in English acquisition while in elementary. In my experiences, this lack of English proficiency follows them into high school where the stakes are heightened. Due to the historical student performance at Chaputnguak in both Math and Language Arts, the school has received additional support from the state as a way to mediate student performance. During the 2017-2018 school year, Chaputnguak was assigned a State System of Support (SSOS) Coach to support instruction. One of the SOSS Coach's main initiatives at our site was to emphasize QARs (Question-Answer-Relationship) to students as part of regular instruction and reading instruction. The goal of this instructional strategy was to increase students' ability to demonstrate comprehension by identifying strategies for answering text-based questions.

The participants.

This study focuses on six students in a Language Arts II (LA II) class during the second semester of the 2017-2018 school year. At the most, the class had eleven students, but because of extenuating circumstances and students relocating, only six students are included in my data

collection. Among these six students, one was chronically absent and two were dealing with personal and family challenges. I initially decided to focus primarily on the three remaining students for this research study, but realized later that all six students were providing me insight about my teaching. Muxy, Caleb, and Jacob are tenth grade students at Chaputnguak School in Chefnak, Alaska. All three are Alaska Native (Central Yup'ik) and speak their heritage language (Yugtun) as well as English. They were in my Language Arts I course as freshmen and participated in my descriptive research about student-student interactions while reading controversial texts. As freshmen, these three students were active participants who fell in love with independent reading. Anthony, Louise, and Ryder are 11th grade students who are scheduled to graduate in December 2018. These three students, though very different from one another, are behind in earning credits to graduate. They are expected to graduate during their fifth year of high school. Five of the participating students gave permission for me to use their real names, but I have chosen to use pseudonyms to maintain their privacy. Table 3.2 introduces each of the participants in my research.

When I conducted research during the 2017 semester about student-student interactions, I noticed surprising patterns in student engagement. While in the midst of teaching I thought that my students were highly engaged, but when I reviewed the class recordings, I noticed that only a few students were engaged while others hovered in the background of the collaborative conversations. To me, engagement was active and positive participation from students. This includes: volunteering contributions to discussions, sitting up while reading, requesting to read, and making connections to the classroom activities. This discrepancy between what I thought and what I learned made me wonder about the relationship between comprehension and student engagement. It seemed logical and exciting to follow Muxy, Caleb, and Jacob into their

sophomore year as part of my current study about the relationship between comprehension and engagement. While the other three participants were not part of this LA I cohort in spring 2017, their participation and interactions during my research in LA II have helped me gain unexpected insight about my teaching practices.

Table 3.2 *Description of Participants in This TAR*

Pseudonym	2017-18 Grade Level	Academic and/or Career Goals	Other notes
Muxy	10 th grade	College-bound	Eager reader; suggests books to teacher and peers. Applies for multiple extracurricular opportunities each semester. Has considered transferring schools to help her be ready for college.
Caleb	10 th Grade	College-bound; values achieving short-term goals, doesn't know long term goal	Eager reader; explores varieties of texts. Wants to read and do "important things." Values authentic learning experiences. Pays attention to details.
Jacob	10 th Grade	College-bound; goal-oriented	Enjoys math. Demonstrates an increased willingness to read. Actively contributes and directs class conversation. Pays attention to details.
Ryder	11 th Grade, graduating in December, 2018	Wants to be done with school so he can work in construction	Passively engaged in school, <70% attendance, verbalized disinterest in language arts
Anthony	11 th Grade, graduating in December, 2018	Barber	Transferred into school during fall 2017; working toward credit recovery for graduation. Affected by various traumas; demonstrates inconsistent engagement and interest in school.
Louise	11 th Grade, graduating in December, 2018	Job Corps; culinary arts	Transferred into school in January; Seems shy and withdrawn during class; Communicates in one-on-one situations

Instructional Procedures

The research events in my classroom lasted 11 weeks; this was longer than expected, but the flow of my classroom routine was interrupted by student travel, students being added and removed from the roster, my own travel responsibilities, and the unpredictable emotional climate of my classroom.

Table 3.3 provides a correlation of the standards, objectives, assessments, and learning outcomes for the instructional period of this research. In addition to the instructional procedures in Table 3.3, students were invited to read a text of their choice for 20 minutes at either the start or the end of the class, give oral book reviews and summaries and practice artistic journaling.

Independent reading was prioritized in my class routine because the quiet time not only centered students and myself, but also allowed students to read outside of the assigned texts as a way to reach their interests or needs. While I planned to have students share reading responses weekly, student travel and inconsistent access to technology made this practice less productive than planned. However, this did not prevent students from speaking to me about their book choices (unsolicited) or from sharing their favorite passages with their nearest friend. Artistic journaling was a practice that I included in the last part of the semester as I noticed the emotions of the students rising and becoming increasingly frustrated/upset. The journals were not collected, but rather completed during time set aside during class. I participated and thought out loud with the students; some students wanted to share their finished journal with me, but this was not required. Table 3.3 explains some of the Common Core Content Area Standards that guided my instructional planning and text selection (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

Table 3.3 *Intended Learning Outcomes for This TAR*

Common Core State Standard	Content and/or language objective (to be displayed for students)	Assessment type	Intended learning outcome
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL/RI.9-10.1 Cite strong text evidence to support analysis of what the text says as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p>	<p>SWBAT support analysis of a text using textual evidence.</p> <p>SWBAT make inferences and support their inferences with information from the text.</p>	<p>QAR (Question-Answer-Response) post-reading questions.</p>	<p>Students are able to support their interpretations of a text using textual evidence.</p>
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2 Provide an objective summary of a text.</p>	<p>SWBAT summarize what they have read.</p>	<p>Student recorded (or written) summaries of their independent reading selection.</p>	<p>Students are able to demonstrate comprehension by retelling a story in their own words.</p>
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of a text.</p> <p>RI.9-10.3 Determine a central idea of a text and its development over the course of the text.</p>	<p>SWBAT determine a theme or a main idea of a text.</p> <p>SWBAT analyze how an idea is developed or revealed in a text.</p>	<p>Graphic organizers, students use organizer to identify the main topic and differentiate the main topic from the supporting details.</p>	<p>Students are able to identify the main idea of a text describe how that idea is supported or developed.</p>
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text.</p>	<p>SWBAT use context clues and previous word knowledge to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words used in context.</p>		<p>Students are able to paraphrase a text using words that they are familiar with.</p>
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature (from outside of the United States).</p> <p>RI.9-10.6 Determine author’s purpose and how the author uses rhetoric to advance their point of view or purpose.</p>	<p>SWBAT explain the opinions or beliefs expressed in a text.</p> <p>SWBAT analyze how culture, time, or gender affect the perspective of the text.</p> <p>SWBAT identify the words and strategies the author uses to make their perspective clear.</p>	<p>In class discussion and writing prompts.</p>	<p>Students are able to synthesize multiple texts to establish and express their opinion or perspective on a topic.</p>

During the data collection process, I adjusted my instructional plans in response to unanticipated events and in response to student feedback. It was during data analysis several months later that I realized students' responses to the literature occurred within three structured contexts include: naturally occurring, classroom discussion, text-based questions presented as a worksheet, and text-based questions presented as a worksheet and completed during a classroom discussion. As I learned during the data analysis, these different text-based events were integral to increasing and maintaining engagement during the semester.

Research Procedures

The data were collected during the Spring 2018 semester. The data collection began shortly after receiving student consent/assent forms. In February, the class was presented with the documentary film, *The House I Live In* (Shopsin, St. John, & Cullman, 2012), which was about the war on drugs and America's racism. Post-viewing, students began to ponder the question "does everyone have equal access to the American Dream?" It was during this time that my classroom took on a very dialogic form in which I was conscious of my students' response to the texts. Instead of trying to coerce them to follow my lead, I worked closely to follow their line of interests. I followed my students out my land of American Dreams and into the world of broken boys. To more fully explain the timeline of events during my research, see Table 3.4.

As detailed in Table 3.4, I used multimodal texts (*House I Live In*) to build background for subsequent texts (ie: "Recitatif"), but I took up the students' cue for different reading material. Rather than anchoring our work in the documentary as planned, Black's (2018) opinion-editorial (op-ed) , "The Boys Are Not Alright" became the anchor text that launched the class into reading sections from Harold Napoleon's *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (1996).

Table 3.4 *Project Timeline*

Unit of time (expected)	Instructional activities	Research activities	Researcher notes
1 week	Distribution of consent/assent forms	Collect forms	11 students in the class (including later additions) 3 students are excluded from the data
1 week	Activities to introduce students to critical lenses.	Research journal, notes & observations	Jan. 29 critical lens activity; read and viewed a couple texts before completing card activity February 6 & 7 read “America” by Claude McKay and “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes Discussed poems through lenses
1 day	Book pass: students explore independent reading options	Video record text selection (are students alert and involved?) Audio record to see if students are making remarks about available texts.	This happened before forms were collected at the start of the semester. No notes or recordings collected.
1 day	Topic generation: selecting a theme to guide our classroom reading events	Research journal, notes and observations Classroom artifacts: photos of notes and topic	Equal access to American Dream
3 days	Core text 1: activating background, vocabulary instruction, reading text. Text: House I Live In (2013)	Research journal, notes and observations Student artifacts: student-filled literature matrix	Began viewing The House I Live in (documentary) Selected supporting texts, jig saw reading & response activity
3-5 days	Core text 2: activating background, vocabulary instruction, reading text Text: “Recitatif”	Research journal, notes and observations Student artifacts: student-filled literature matrixes; are connections between multiple texts developing?	Began “Recitatif” by Morrison (3/6) inspired conversation that lead to abrupt change in plans. Switched to “The Boys Are Not Alright” by Michael Ian Black 3/8 topic selection for project: Annotated bibliography
1-2 weeks	Core text 3: Yuuyaraq intro and Chapter 1	Research journal, reader response worksheet, audio recordings.	

Data Collection and Analysis

Because my study focused on student engagement and my decision making, my data is comprised of audio recordings, student work samples, and my teacher observations and written reflections (field notes). The audio recordings capture classroom conversations and student reading events. Student work samples are used as a means to examine students' reading comprehension. My field notes are used to explain and connect to the reading events as perceived by me as part of my ongoing reflections and research.

Collected data.

As explained in Table 3.4, I relied on audio recordings, video recordings, student work samples, my journal entries, and research memos written during data analysis. In total, I have transcribed and analyzed three hours of audio recordings, 30 minutes of a video recording, and 12 written assignments from six students.

Analysis.

As I organized and began the initial coding of my collected data, I first tried to organize the data chronologically. As I laid out the order of data, I spent time reflecting on the semester and wrote narratives that described what I considered to be the critical incidents that propelled my research. I identified two particular events that seemed to inform the instructional events and outcomes in my class: Jacob entering class with a black eye and Ryder moving himself into a small group discussion. Jacob's candidness lead into a pivotal moment in class that ultimately influenced the text selections, which lead to increased student engagement. Ryder's movement *into* a group discussion further reinforced my belief that the texts were engaging the students.

In examining these critical moments, I looked closely at my teacher researcher journals, transcripts, and student writing. Through analyzing the transcripts of discussions and the written

responses, I began to notice things I did not notice during the class time. First, students who I thought were passive or disengaged were contributing to class discussions in unexpected ways. Second, I noticed not all students were equally engaged in each type of activity. This observation led me to view my data as a story told in three parts. When I viewed the three parts of the story, I began to see a connection between what I could notice about students and how I adjusted my plan in response to my observations. Students were taking agency for their learning as participants in my class; their choices during class help me understand how they were demonstrating engagement and understanding.

In all of my data, I noticed another pattern emerging. As I mentioned before, not all students were equally engaged in every activity and their engagement seemed to vary with the selected mode of response (for example, reading, writing, and discussion). By that, I mean that I noticed students expressing themselves with different modal affordances. This made me wonder more about how the structure of class increased or interfered with students' meaning-making processes. That realization helped me focus my research questions as I began data analysis.

In chapter four, I will report on the analysis of data from the two episodes above in addition to a third episode that helps me to describe the instructional events in my classroom during this TAR. I will present the analyses and narratives of these episodes chronologically, with evidence from the data, explaining what I think the data suggests about my instructional decisions and how students show they are engaged.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

In this chapter, I will describe my data analysis and discuss the findings related to my research questions, which are

1. What does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged?
2. How do I make instructional decisions to enhance and sustain my students' engagement?

While I initially started this research wanting to focus on comprehension, I realized over time that I am actually interested in student engagement. During this research, I have tried different instructional designs and text selections that fit my students' needs. In order to most fully explain the patterns observed in my classroom during the Spring 2018 semester as they relate to the research questions, I will tell the story of the data in three narratives. After each of the narratives, I will briefly discuss how students demonstrated engagement in both the text selections and the instructional designs (specifically, in the discussion tasks and written tasks).

Before the narratives, I will explain the physical set up of my classroom and give a detailed description of each student in the study. In the first narrative, I will tell the story of a critical incident which shifted the instructional plans for the unit. This first story represents an informal, low-structure context for meaning-making whole class oral reading and unstructured, impromptu conversation. While analyzing and reflecting on this first narrative, I realized that this event was a catalyst for my decision-making later in the semester. In the second narrative, I will illustrate the patterns that emerged when students were asked to read and respond in writing to questions presented in a worksheet. In the third narrative, I will tell the story of a class in which students read, responded in writing, *and* participated in a whole-class discussion. In each of these

episodes, I will identify what I noticed and learned about my students' engagement and also how my noticings led to me making decisions about my instruction.

My analysis and the stories that emerge from my analysis come from data recorded over an 11-week period during the Spring semester. The data include audio recordings of whole-class discussions, student work samples, teacher researcher journal entries, and research memos written during data analysis. Viewing these pieces of data through constructed grounded theory helped me to understand the different ways students show engagement and the ways in which I perceive or presume engagement.

Classroom Context and Description of Participants

This teacher action research focuses on six students in my Language Arts II course. Language Arts II (LAI) is usually taken by tenth graders, but because of course failure and/or reading interventions, this class also includes eleventh and twelfth graders. Three of the students were tenth graders at the time of this study, and three were older eleventh graders who were working toward credit recovery and a mid-year graduation. There was a pretty clear dichotomy between the two groups of students in terms of attendance, motivation, grade point average (G.P.A.), and behavior. I will attempt to describe each participant both as an individual and as they acted within this learning community. I will first describe the physical classroom before introducing the three tenth grade students and then the three eleventh grade students.

The classroom

My goal as a teacher was to create a cozy and relaxing environment in my classroom because I believed that a comfortable and warm environment would lend to more learning. Often, students would walk into a dimly-lit room with natural lighting filtering through the green sheer curtains on the outside wall. During my first year, I exchanged the 20 individual

desks for five tables. Three rectangular tables were lined up across the front of the room, parallel to the whiteboards/projector. Two circular tables were behind the row of three, and I kept two individual desks for the added versatility. The shift from desks to tables not only solved the issue I was having with desks breaking and disrupting the flow of my classroom, but also accommodated my students' natural desire to collaborate during learning experiences. Even when I used individual desks, students would lump them together into clusters; tables allowed for their choice in seating while also providing a larger and more useable work space.

In general, I do not utilize assigned seating; unless behavior is unmanageable, I extend trust to students to choose their seats as a way to increase their buy-in and engagement for my class. On occasion, classroom activities invite movement, but usually students' choice in seating reflects differing combinations of my students' social and academic interactions.

To the left of the smartboard, there is a podium where I attach my computer to the projector and a tall chair where I sometimes will sit during direct instruction. If I am giving direct instruction or presenting new material on the smartboard, I am typically beside this podium. During class and group discussions, I shift between moving about the room and sitting at the tables among the students.

Additionally, Chaputnguak High School uses a block schedule in which each student takes four semester long classes each semester. LAII is a one semester class, and in Spring 2018 it was the last class of the day. Because it was the Spring semester and the end of the day, the timing of our class was sometimes an obstacle to content instruction. For students in LKSD, the Spring semester starts with NYO (Native Youth Olympic) meets and preparation for the district-wide basketball tournament. The semester starts out with a lot of seasonal cold and darkness, but as the winter wanes, the day gets noticeably longer by March. With the increase of sunlight

comes the natural energy boost and the ideal weather conditions for seal hunting and bird hunting. Often, by the end of the day, students are sometimes exhausted, sometimes manic, but almost always distracted.

My students.

The six students in this study not only help me to learn more about engagement in my classroom, but also are a good representation of the emotional climate of Chaputnguak School. In rural Alaska, nearly all students are survivors of either direct trauma or vicarious trauma. This includes being survivors of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and substance abuse. If a student has not encountered trauma directly, it is very likely that someone close to them has. As an outsider of the community, I would suggest that much of the trauma is either ignited or compounded by the historical context of this region of Alaska and the subsequent cultural and language loss.

As a result of the on-going presence of trauma in this village, I tried to be aware of trauma-informed teaching practices. I found that understanding the possible causes of my students' emotions and behaviors allowed me to be more empathetic in my response to discouraging and frustrating behaviors.

The descriptions of the students that follow arrived after a lot of my own reflection and thinking about the students' learning. For some students, I realized I had viewed them through a deficit lens instead of an asset lens. Through my analysis, memo-writing, and reflection, I was able to see how my own biases affected the way I understand my students.

Muxy

At the time of this study, Muxy was a tenth-grade female student who recently became an avid reader. During her ninth-grade year, I facilitated daily silent reading time in our LAI course. During the course of the year, she became an eager and curious reader, often reading outside of

her presumed reading level and using websites such as *Goodreads* to recommend new additions to the classroom library. Her interest in reading followed her into our LAII course, and she would often be nose deep in young adult and new adult novels that dealt with themes of love, abuse, and heartbreak. It was not unusual for Muxy to linger in the classroom after school to tell me about the latest book she was reading. On the occasion that I would read a book that she recommended, we would often bond and share our reactions. It felt like a mini book club for the two of us.

Throughout the 2017-2018 school year, Muxy had applied for and been denied a few different extracurricular activities. In conversations with Muxy, she discussed how these rejections both frustrated her and motivated her to continue pursuing opportunities to learn outside of the village. During the Spring 2018 semester, she was preparing applications to Alaska boarding schools. However eager she was to learn, her energy in LAII was inconsistent. There were days in which I recorded the classroom conversation and she spent the entire class with her head down, unresponsive. She appeared less consistently motivated than she had in previous semesters.

Caleb

Like Muxy, Caleb was a tenth grader. His mother has called him a perfectionist, and he would joke about being OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder). In general, Caleb was very detail-oriented. He was unafraid of writing, erasing, and re-writing. He prided himself in the quality of work he did in class and was serious about completing his work in order to meet deadlines. Caleb sees himself as a writer; in conversations with me, he would discuss how much he likes writing and that he might want to do it seriously even after high school. When we would confer about his writing or when he would receive feedback, he was especially receptive because of his interest in

the craft of writing. Caleb is the kind of student who responds well to teachers that are able recognize that he is serious and needs both challenge and support in order to attain his desired level of success.

Jacob

The third and final tenth grader was Jacob. Jacob has a very leadership-driven personality and he would often set a tone for himself and the other two tenth graders. He would vocalize his concerns or questions about the classroom content and instruction and tended to be more outwardly critical; in other words, he would question the purpose and the intended outcome of classroom activities and assignments until he understood the why behind my planning; without knowing it, he was a student who held me accountable to thinking deeply about text selection and revising the text selection.

Jacob was a very serious and deliberate student; he and Caleb would regularly offer really insightful ideas during class discussions and Jacob would commit deeply to his opinions. It is my opinion that Jacob thrived best in classrooms that were led by teachers he trusted-- during staff meetings, it became clear that not all the teachers had the same experience with this student. Because of the differing perceptions of this student among staff, I wonder how his relationships and perceptions of his teachers contributed to his academic and behavioral performance.

Ryder

Like the following two eleventh graders, Ryder transferred into my classroom from another school. He first came to Chefnak in the fall of 2016. He was immediately enrolled in my ninth grade *Read 180* intervention, but after observing him, it was very clear that he did not need remediation. The boring content and the fact that my class was the first one of the day meant he had both poor attendance and low motivation for that class. At first, I viewed Ryder as

a resistant and troublesome student. We would butt heads and fight to control the classroom. Eventually, I learned how to have a conversation with him, and through talking to him, I learned that he had some really poor experiences in school and especially hated English.

Ryder was a student I found to be very insightful and mature in some ways, and very impulsive in other ways. I would spend a lot of time trying to think of ways to engage him and support him so that he could recover his language arts credits and eventually graduate. In general, Ryder had remarkably bad attendance. Because of the school's retake policy, he would be completing missing assignments up until the last day of the semester. When in class, he was a conversationalist. He had a knack for talking his way into and out of complex ideas and seemed to most enjoy talking to adults or students he deemed to be more mature than most. As his teacher, it was a big challenge trying to get him to put his interesting and powerful ideas into writing. Since the conclusion of this study, he had successfully recovered many of his language arts credits, but has dropped out of high school.

Anthony

Anthony transferred into Chefornak during the Fall 2017 semester. He came into our school from the Kuskokwim Learning Academy (KLA) which is an in-district alternative high school for students needing to recover credits. Anthony is a creative and passionate student who demonstrated a love for hunting, drumming, and traditional Yup'ik art. Although I never learned specific details, Anthony seemed to have had a difficult relationship with school. School may have been a very safe place for this student, so he would come regularly; however, his behavior and mood were often unpredictable and inconsistent. Some days, he would be curious, eager, and motivated. Other days, he would threaten to drop out of school because of my class. When he felt comfortable, he offered feedback about the content of my class.

Louise

Louise came into Chefnak after the start of the Spring 2018 semester. She is Anthony's sister. Like Anthony, she was seeking credit recovery. At first, Louise struck me as shy and uninterested, but as I got to know her, I realized she was equally passionate and creative as her brother. In the end, I have to admit, I knew Louise the least. As I introduce and explain my data, it will become clear as to why she was little known; her preferred communication was either in private, one-on-one interactions or through expressive, journalistic writing. None of the recordings from my data include her voice. As I will explain later, her lack of presence in the data has incited a lot of questioning and reflecting on the inclusiveness of my teaching practices.

Narrative 1: Re-engaging Students with an Unplanned Reading

This first narrative represents a critical incident near the start of my research that led to my decisions to change this particular text selection, and more broadly to reflect on my approach to teaching. Before I explain this incident, I need to explain the instructional decisions and events that precede it.

When I first began my instructional planning for this research cycle, I was so attached to the idea of increasing students' comprehension through using texts about controversial topics that I spent a lot of time constructing a text set and a corresponding essential question. Specifically, I wanted to anchor the unit around the viewing of *The House I Live in* (Shopskin, 2012). In this documentary film, the United States' war on drugs is viewed through the lens of racial discrimination and systemic marginalization of minority groups. I chose this particular film because I wanted to build students' background knowledge about systemic power and race dynamics in the United States and invite them to make connections to their observations of drug abuse in their region of Alaska.

Originally, I planned to use this documentary to connect us to the essential question: Does every American have equal access to success and the American Dream? My overall vision for the unit was for students to read multiple texts about varied social issues and use the text to answer the essential question. Students were to record the progression of their ideas onto a chart that would document their comments about each of the texts they would read. Looking back, it is clear to me that I was trying to incorporate an element of critical literacy into the classroom readings as I was pushing students to establish and support claims about social issues such as: drug use, race, and socioeconomics. Their culminating project was to be a PSA (public service announcement) about an issue they felt passionate about.

I remember when watching the film, the students were still, tracking the screen with their eyes. The room was mostly very quiet except for the occasional interjections of “messed up!” that students muttered in response to the narration of the film. It was at this time, I had assumed that the quiet classroom and occasional responses were signposts that I was on the right path in terms of engaging students with the content of this unit.

When the film came to an end, I felt rushed to move on to the next task so I had my students write in their journals about the film. I never collected these journal entries, and I did not allow for time to discuss the film. If I could go back, I would have liked to spend more time with the students building a thread of what students noticed and learned from the documentary. Instead, I prepared to transition students into reading Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif” (1983). This short story by Toni Morrison radically impacted me when I first read it in college; I thought the content and the style of the text would engage students enough to make it worth the challenge of reading the short story. “Recitatif” follows the story of two girls: Roberta and Twyla. One of the girls is white while the other is black; however, Morrison never explicitly reveals which girl is

which, but rather gives details for readers to infer. When I first read this text, it opened my eyes to my own racial assumptions. For my students, I anticipated that it would provide insight into how people in power use race as a way to stereotype and perpetuate inequality.

I introduced Morrison's short story text on March 6 and planned to continue it through March 7. On March 6th, my goal was to get the texts in students' hands and under their eyes for a preliminary read; I believed that in order to work toward analysis, we had to first read the text as a whole and then re-read parts of the text to aid in analysis. On the first day of reading the text, students were compliant during the whole class read aloud of the text, but we did not finish the story. On March 7, I intended to continue our initial reading, but my plans were derailed when a student named Jacob entered class with a black eye. Before getting settled into class, I asked him how he got hurt, and he said that he was in a snow machine (snowmobile) crash the night before. Not probing further, I encouraged the class to continue reading aloud "Recitatif." I noticed a slump in the energy of the students; students tucked their heads into their elbows and used their arms as pillows and they lethargically listened or read the text. I knew instinctively that *this* was not engagement. I panicked and decided to take the students to the gym for a short break; I found that short walks or jogs around the gym lifted their energy in the long afternoon, and I knew if they were going to access this text successfully, they needed to be awake.

When we returned to class, Jacob initiated the following conversation with me in the company of his peers (Excerpt 4.1, teacher journal, March 7):

Excerpt 4.1 *Jacob Explains His Black Eye*

J: Can I tell you something without you freaking out?

Me: Yeah

J: I didn't get into a snow machine crash. I fought with a drunk guy.

Jacob went on to describe the conflict he had the previous night in more detail. Through Jacob's story, I learned that this "drunk guy" was actually a close family member and the fight turned out to be about Jacob protecting his personal property. This reminded me of just how small the village can be at times and how challenging it is for teenagers to feel as though they have their own space. As he opened up, I noticed (and journaled) that the rest of the "class seemed available to continue the conversation" (teacher journal, March 7). I understood this was a critical moment that all the students had some connection to-- whether immediate or not--and that I had to put aside the Morrison piece, however profound it was, so we could linger on the conversation that was unfolding.

As I continued to listen to the Jacob's story, I thought about the many complex emotions and conflicts teens in the village encounter and was reminded Michael Ian Black's (2018) opinion piece, "The Boys Are Not All Right." Black penned this editorial in response to the string of school shootings in January and February 2018. I remembered having invited students to read it previously, but there was little interest so I did not fight their disinterest in the text at that time. But now seemed like a perfect time to reintroduce it because it appeared that at least one student was mulling over the effects of emotions, addiction, and violence in our small community. I realized that an essay about those lived issues might be more engaging than the short story which did not as closely reflect their personal experiences.

Looking back, I remember that showing my other classes reports of mass shootings caused shock and awe, but the students did not seem to understand the gravity of the shooting. It was just an exciting break from the other literature. I wonder now if the initial disinterest in this opinion-editorial came from the initial detachment from the issue of mass shooting. While mass shootings are not a cultural force in rural Alaska, it does seem that some of the emotional

turbulence is-- having Jacob's story fresh on our minds let us all see the immediate relevance of Black's opinions on men and their emotions.

I asked the students to put "Recitatif" into their folders and passed out copies of "The Boys Are Not All Right." I stood in front and read aloud my copy of the article while projecting it onto my smartboard. The seven students and I began to read aloud together, switching from reader to reader without prompting. I wish I had recorded this day because I recall a shift in the energy level and an increased engagement in the reading activity. Students were no longer lying on the table and using their arms as cushions. They now sat upright. During the reading and natural pauses between paragraphs, I noted the following instances of students responding quietly to themselves during the reading (Excerpt 4.2, teacher journal, March 7):

Excerpt 4.2 *Overheard Private Speech*

Attributed text (Black, 2018)	Overheard student comments
<p>"Men feel isolated, confused and conflicted about their natures. Many feel that the very qualities that used to define them-- their strength, aggression and competitiveness-- are no longer needed... We don't know how to be, and we're terrified."</p>	<p><i>Reminds me of my dad</i> [Muxy]</p>
<p>"The man who feels lost but wishes to preserve his fully masculine self has only two choices: withdrawal or rage."</p>	<p><i>I've seed that</i> [Jacob]</p>
<p>"To be clear, most men will never turn violent...most will learn to navigate the deep waters of their feelings without ever engaging in any form of destruction."</p>	<p><i>I feel thankful for my mom</i> [Caleb]</p>
<p>"Sometimes, though, I see [my son], 16 years old, swallowing his frustration, burying his worry, stomping up the stairs without telling us what's wrong..."</p>	<p><i>Bipolar like me....</i> [Anthony]</p>
	<p><i>I feel so calm....</i> [Caleb] <i>So asqii [comforting] conversation....</i> [Jacob]</p>

As class came to an end, I was at a loss for words about the vulnerability and calm that washed over the room. The bell was about to ring, so students packed up their belongings for the day. Jacob approached me and said “you know why we like that? Because we’re mostly guys in this classroom” (Teacher journal, March 7). With that bit of feedback, I felt I had an invitation and an obligation to continue the discussion we had that day. After witnessing the increased engagement and hearing from Jacob, I began to wonder if changing my plans would not only help me answer my research questions but also meet my students’ needs. Table 4.1 outlines the key texts and reading events that led to the redirection on March 7.

Table 4.1 *Progression of Instructional Events*

Feb. 19-28	Mar. 5	Mar. 6	Mar. 7	Mar. 8
Students finished viewing the documentary, <i>The House I Live In</i> (2012). Were assigned supporting texts and practiced establishing claim, reason, and evidence	Teacher was stuck in Bethel.	Teacher introduces “Recitatif” by Toni Morrison (1983).	Teacher continues “Recitatif” Jacob tells a personal story after break, teacher uses the story to redirect reading to opinion piece.	Teacher facilitates an informal whole class discussion of the opinion piece. (audio recording) Teacher records student ideas; this becomes the foundation of subsequent lessons and reading.

I chose to veer off the plan mostly because of my beliefs about reading. I felt emboldened by my experience seeing Newkirk at the NCTE 2017 conference, where he talked about the importance of engaging texts. I also knew instinctively that if students are not *engaged* in the reading, it is going to be really difficult to demonstrate comprehension (2008, 2018). So, while the Morrison text has credibility and significance on its own, it was not getting any traction with the readers in my classroom at this time. I had a pile of copies of Black’s opinion piece that I had printed the week before, but during that time students did not find *it* engaging so I ended that

reading activity. Given the student conversations and the depleted energy level in the classroom, it seemed appropriate to give the opinion piece another try, and in doing so I found the second attempt at reading the op-ed was more successful.

In this op-ed, Black acknowledges that while women and girls still have many hurdles they have to surmount, the feminist movements during the past five decades has provided a language and a new esteem for women to access a full range of possibilities of self-expression. Boys and men, however, are still burdened by the same, singular language used in expressions of masculinity. For a man or a boy to express sensitivity is still seen as feminine, and the implicit pressure for men to withdraw from emotions turns into rage, and that rage can manifest itself in violence. Black's essential argument is this: The boys are broken, and men would benefit from using "feminism as an inspiration" to "expand what it means to be a man" (2018).

Analysis and interpretation of the "Broken Boys" discussion.

As I explained above, students entered class and went through the motions of pulling out "Recitatif" (Morrison, 1983) and trying to follow along. They were not outwardly defiant, but their low energy and the way they laid their heads on the desk while reading made it clear they were really struggling to maintain engagement during the last part of their afternoon. When presenting the second text, "The Boys Are Not Alright," (Black, 2018), I remember the students' posture changing from low energy slump into alert and eager postures. They sat up right and leaned over the essays with curiosity and willingness to switch tasks. The class was energized, and they became actively engaged in the text. While one student read, I heard other students whispering comments to themselves. I could not discern each comment, but I realize now, I was witnessing students showing engagement between themselves and the text. Throughout the

reading, students demonstrated engagement through private speech, a change in posture, and increased participation in the whole-class read aloud.

In this unplanned and spontaneous reading event, I was responsive to students' body language, verbal cues, and the emotional climate of the room. While I did enter the class with an instructional plan and intended learning targets, I recognized the signs that students were displaying that suggested "we are not available for this today." I could have maintained my instructional plan in recognition of the social, historic, and academic weight my assigned text carries, and I could have pushed my students into an academically challenging reading endeavor. By noticing the energy level and leaving space for students to communicate their needs, I was able to quickly adapt my planning to introduce a text that more closely mirrored their most recent feeling and experiences.

During this class period, I interacted with students in a way that is best understood in the context of my relationship with the students. By asking a student about his black eye, I was able to show him that he is noticed in my classroom. When observing a class of six students in which three students had their heads down, I responded with providing a brain break instead of handing out consequences; I took the students to the gym for a chance to briefly run or walk a few laps. The positive framing of my decisions apparently created a safe environment for my students to exist and interact authentically. When I ultimately discontinued the reading of "Recitatif" and plunged into a more raw, timely, and vulnerable topic and text, I had already earned my students' trust to read something that more adequately reflected their lives.

Thinking about the tensions that I encountered during this class, I wonder what I would have done if I had not had the op-ed piece readily available. Would I have continued with the plan? Would we have found a new way to engage with the original text selection? What might

have happened if I had taken the time to discuss the introductory film? Would that have built more interest/engagement in the next text?

Reflections and implications from narrative 1

The events in this narrative demonstrate one of the keys that unlocked learning during my research: My receptiveness to student feedback could help me curate a better text selection that elicited student engagement. Out of five total students, three actively shared the role of reading aloud and were observed having private speech during the reading. The remaining two students were quiet during this time.

While it is true that the three actively engaged students seemed deeply impacted by this impromptu discussion, it is also true that this whole class reading experience was not equally engaging for the remaining four learners. When assessing success and engagement by one measure (engagement in speaking and reading), then it appears that not all students found success. This discrepancy in total student engagement made me wonder what would have happened if I had included an option to write; would the other three have been able to participate more fully? In other words, perhaps this informal class structure was not sufficient for maintaining full student engagement or for assessing student learning over time. This discussion, however, became a critical incident in this TAR and a catalyst for the revised instructional decisions I made moving forward from this event.

Narrative 2: Engaging with the “Great Death” through Written Responses

After the events of March 7, in which students engaged in reading the essay about boys, I reached out to a personal mentor and regional advocate Dr. Agatha John-Shields. Dr. John-Shields grew up in Toksook Bay, Alaska and is the daughter of the late Paul John who was a deeply respected elder in the region. I first met her in 2015 at a culture camp where I first learned

about the Yup'ik culture. I trusted her to guide me and help me take a culturally appropriate approach to the events in my classroom.

I told Dr. John-Shields about the events that unfolded in my classroom and asked, “Where do I go from here?” My original plan to view texts that discuss the American dream My previous plans did not fit this new trajectory of this class; I now was planning a more culturally relative path, but I was not prepared emotionally or pragmatically to take on this new direction alone. Being aware of my students’ relationships with trauma made me see that changing my lesson plans was important, but I was also afraid of entering into this deeply emotional territory through my classroom content.

During this conversation, we talked about the cultural and personal traumas that are evident in rural villages. That resonated with my general knowledge of my students, but also with the students’ responses to “The Boys Are Broken.” She guided me toward texts and curriculum that would help continue the conversations and reflections of the students (Teacher journal, March 8). I ultimately decided to read portions of *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* by Harold Napoleon (1996). This book is an essay written by a Yup'ik man to and about Alaska Natives who are healing with the historic trauma that has impacted their lives.

At the time of my teacher action research study, I not only felt compelled to find literature more relevant to my students’ lives, but I felt an internal pressure to collect evidence of comprehension in the only way I knew how: Prompted student writing. Additionally, I maintained awareness of district expectations for student learning and assessment. These internal and external forces made me want to create a paper trail of what the students read and learned from the reading as a way to “prove” they were practicing reading (and that I was teaching).

Prior to handing the text to students, I curated five text-based questions for students to write a response to after reading.

The first reading response worksheet (which asked students to write sentences in response to questions about the text) focused on the introduction of *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (see Appendix B). These prompts were important to me because it would give me insight into if and how students use a text to construct a response. Also, I wanted to ensure that they had a strong command of the topics discussed in the introduction so that it would become background knowledge for future reading. Because the written responses were collected at the end of class on a Friday, there was no review or discussion of the questions after they had been completed. See Table 4.2 for more details about the introduction to this text.

Table 4.2 *Introduction to Yuuyaraq*

Mar. 12	Mar. 13	Mar. 14	Mar. 15	Mar. 16
No School	Begin instructional activities for Yuuyaraq Vocabulary	Review vocabulary from the text: synonyms and antonyms	Reading as a whole class “Introduction” (p. 1-4)	Reader response worksheet

When I decided to lead students in a reading of *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (Napoleon, 1996), I had a few compounding intentions. As a teacher striving to be culturally relevant, I wanted to incorporate a text that honored and reflected my students’ cultural identity and the local setting of the school. As a teacher researcher, I was interested in how students would respond to such a text (for example: would this text ignite conversation and writing in a way that other texts have or have not?). As a teacher who is held accountable to their students’ demonstration of reading growth, I chose to incorporate the QAR (question-answer-relationship)

strategies introduced to school staff in the previous fall, an approach to structuring text-based questions.

Before releasing the text and the reading assignment to students, I re-read the section I wanted to assign and constructed a series of questions that varied from lower-level recall to making a claim or inference based on the text.

In Napoleon's introduction, which we read aloud together, he contextualizes his circumstances and establishes his credibility on the issues surrounding Alaskan Natives and addiction, and post-traumatic stress disorder. He begins by explaining that he has spent years writing and discarding letters about alcoholism until his own addiction landed him in prison where he was able to complete his previously fragmented thoughts. In the introduction, Napoleon moves between establishing his expertise and addressing the main idea of his essay: the spiritual well-being and the disease of addiction of Alaska Natives. His introduction ends with a call to action for the reader to "arrest this disease, this unhappiness, this suffering" (p. 4). At the time of this research, I thought this text would be important for my students because it is written by a Yup'ik man, and it deals with relevant and timely issues that impact the students in the classroom. Furthermore, it extends the conversation about drug use and addiction that started with our viewing of *The House I Live In*.

Because of the longevity of my relationship with these students, they had become candid over the years they spent in my classroom; by that, I mean they became increasingly honest about how they express their emotions while in my classroom. I knew from first-hand experience and the data trends about our region that each student in this study had been directly affected by addiction. Some are the children of addicts, but are not addicted to substances themselves. Others did struggle personally with substance abuse. In the cases in which a student does not have

parents who struggle, they are friends with another teen who does. For a student like Jacob to be willing to discuss the source of his black eye, and for students like Caleb and Muxy to make personal connections to the texts, I felt that they should have access to a culturally relevant discussion of their experiences. It is not a secret to my students that much of the addiction in Alaska is connected to colonialism, but as their teacher, I was unsure how they would respond to it being explicitly discussed in the classroom.

Prior to introducing the text, I read the introduction and tried to discern the key ideas and concepts that I wanted students to grasp onto for further reading. I took into consideration previous lessons and prior learning and decided I wanted students to understand the main idea, the purpose, the audience, and infer the author's emotions. As I constructed questions about the introduction, I had these targets in mind. I structured the questions with the Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR) framework (Raphael & Au, 2004), in mind to hold both myself and the students to using the text as a source for answers. Within the QAR framework, there are four question types: right there (RT), think and search (TS), author and you (AY), and on my own (OMO).

Each question in this framework entails a different relationship and reliance on text. Right there prompts refer to questions that can be answered by specific lines, phrases, and sentences within a text. Think and search prompts require a person to read and consider multiple points of the text to construct an answer. Author and you prompts invite the reader to establish a claim or opinion based on the text. On my own questions can be answered without reading or re-reading the text. See Table 4.3 for the constructed questions feature on the worksheet, the QAR type, and my intended goals for these text-based questions.

In my three years spent in the Alaskan classroom, I learned quickly that missing and late work were part of the whole teaching package. In my teaching tenure, I encountered missing work in almost every assignment. However, there was 100% completion and participation with this particular guided reading worksheet. More specifically, students answered these questions independently during a class period rather than working along with partners, which led to more individualized responses based on students' interpretation of the text.

Table 4.3 *QAR Questions and Teacher Goals*

QAR type	Question	Intended Goal
Right there	What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon's introduction?	Identify the main idea by referencing the author's words
Right there	What is the purpose of this paper (p. 4)?	Identify, in the author's words, his purpose for the paper.
Right there	What actions is he calling his readers to take?	Identifying the call to action as part of the author's larger argument.
Author and you	What do you think Napoleon's feelings were as he wrote this paper?	Considering his resume and past experiences, infer or interpret what he might be feeling.
Author and you	Who do you think Napoleon is writing this paper for?	Infer about the author's intended audience.

Analysis and interpretation of narrative 2.

The students' written responses from the introduction to *Yuyaraq* told a story of both engagement and compliance. I noticed four patterns in the way that students engaged with the text and their previous knowledge to construct answers. These patterns led me to conclusions about some ways in which students may show that they are engaged in reading and writing. I will first explain how students used the text to determine the focus of the assigned reading. I will then

explain how the students relied explicitly on the text to construct responses, how they used their personal knowledge to construct responses, and how they expressed uncertainty in their writing.

Determining the focus of the text.

The first question on the reader response worksheet was “What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon’s introduction?” When I constructed this question, I anticipated that students would both reference the author’s direct words and also put the ideas into their own terms. In analyzing the students’ responses, I found Jacob’s and Ryder’s most resemble my teacher expectations. Figure 4.1 shows Jacob’s written response to the question: “What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon’s introduction?”

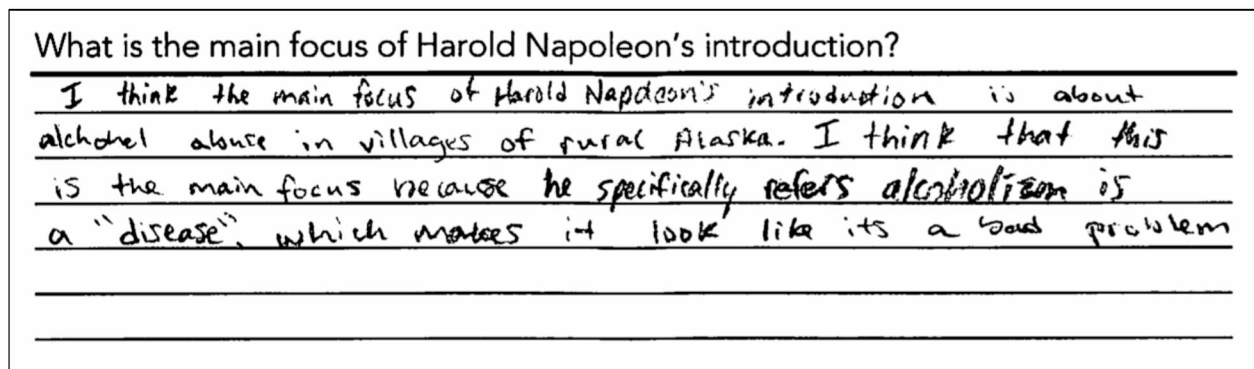


Figure 4.1. Jacob’s written response

Jacob begins his written response by identifying alcohol abuse as the main topic of this text; he cleverly supports his answer by putting quotation marks around the word “disease” in acknowledgement that he is borrowing the use of the word from Napoleon’s word choice. Jacob explains that this word choice “makes it look like its (sic) a bad problem.” Jacob is using his knowledge of words to make strong inferences about the author’s stance on substance abuse in Alaska Natives.

In Figure 4.2, Ryder also borrows Napoleon’s word choice disease when identifying the main focus of the introduction and follows his answer with a direct quote. He writes:

“His main focus is the lives that got caught by a disease called ‘alcoholism.’ ‘The theory that native people are somehow biologically susceptible to alcohol abuse may have some credence, but I have discounted it as being almost insignificant.’”

What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon's introduction?
His Main focus is the lives that got caught by a disease called "alcoholism." "The Theory that Native People are somehow biologically susceptible to alcohol abuse and alcoholism may have some credence, but I have discounted it as being almost insignificant."

Figure 4.2. Ryder's written response

Ryder does not, however, explain how the direct quote helps to support the main idea. By incorporating a direct quote into his answer, he supports his answer and shows that he is using the text to make meaning. However, since he does not explain how the quote supports his answer, it is unclear to me what he understood or interpreted when reading the text and constructing his response.

Unlike Jacob and Ryder who relied more directly on the specific words/word choice in the introduction, Caleb used the actual structure of the text to explain his answers. Figure 4.3 is an example of how Caleb used the text structure to answer the question.

What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon's introduction?
I think the main focus of Harold Napoleon's introduction is about the abuse of alcohol in the village. I think I know because he was talking about alcohol for the first how many pages.

Figure 4.3. Caleb's written response

Caleb, perhaps, has one of the more unique responses among his peers. Instead of citing author’s word choice or using more typical text features (like headings or direct quotes) to explain his answer, he uses the duration of the topic across the introduction to support his inference. By recognizing that multiple pages elaborate on addiction, Caleb is able to identify the main focus of the introduction.

Relying on the text.

I noticed when students chose to use a direct quote, whole written response was only a direct quote from the text with neither an introduction nor explanation. Table 4.4 shows the question and the direct quote used to answer the question.

Table 4.4 *Using direct quotes to answer questions*

Prompt	Response	Student
What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon’s introduction?	“Addiction to alcohol, understanding the cause of this disease.” (sic)	Louise
	His main focus is the lives that got caught by a disease called alcoholism. “The theory native people are somehow biologically susceptible to alcohol abuse and alcoholism may have some credence, but I have discounted it as being almost insignificant.”	Ryder
What is the purpose of this paper?	“This paper tries to deal with the causes of alcoholism and alcohol abuse among this generation of Alaska Native people.” (sic)	Caleb
What actions is [Napoleon] calling his readers to take?	He says, “we have to arrest this disease, this unhappiness, this suffering, and the good news is that we can.”	Jacob

Of all the collected responses, these were the only four instances in which students incorporated direct quotes from the texts to construct the answer. I find it interesting that only one student introduces the quote with “he says” while all other just quote the text with no introduction or explanation on how that text fully answers the prompt. Perhaps the format of this task—a worksheet with blanks to complete—suggested to students that they simply needed to answer the question without providing context.

Because these four responses incorporate text from different points in the introduction, I can infer that the students read the entire assigned section before and/or while answer the questions. While I am not ready to point to this evidence and say that it is indicative of engagement, I do wonder if this use of the text is indicative of compliance. By that I mean, does this use of the text stand as evidence that students are reading (and using) the text as I have assigned and modeled for them? If so, are students interacting with the text just because I have assigned it, or are they also interested in the text? I think it is fair to assume that students would unlikely read this text without prompting, but I still wonder about their personal interest in this text relative to other available texts such as “Recitatif” or other selections provided in the school curriculum.

Relying on background knowledge.

More than relying on exclusively on the text, I noticed students employing their personal background knowledge to answer and explain the prompts. Table 4.5 list the prompts and responses the students provided.

Ryder, Louise, and Muxy draw from their own experiences and knowledges in order to construct a response based on their reading of the text. Ryder references the spiritual aspect of Napoleon’s work while also articulating his own inference about the author’s message when he writes “The purpose of this paper is to educate us the effects of being a lost spiritual being that could be lured into the alcoholism and show you through his text that it is bad to drink alcohol everyday (sic).” Ryder attempts to quantify alcoholism by specifying that it is bad to drink alcohol every day.

Table 4.5 *Relying background knowledge*

Prompt	Response	Student
What is the purpose of this paper?	The purpose of this paper is to educate us the effects of being a lost spiritual being that could be lured into the alcoholism and show you through his text that it is bad to drink alcohol everyday (sic).	Ryder
What actions is [Napoleon] calling his readers to take?	His actions is (sic) telling us not to belittle but show them that alcoholism is a disease and not get into the negative spiritual ways.	Ryder
	To me he is saying "please don't drink please don't start. It will trouble you. Your people comes first then alcohol. Alcohol is bad." (sic)	Louise
	I think he wants the readers to take a look at themselves and better ourselves before something goes wrong from his experiences.	Muxy

Expressing uncertainty in writing.

Since this writing activity was isolated and not part of another activity such as a discussion, students did not have another way to express their learning and understanding of the text. What they wrote was all that I had when trying to understand their engagement and interaction with the text. Also, this was an independent endeavor. Interestingly, Muxy who is usually a confident and participatory student, expressed uncertainty in her writing. In this five-prompt worksheet, Muxy shows uncertainty in her response in two of her responses. In Figure 4.4, Muxy is responding to the first question: "What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon's introduction?" In this response, she expresses her uncertainty in two ways: by including extra punctuation and using a Yugtun phrase, *naam*, which means "I don't know."

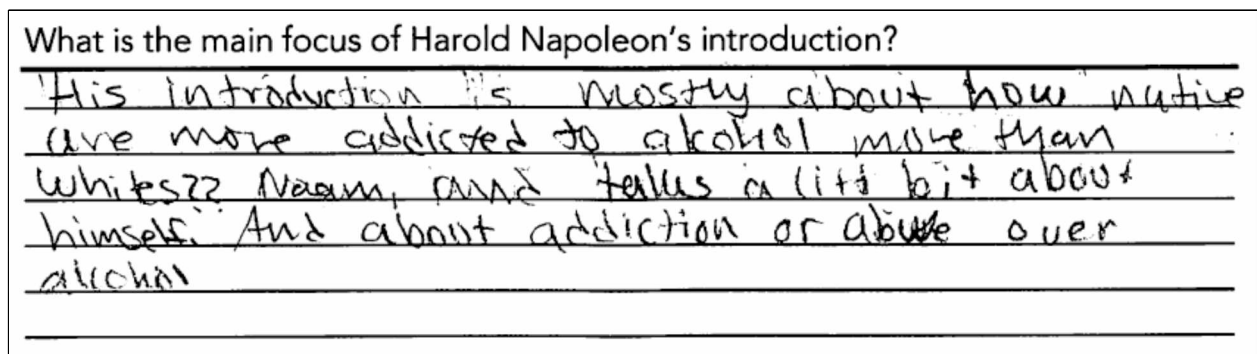
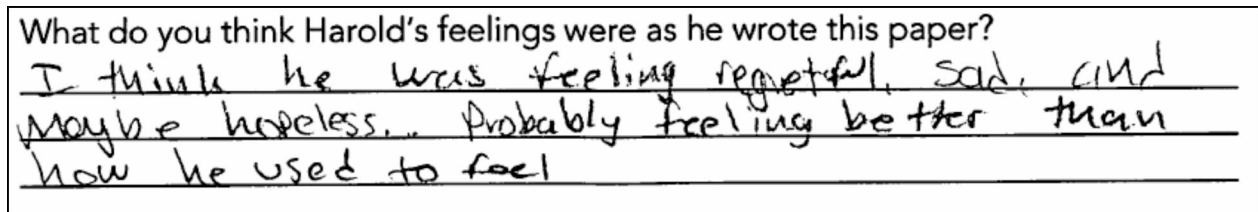


Figure 4.4. *Muxy expresses uncertainty*

The content of Muxy’s answer is consistent with the text, but she seems to feel uncomfortable or unsure of the comparison between natives and white people in terms of their tendency toward addiction. She notes this tension in her writing by writing “whites??” She begins the next sentence with the Yup’ik phrase that means “I don’t know.” It is clear to me from this response, Muxy has read the text and is thinking about the content of the essay and how it aligns (or not) with her perspectives. She correctly borrows the author’s stance about natives’ susceptibility to struggle with alcoholism, but perhaps she is not ready to accept that as a complete fact and she notes that with the question marks (??). As she constructs her responses, she seems to be engaged in a conversation with the author.

Another instance in which Muxy expresses uncertainty is in question four in which I ask students to make a text-based inference: “What do you think Harold’s feelings were as he wrote this paper?” In Figure 4.5, Muxy writes: “I think he was feeling regretful, sad, and maybe hopeless. Probably feeling better than how he used to feel.”



What do you think Harold’s feelings were as he wrote this paper?
I think he was feeling regretful, sad, and
maybe hopeless... Probably feeling better than
how he used to feel

Figure 4.5. Muxy makes an inference

Again, the content of her writing is consistent with the text. Napoleon shares a story about killing his own son—which may be where Muxy is inferring regret. Napoleon also uses a lot of words with negative connotations, so Muxy’s attention to hopelessness also makes sense. Still, she uses words like maybe and probably in a way that take away from the assertion of her ideas and suggest that she is not confident or connected to that specific answer.

The completeness of Muxy's assignment as well as the hints of her reliance on text help me to see that she did participate in reading. Still, without more information, it is hard for me to discern from this assignment whether or not she was personally engaged in the assigned reading and writing.

Reflections and implications from narrative 2.

To summarize, my main take-aways from this narrative were that the students' written responses suggested that they were engaging with the same text in different ways using both the text and their background knowledge to construct written responses.

In this reading and writing assignment, the structure was more formal and structured than the impromptu discussion in the previous narrative. Because there was no discussion element included in this episode, students had to rely largely on their background knowledge, reading strategies, and the text to complete the assignment. In general, they complied with the assigned task, but their actual engagement was less clear.

Students who had not participated in the impromptu discussion (Anthony and Louise; Ryder was absent for discussion) now had another venue in which they could participate. While Anthony and Louise relied a lot more on the text to construct their written responses than Ryder who relied more on his schema, the modality of writing gave them the space to read, digest, and construct an appropriate response. If the assignment were only an oral discussion, it is possible they would not have been able to demonstrate their knowledge as well as they did in writing.

As for Ryder, the writing assignment seemed to play to his strengths in reading and writing. Ryder typically shies away from narrative and fictional pieces, so the structure of the introductions (headings within the text) likely supported him. Also, Ryder struggles to complete

assignments that require more time and attention (essays and presentations), but the succinct nature of the prompts allowed him to have short, productive writing sessions.

I was generally pleased with the fact that all of the students completed the assignment, and I was happy to see that students were relying on the text to construct responses. However, I knew that this was an incomplete picture of what they were learning. I knew I wanted to continue writing about the text, but I also wanted to capture a discussion about the text. I anticipated that a discussion about the text would give students a chance to incorporate more of their own knowledge in just of relying mostly on the text.

Narrative 3: Engaging with the Great Death through Written Response *and* Discussion

At this point in the study, students had responded to the introduction of *Yunyaraq* using the QAR-framed questions. On March 23, one week after they had completed the first reading response worksheet, students were assigned another worksheet of teacher-made QAR questions (see Appendix C). Knowing that I wanted to focus on Muxy, Caleb, and Jacob, I placed the recorder near their desk and announced that students had a specified amount of time to answer the first two to three questions before transitioning into a discussion. I set a time limit and asked students to focus on the first three questions because not only did I feel as though the first three questions set the foundation of the section but also, I knew if I had not assigned a time limit and a focus, students may have taken most of the class to finish the assignment.

Also, I had chosen this structure because they had previously responded, in writing, to the text, but I wanted to capture a discussion about the text for data purposes. I thought that having them respond first would give students a chance to review the text and thus give them more material to contribute to the discussion. Had I not been collecting data for teacher action research, I may not have broken up the written assignment. Despite part of my decision-making

being influenced by the need to collect data for research, I think breaking up the written assignment with a discussion was actually a positive instructional move and potentially increased students' overall engagement with the assignment.

After the allocated time for students to write responses to the questions, I took a seat in the front across from Muxy. On a typical day, Muxy, Caleb, and Jacob would sit in the front center of the room. Figure 4.6 represents the room layout during this discussion as well as where the students were seated on this day (as well as most other days).

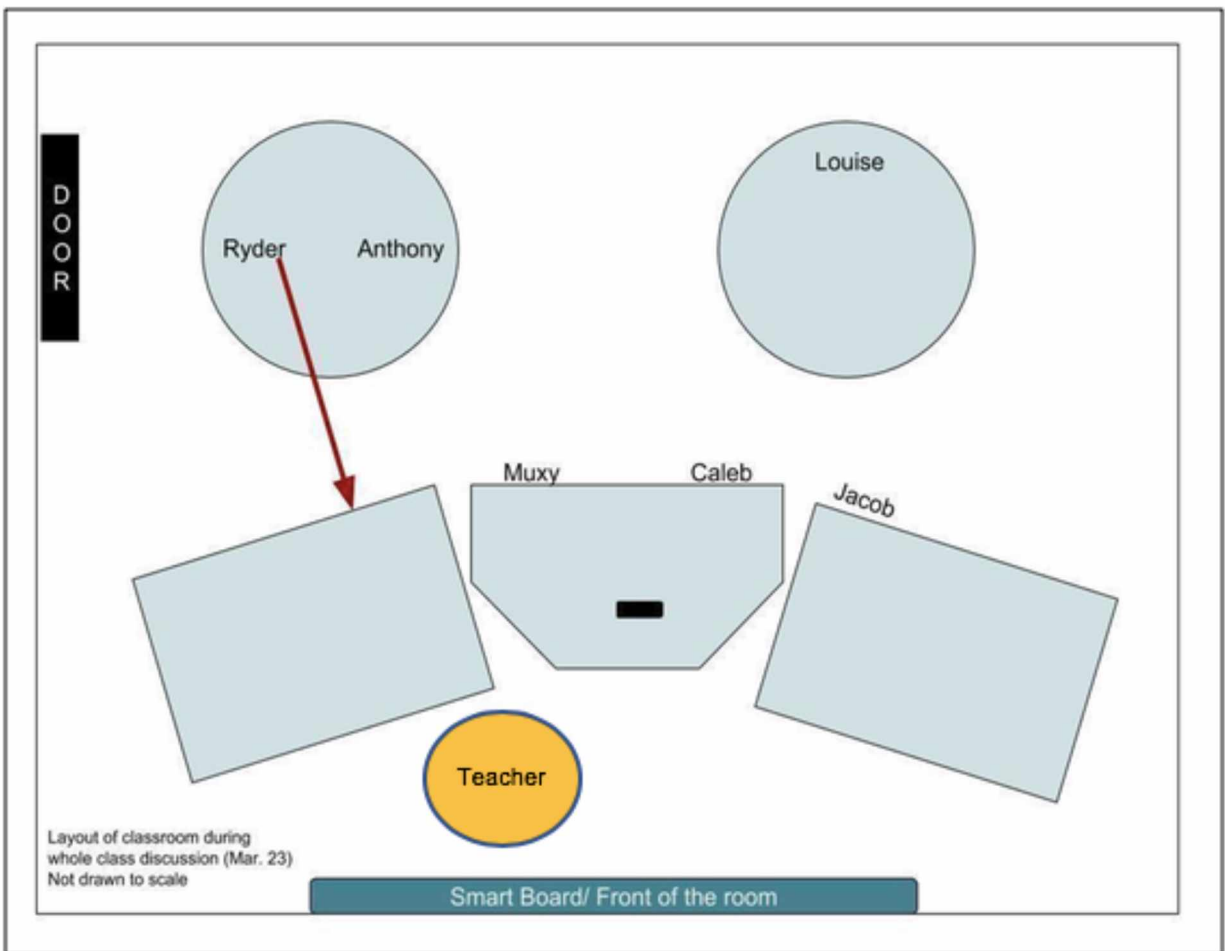


Figure 4.6. Layout of the classroom on March 23

I placed the audio recorder (black square, Figure 4.6) in the center of these three students. Given irregular attendance and unpredictable external factors (students' emotions and

dispositions), I did not anticipate that Ryder, Anthony, or Louise would participate in discussion. In fact, I had *planned* for these three to not participate in the recorded discussion. At the start of the small group discussion, Ryder moved from his typical seat in the back corner to a seat at the front portion of the class (see red arrow, Figure 4.6). This was not requested, but happened unexpectedly. He joined this discussion and was an active contributor. Anthony remained in his seat, but he also chose to participate with the four students in the front of class during discussion. Louise, as anticipated, did not contribute to the discussion. Because my attention was on the other five students, I do not know if she was actively listening or note-taking, but she did turn in the reading response prompts.

Before I introduce and explain the data, I want to iterate that Ryder's willingness to discuss something in class was not all that unusual; in the time I knew him, he had always been an eager conversationalist. Up to this event, most of the academic conversations I noticed Ryder participating in were either at his table in the back of the room or with me between classes. When I had asked him to move seats in the past, he resisted and refused to move. As a result, his *choice* to move seemed important.

Analysis and interpretation of "Great Death" discussion.

Before today, we had read Napoleon's introduction to *Yuuyaraq* and reviewed vocabulary for the reading. Because of some circumstances beyond my control, I had often had to wait until class started before making the final decision on which activities to implement because of the trauma-related behaviors my students sometimes displayed. On this day, I planned to focus on the Muxy, Jacob, and Caleb since I anticipated they would provide the most interesting data for my research questions; however, as class unfolded, it became clear that a whole class structure was more appropriate and inclusive for the students.

I initiated the discussion by choosing to sit among the students I intended to record. By doing this, I was showing my students that I was going to have a conversation *with* them and among them rather than trying to *lead* a discussion at the front of the room as I have before. I chose to initiate the discussion by referring one of the questions on the worksheet: *In what ways has the Great Death affected people today?* During this exchange, I ask for students to expand what they are saying (see Appendix D).

The transcript excerpt is preceded by Muxy's request for me to read her written response aloud. This was unusual because she typically contributes in class with little hesitation, but here, she wants to answer the question during the discussion by asking me to read her written response aloud. This is the first time she has ever asked me to do this during a discussion. I do not know if this is because she was uncertain of her answer, or if the topic was difficult for her to talk about.

To begin our discussion, I restate the question: "In what ways has the Great Death affected people today?" and honor Muxy's request for me to read her response. She writes, and I orate: "Misunderstanding and we don't know more about our history because of this epidemic. We do know most but not lots." After reading her words, I pose the question "and what's the effect of that what's the effect of not knowing?" (line 5, Appendix D).

Jacob uses this question to contribute to the conversation and as he pauses to elaborate, Ryder fills the pause with his own addition (Excerpt 4.3). Ryder continues contributing to this discussion by suggesting that the traditional culture is "dissipating" (line 17) and explaining that the culture is fading away. While this is a whole class discussion, Ryder and Jacob are the two who are most involved in contributing to the discussion. In lines 7, 22, 29, (Appendix D) Jacob begins thoughts that Ryder either completes or disrupts with his own. Ryder seems really interested in offering his insight about the current condition of Yup'ik culture.

Excerpt 4.3 *Ryder Builds on Jacob's Idea*

07 J: Turning into a weaker culture... maybe and...
08 R: Its not strong as how it used to be like uh most of the teachings are just lost into the 09 ssss[muffled]
10 T: And is that a problem?
11 R: Yeah because most uh teach us about a way of living and what not
12 M: [mm]

15 T: Do you think that the teachings are actually being lost or do you think that the
16 culture you know is adapting
17 R: [Its dissipating
18 T: Ooh dissipating
19 J: It's probably adapting to more of a white culture
20 R: Its like most of the traditions is fading away

Jacob, on the other hand, begins to argue that the changes that he notices are a result of outsiders coming in and the Yup'ik people adapting. He then expresses his perception of the elders' choices and the behavior of his peers (Excerpt 4.4).

Excerpt 4.4 *Jacob Explains How Culture Has Changed*

J: And I heard one thing about uh the elders saying that the generation this generation doesn't like actually listen or
T: hmm
J: don't actually listen to what they talk about so they stopped talking
T: When you hear elders say that or you hear others saying that about your generation do you agree with them(?) Do you see that in your generation
J: Kind of because most of the teenagers and kids nowadays only be on their cell phones and social media and stuff (pause) and like school, sports

Here, Jacob is drawing on his own observations to add to Napoleon's discussion about lost teachings and Ryder's commentary of the fading culture. Jacob seems to be reflecting on multiple factors such as social media and schooling practices that are leading to the current cultural state in his village.

I find this conversation to be particularly rich with personal connections, as students drew on personal knowledge, previous conversations, and observations about the way elders talk about the culture and how the whites have influenced some of the changes in the region.

Analysis and interpretation of students’ written responses.

In writing, Jacob touches on some of the details in Napoleon’s text (missionaries and unawareness of true history), but begins his written with “IDK” or “I don’t know” (Table 4.6). In the discussion, he appeared more confident in expressing his ideas, but in writing, he begins his response with uncertainty, although he does go on to write a response. Ryder, who is also very expressive during the discussion, writes a nearly identical response to the question as Muxy. They sat next to each other and I read her response aloud. I don’t know if he recorded that response during the discussion or if he collaborated with Muxy, but it is clear that he did not compose an original response.

Table 4.6 *Comparing student responses*

Q: In what ways has the Great Death affected the lives of people today?		
Jacob	Ryder	Muxy
IDK probably lost a bit of knowledge due to the missionaries teaching everything except cultural knowledge. We are unaware of our true history.	Misunderstanding and we don’t know much about our history because of this epidemic.	Misunderstanding and we don’t know more about our history because of this epidemic. We do know most but not lots lots. (sic)

Either way, I see his choice to write concisely about this question as an indication of “playing school” rather than engaging in meaning making in an authentic, personal way. In fact, I think many of his written responses (in general) rely heavily on his personal knowledge and opinions and are not so much rooted in the text. Based on Ryder’s use of his own background knowledge, I think that he shows engagement with the reading by not only completing assigned tasks, but also incorporating his wealth of knowledge into his work. In terms of reading comprehension, however, I do not think there is a lot evidence about how he comprehends a text aside from using the titles and headings in texts as a launching pad for his own thinking.

With Ryder is an exception, a pattern in the students' written responses was a distinct reliance on the text. For students like Jacob and Caleb, I think their use of the text can be attributed to their ability to “play school,” decode questions, and use the text to satisfy the questions. Each student directly quoted or referenced the text by piecing different parts of the passage to construct a single response. Figure 4.7 is an example of how Ryder relies on his background knowledge to answer a text-based question.

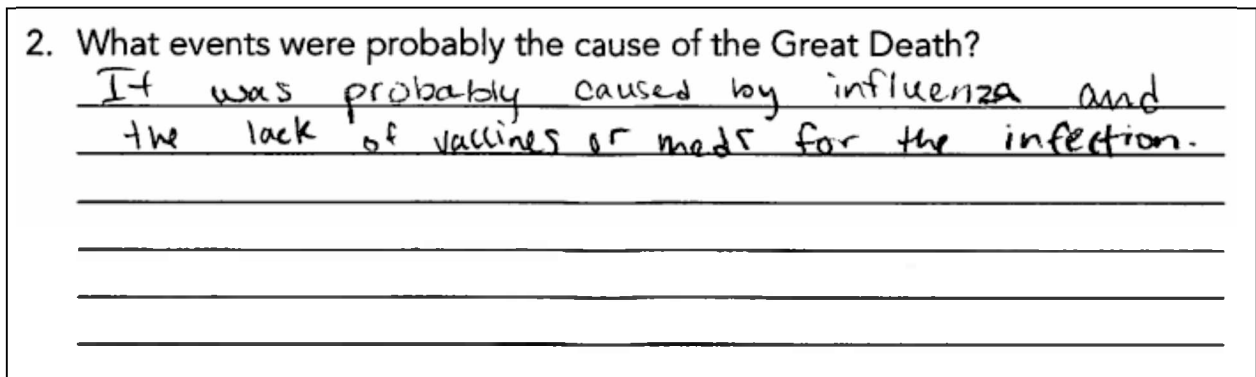


Figure 4.7. Ryder uses his background knowledge

When explaining the events that likely caused the Great Death, Ryder suggests “it was probably caused by influenza and the lack of vaccines or meds for the infection.” Napoleon does not discuss the medical knowledge of this time, but Ryder’s use of his background knowledge is consistent with the historical period of the Great Death.

Not all students were equally comfortable with asserting their background knowledge when answering questions. As an example, Figure 4.8 shows Caleb using direct quotes to answer questions two and three (What events were probably the cause of the Great Death? and In what ways has the Great Death affected lives of people today?).

2. What events were probably the cause of the Great Death?

The Great Death was caused by influenza. It spread like a wildfire to all corners of Alaska, killing up to 60 percent of the Eskimo and Athabascans people with the least exposure to the white men.

3. In what ways has the Great Death affected lives of people today?

They felt angry, bewildered, ashamed, and guilty, but all this they kept within themselves.

Figure 4.8. Caleb uses direct quotes

These questions are text-based questions in the sense that I constructed them based on the content of the text. However, my use of the word *probably* hints that there are multiple possibilities for an answer and not one specific correct answer. In question three, I write “In what ways...” Again, this phrase opens up the possibilities for different responses and hints at the answer not only being in the text, but also in the readers’ background knowledge. Even so, Caleb chooses to use direct quotes from the text to answer both prompts instead of incorporating his own knowledge or putting the text into his own words.

Louise, who does not appear in audio recordings because she does not orally participate in discussions, both paraphrases and references texts to respond to the question. Question four asks: Napoleon says, “the world the survivors woke to was without anchor... They woke up in shock, listless, confused, bewildered, heartbroken, and afraid” (p. 11). What do you think Napoleon means by this? Here, I was expecting students to interpret the author’s intended

meaning by drawing their attention to a specific part of the text. Louise, who is otherwise quiet, constructs a response in which she imagines herself waking up post-Great Death in Figure 4.9.

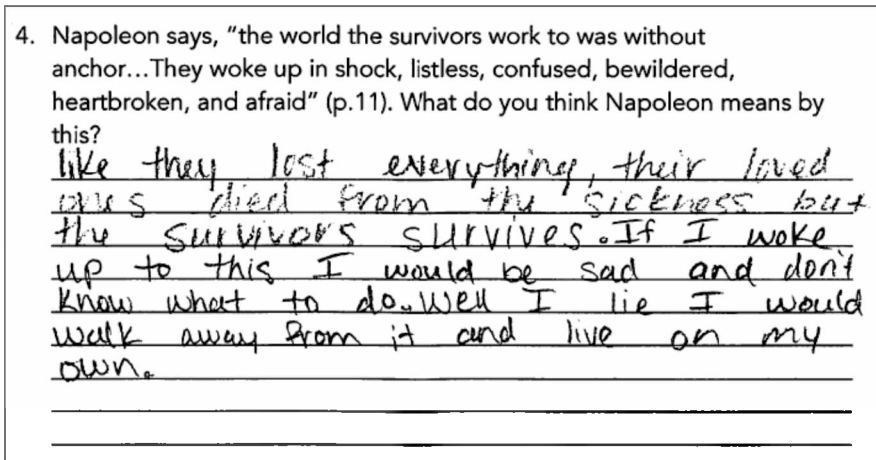


Figure 4.9. Louise writes a response beyond the prompt

Louise not only interprets the author's words by explaining "they lost everything, their loved ones died from the sickness but the survivors survives (sic)," but she also goes beyond the prompt to imagine how *she* would feel in the wake of the Great Death. She says, "if I woke up to this, I would be sad and don't know what to do. Well I lie I would walk away from it and live on my own." She expresses both the heartbreak she would experience and a possible action she would take.

My prompts elicited different manifestations of students' engagement. For students like Ryder, he was able to rely on his background knowledge, while students like Caleb were able to demonstrate their ability to extract information directly from a text. Louise, who does not participate in group discussions was able to write and think *beyond* the limitations of one of my writing prompts. This writing assignment does not necessarily help me understand *if* students were engaged, but it does help me see the different ways that students participate and perform on written tasks such as the reader response worksheet.

Reflections on Student Engagement, Participation, and Instructional Decisions

Something that occurred to me throughout the study and especially after analyzing the data is that not all students participated equally in the classroom activities. Even between Ryder and Jacob, there were instances in which they almost had to compete for talking space. The remaining students took an observational role during this time. At first, I thought that having a discussion *and* writing tasks helped students have different ways to show engagement and participate in class, but as I analyzed my data, I actually find that many of students' written responses to be devoid of their voice. As a result, I remain ambivalent about whether or not there were engaged in authentic meaning making, even when they clearly participated in the assigned task. In other words, students generally use *only* the text to answer or *only* their background knowledge without integrating the two. However, the discussion format did not hold students accountable for that kind of engagement or include *all* student voices equally. It seems as though it is possible that I had confused student participation with student engagement. Students throughout different points in my research were on-task and completing assignments but were not visibly *engaged* the way I had envisioned them to be. It is hard for me to determine hard and fast conclusions from these data points other than engagement and decisions related to engagement are complex.

Employing culturally relevant texts and funds of knowledge.

For students such as Ryder, this discussion offered a chance for him to articulate himself in a mode that he intrinsically enjoys: talking. The act of writing generally brings frustration and resistance from this student, but when offered space to speak, he does participate and even seems to enjoy the process. Jacob is another student who, though more flexible, values participating through speaking. I noticed as a teacher, that I was able to connect, acknowledge, and ask for

elaboration in the moment while in discussion with each of these gentlemen. In writing, Jacob expressed uncertainty (beginning an answer with “IDK”), but in conversation does not as obviously show that sense of self-doubt. In writing, students were able to connect their personal knowledge to at least one prompt even if the other prompts were answered with direct quotes from the text. This tells me that it is possible that the students’ funds of knowledge supported their comprehension of this culturally relevant text.

One of the biggest pieces of data that stands out to me is a significant *lack* of data from Louise and Muxy. Louise, in particular, did not participate in discussion through contribution. She did show respect by not distracting the conversation, but the structure of the tasks and assignments do not let me determine how much she listened or took away from in-class conversations. Thinking back to how the events in class unrolled, I do not think the assignments and discussions met Louise where she is and that impeded her chance to participate and for me to evaluate her understanding more fully. It seems as though writing offered more affordances to her, but in writing she was not given timely feedback from me or her peers. Muxy, though quiet, did participate with the boys in such a way that makes me think that even if she did not appear as often on the recordings, she was taking an active position as a listener as she worked with and among them.

Summary of Findings

Much of my data tells the story of student engagement and my decision making. In this teacher action research, I ask: what does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged? And how do I make instructional decisions to enhance and sustain my students’ engagement?

First, I learned that engagement is individualistic and instructional decisions about engagement are complex. Students were rarely equally engaged or equally participatory in class readings and discussion activities. What seemed to pull one student into instruction would also seem to uninvite another student. For example, I speculate that Ryder's participation in the discussion on March 23 is an indicator that he was engaged, but his presence in the discussion may have inhibited Caleb's voice. More generally, Louise *never* participated in class discussion which suggests that discussion-based activities were not engaging for her. All students completed the writing, but because many responses were direct quotes from the texts, it seems that students were more compliant in completing the writing task than they were engaged in interacting with the text.

Secondly, I learned that I over-emphasized the role of the text in my classroom. In designing this research, I spent months preparing a text selection that I believed would engagement and sustain students' interests. The initiating activities and first planned text reinforced my decisions because students participated in the activities and were alert and responsive to the film viewing of *The House I Live in* (Shopsin, St. John, & Cullman, 2012). However, moving into the second planned text proved to be much more difficult. Students were fighting lethargy and reading with their heads on the tables instead of sitting upright and alert. I reacted quickly when one student shared a personal story that triggered the memory of a recently published op-ed. The transition into the op-ed and the students' change in their body language and active participation motivated me to quickly change my plans. As a result, my readings and activities were reactive and quickly assembled instead carefully planned. Because I started with text selection and then moved into thinking about learning outcomes, I was in unplanned territory when the text selection radically changed.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

I first came into this research hoping to explore whether texts about controversial topics elicited greater student engagement. Initially, my research question dealt with reader comprehension *and engagement*, but over time, it became clearer that my interest and my data were more focused on just engagement. Because of my experiences teaching a reading intervention (*Read 180*) to high school-level learners, these questions are of great importance to me and to other teachers of struggling readers and writers. I noticed that when students worked with the texts provided by the intervention curriculum, behavior problems often got in the way of learning and students would regularly complain of boredom. The *Read 180* texts dealt largely with issues that were far removed from my students' lives in the village and the aligned goals of the reading made it difficult for me to make decisions about how I would like to approach the texts with local connections. I am convinced that the lack of engagement of my students in *Read 180* was a major roadblock in their demonstration of growth in reading.

I base these assumptions about the relationship between engagement and reading growth on my experiences in other language arts classrooms in which I had more autonomy to select texts and design instructional activities and assessments for my students. I found that when I constructed my own questions and selected the texts for readings, students were less likely to misbehave and more likely to complete tasks and enjoy being in my class.

When I began planning for this research, I determined that controversial topics included things such as race, addiction, and violence. I found the initiating text, *The House I Live In* (Shopsin, St. John, & Cullman, 2012) to be particularly engaging for most of the students, but the subsequent planned texts did not hold the students' attention as easily. By listening to the students' needs and lending an ear to the current events of their lives, I realized that more than

controversy, students perhaps wanted culturally relevant and timely reading experiences that resonated with their lives in that moment. They also benefited from having opportunities to respond to the reading assignments in writing and in classroom discussion. Through this research and data analysis I learned a lot about the complexities of student engagement and my decision-making process for selecting classroom texts and for creating opportunities for students to respond.

Through teacher action research, I was able to take a closer look at my instructional decisions and how students responded to these decisions. This research may help other teachers take an investigative stance on their own teaching and students' engagement as a means to not only pull readers into instruction but also work toward growth in learning. The data in this research address these questions:

1. What does it mean for my indigenous high school students to be engaged?
2. How do I make instructional decisions to enhance and sustain my students' engagement?

In the sections that follow, I will explain two major takeaways from this teacher action research. The first section explores my first finding and addresses the first two research questions. The following section explains what I learned about instructional decisions, specifically, decisions about ~~the~~ text selection.

Instructional Decisions about Engagement Are Complex

In answering the first question, I had to decide what I meant by “engagement.” Newkirk says the pleasure of reading “comes from entering a meditative state in which the reader is not even conscious of reading... the reader is *in* the text” (2008, p. 22). I wanted that joy and pull toward reading to be manifested in my classroom. I learned that it can be deceptively difficult to

maintain complete engagement even in a small classroom. It is also difficult to assess whether students are deeply engaged or whether they are merely compliant. During classroom events, I recall feeling invigorated by the student input and participation only to realize that not all students were equally included in the classroom events. This discrepancy between what I thought was happening during discussion and what *actually* happened helps me grasp the larger importance of teacher action research which is to essentially improve educational practices for all learners and stakeholders.

This first finding stems from the frequency of participation from each of the six participants. Jacob was the most regular participant, regardless of the task (discussion or written response), and Louise's engagement was the least visible across the participants for the fact I only have data from her written responses, which means she did not talk during the recorded class discussions.

With that in mind, I began to wonder about the relationship between engagement and participation. Does non-participation mean there is not engagement? What factors motivate students to participate? In the case of Jacob, he was the inspiration for the initial re-design of my instructional planning, it makes sense that he would be regularly engaged and participatory during class—he even made a point to compliment my text selection (teacher journal, March 7). For Louise, she participated regularly on individual writing activities, so she was engaged—but not in the same way as Jacob, Caleb, or Muxy who were more active in class discussions.

So, in response to *what does it mean for students to be engaged?* My first thought is that engaged students are personally interested in the text or activity. For Jacob, he was deeply connected with the text selection of “The Boys Are Not All Right” because his story influenced my choosing it. Jacob's engagement looked like participating in discussions, offering new ideas

and personal connections, and completing the written responses. For Louise, she certainly participated by listening, reading, and writing—but it is harder to determine whether or not she was *engaged* because of the way in which she participated in class. These examples helped me understand that engagement is complex because it is deceptively difficult to assess and sustain. In this study I saw three ways in which students engaged in meaningful transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 1978; Weaver, 2008). Students read texts, they discussed the texts, and they wrote about the texts.

Engaging in Talk About Reading.

Students in my LA II class were given 20 minutes at the start of each class to read texts of their choice, and I also assigned class readings so students had opportunities to read, both for fun and for academic purposes. I remember Muxy and Caleb first becoming interested in the daily independent reading when they were in my LA I course, and this interest in reading novels and other self-selected texts followed them into LAII. Muxy would regularly request more time for reading and recommend books for me to read. Ryder, I recall, being resistant to reading. He would often insist on catching up on missing assignments during independent reading or hide behind a book while he took a nap or tended to the text messages on his phone. That being said, silent, independent reading induced varied levels of engagement and excitement from these students.

During the viewing of *The House I Live In* (Shopsin, St. John, & Cullman, 2012), students were alert and actively watching the film as they sometimes muttered things such as “messed up” or “really?” but when we transitioned from the film into Toni Morrison’s (1983) “Recitatif” I was met with what felt like a whole-class slump in energy and commitment to reading for understanding.

In recognition of my students' lack of engagement and of one student's personal storytelling, I made a change to the text selection to something more culturally relevant and noticed increased interest and engagement to the students. I will discuss these decisions in detail below. Throughout the study, however, engagement with the texts varied from student to student and from text to text. Some students engaged independently while others seemed to engage more deeply when the class read a text together.

Engaging in Talk About Texts.

During the open-ended and impromptu reading of "The Boys Are Not All Right" (Black, 2018), I noticed that two students engaged in private speech and two engaged in unprompted discussion as a result of the reading event. In the private speech that I overheard, students had made connections such as "like my mom" and "bipolar like me" and "I've seen that" (teacher journal, March 7). These utterances made that were not intended for specific people made me think that the text was personally engaging in a way that other texts were not. Also, these personal comments helped me to see that students were comprehending the text because of the personal connections students were sharing.

Later in the semester, when we returned to a discussion of a classroom text, it was a little more planned than the event on March 7. On March 23rd, the class returned to a writing assignment (reading response worksheet) before I opened up the class for discussion. I had intended to focus on three students, but five students participated in total. Before this discussion we read part of *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (Napoleon, 1996), and answered questions about the section. This discussion was aimed at allowing students to discuss their answers and responses to the text; by having both a written sample from students and a recording of students' discussion, I was able to see how classroom discussion elicited participation from

individual students. Through discussion, Ryder and Jacob dominated much of the talking space, and both filled each other's pauses and build off each other's ideas (See excerpt 5.1). As a participant in the discussion, I was able to ask for students to expand on their ideas in the moment (Excerpt 5.2).

Excerpt 5.1 *Jacob and Ryder Lead the Discussion*

<p>15 T: Do you think that the teachings are actually being lost or do you think that the 16 culture you know is adapting 17 R: [Its dissipating 18 T: Ooh dissipating 19 J: It's probably adapting to more of a white culture 20 R: Its like most of the traditions is fading away 21 T: Mhm 22 J: [and-- 23 R: [Cause we gotta learn English uh you know 24 C: [reading or saying something in Yugtun 25 R: And our elders don't teach us much of our culture any more</p>	<p>In line 20, Ryder adds to what Jacob is saying about the culture adapting.</p> <p>In line 22, Jacob begins a thought and Ryder takes up the pause to contribute another idea in lines 23 and 25.</p>
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Excerpt 5.2 *Teacher Asks Students to Expand Their Ideas*

<p>26 T: Why do you think that is? 27 R: Because most of us students 28 C: [They [I remember one thing they said that school was on the way 29 J: And 30 R: [Cause they think having an education is more important than these teachings 31 and the way of living 32 T: The elders think that or the people coming into here think that 33 J: Everyone</p>	<p>In lines 26 and 32, I am able to ask students to expand their thinking or clarify their ideas.</p>
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Because these Excerpts (and other transcribed data) featured the same students and were void of other students, it became clear to me that some students engaged in talking about the texts to express their connections to the text and make their meanings clear. Their engagement in the talk was individualistic as their engagement in reading. As a result, I had to remind myself

during the study and during the analysis that non-participation does necessarily mean non-engagement and vice versa, but I do need to be aware of students who may be personally interested, but who need other ways to participate.

Engaging in written responses.

When assigned the text-based questions, all of the participants in this research completed the assignment. This is significant because not all students appear in the audio recordings of classroom discussion. This tells me that while not all students think that writing is their strength, they tend to participate most consistently on written tasks. I wonder if this is because writing is such a common, cross-content practice that it has become an acceptable and expected practice for demonstrating knowledge. With that in mind, I wonder if the consistent participation in writing stems from students' compliance (since they have been asked to write since kindergarten) or from students' perception of risk (since it may be riskier to talk about something than to write about it). I do not know why all students performed through writing, but not in discussion.

Although writing led to complete student participation, the strategies used in writing varied among students. For students like Ryder, the responding to the text-based questions was an invitation for him to demonstrate his background knowledge and lived experiences. For students like Louise, Muxy, and Anthony, they benefited from having questions that are explicitly connected to the text as it guided them into using textual support for their written responses. Caleb and Jacob wrote using both their schemas and the text to construct responses (Weaver, 2008). Interestingly, Jacob began one written response with "IDK" (teen speak for "I don't know" which suggests a sense of uncertainty).

The writing task was completed independently. Unlike the discussion, I was not able to give in-the-moment feedback about students' writing strategies and elaboration on their answers. Also, because it was an independent writing assignment, students did not have each other readily available to co-construct knowledge.

Looking back, this writing task was prepared by me with the intention to determine if students understood the intended meaning of the text (as understood by me). The questions did not promote genuine reader response (Rosenblatt, 1978), and did not give a lot of space for students to incorporate explicit connections to their funds of knowledge (Weaver, 2008).

I wonder what student writing would have looked like if my prompts were fewer or more open-ended to allow students more choice in how they wanted to construct a response and what aspect of the text they wanted to respond to.

Sustaining Engagement Through Text Selection

When preparing for this research, first priority in my instructional planning was my focus on text selection. When I first planned the instruction of this unit, I centered my lessons and activities around what I determined would be high-interest texts for my students. I chose topics that dealt primarily with race and success, and the American dream. I thought that even though my students are not directly represented in the people and the characters featured in the texts, they would resonate with the themes and topics such as: drug addiction, violence, abuse, and inequity. What I found was that students connected effortlessly with texts that most connected with their present lived experiences and not as easily with texts that were further removed from their experiences and funds of knowledge.

For example, students viewed *The House I Live In* (Shopsin, St. John, & Cullman, 2012) effortlessly as it dealt largely with drugs in the United States and the consequences of addiction

(both personal and legal). However, when the class transitioned into a text about two young girls (one white, one black) who were in the foster-care system, students either did not engage (head down) or had to tend to the text with focused attention. This mixture of forced engagement and quiet disengagement led me to question my next steps: *Push into this text more or change my strategy?* I made the quick and in-the-moment choice to disregard our assigned text for the op-ed that changed the trajectory for this class.

Despite students' low energy levels, the in-the-moment text change brought life to an otherwise disinterested class. This textual shift led to four students participating at will in a conversation among each other in response to the op-ed.

I used this re-ignited interest in reading to scrap my original plans for a quickly adapted plan based on my perceptions of students' interest in the text. The op-ed, then, became a platform into reading parts of *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (Napoleon, 1996). While not all students were equally engaged in this text or engaged in the same way, there was an overall increase of maintaining students' engagement after the inclusion of this culturally relevant text.

By including a text that directly resonates with the students' culture, I learned that Yup'ik writers and texts should have more credibility in a formal, academic setting—especially in rural Alaska. The implicit message students received in my decision to do so is that *they* have intellectual capital to bring to our classroom readings.

Implications for Teaching

Meaning-making come from engagement *and* comprehension. Based on the varied types of participation from my students in this study, I learned that students can be engaged *without* necessarily comprehending the text. Ryder comes to mind as an example; both his contributions

in discussion and his written responses stemmed from his funds of knowledge. It is not obvious whether he read the assigned text or not; what *is* obvious is that he knew a lot about the topic (Yup'ik culture and colonization), and wanted to talk about what he knew. I think the opposite may also be true—that students can comprehend texts at a literal level without engaging with them at a higher analytical level. However, I wonder to what extent can comprehension exist without engagement.

Secondly, I learned that as a teacher, I should plan activities that provide more ways for students to engage in the classroom. By moving between different instructional designs and texts, more students will feel invited to participate and engage. With that in mind, I also learned I need to think more holistically and logistically about assessing students' demonstration of comprehension. Often times, school administrators will observe classes expecting to see full engagement from the students, and when it comes to testing the same administrators expect to see growth in learning.

In terms of monitoring and assessing comprehension, I learned that I need to be more intentional about how and when I monitor students' reading comprehension. If I *only* used a text-based question strategy like QAR, I potentially reduce students' meaning making to what can be found in the text and regurgitated. However, if my comprehension-driven discussions are open-ended as they were during this research, I am limited in my ability to accurately determine which students understand which aspects of a text. For myself, I learned that I need to think both holistically and logistically about assessing students' demonstration of comprehension. As a classroom teacher, I need to remember that my students come into class with many contributing factors and that they need to be engaged in order to learn. So, when I prepare to assess learning, I wonder how I can sustain students' interest. Also, as a classroom teacher, factoring engagement

can feel like another item on a long checklist. I am curious about more efficient ways to measure the different aspects of student learning an engagement that enhances the instruction without clouding my time or preparation for meaningful experiences. In light of the reader response theory (for example, Rosenblatt, 1978) and modal affordances (for example, Jewitt, 2009), I think teachers should use a purposeful blend of open-ended tasks and low-structure tasks that are more inclusive to all students (Rosenblatt, 1978; Jewitt, 2009). In the case of my classroom, things as simple as having students jot down ideas before sharing may have increased the number of voices in the discussion. Additionally, given the talents, interests, and learning styles of the individuals in my classroom, a jigsaw activity in which students worked in groups to focus on one portion of the text and then report to other students. This type of activity may have allowed students to access modalities with which they could have demonstrated their understandings.

Another implication is that any teacher who wants to understand the lesser-visible yet influential tensions in their classroom and in their instruction, should participate in teacher action research. As a teacher action research, I was able to develop a new lens for looking into my classroom. In addition to a content-area expert, a pedagogical practitioner, and a social-emotionally aware classroom teacher, I developed strategies for reflecting on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions and found support in the different sources I have read to help me reflect into action.

I realize that something that I need to consider deeply in my future instruction is the idea of backward design. When I initially planned the instruction for my research, I thought first about the texts, then about the culminating product, and *then* the activities in between. I focused on the text first because the larger context of students' lives is becoming increasingly multimodal

and media driven. I notice that students have access to endless content that engages and maintains their attention. Literacy education, especially for emergent bilinguals, needs to tend to this by prioritizing intentionally curated text selections for classroom reading. While traditional anthologies and collections literary works are convenient and organized with learning in mind, teachers should consider creative ways to enrich their prescribed curriculum with texts that are selected with the specific students in mind. I wanted to respond to this through my own text selection process.

Since I had considered the culminating product before the activities, I thought I was implementing backward instructional design successfully. However, during this research, I learned that as a teacher I have a deep knowledge of my students. And with this knowledge of my learners and our shared classroom environment, I gravitate toward tossing out my plans in favor of creating an organic, naturally-occurring learning experience.

I think that there is merit to my approach of letting students and the classroom climate inform my teaching and to lead me to revising my lessons as they unfold. However, I realize that by spending a lot of time focusing first on my text selection and *then* the culminating end to my instruction, I put myself in a position of being unprepared and reactive in my instruction rather than deliberate. Moving forward, I will think first of the skills and strategies I am hoping to share and develop with my learners before selecting engaging texts. This way, if (and when) the text selection changes due to student engagement, I can maintain intended outcomes throughout the changes.

Implications for Future Research

Additionally, this research suggests that teachers and school leaders should revisit assessment practices as not all modes of assessment are equally accessible by all learners at

every stage; in other words, if a teacher wants to monitor comprehension, they may need to consider multiple means by which they check students' understanding. Where some students are proficient speakers who are comfortable sharing knowledge orally, others may benefit from written responses that provide privacy and time for thinking through the content. The multimodalities framework provides insight into how teachers like myself can hold space for learners to explore a larger variety of ways to share knowledge.

In an attempt to teach all students throughout a course of study, teachers should consider multiple routines that offer different opportunities and strategies for response in order to engage all learners throughout a course of study since it is unlikely that any singular routine will sufficiently reach all students. After my research, I would recommend that teachers design instruction that cycles through different modes of language throughout the learning process. This way, more students will have more access points with which they can contribute to the co-construction of meaning and the demonstration of their individual learning.

This teacher action research has made me wonder more about *what* types of content engages students and how to use trauma informed practices to support the reading of socially and emotionally driven reading. As teenagers continue to navigate difficult emotional territory, I wonder how the reading content in English Language Arts classrooms can be both a source of enhancing literacy and mediating through both the typical coming-of-age challenges and the less-typical and varied traumas that teenagers sometimes endure.

As expected this teacher action research lead me to more new questions than answers, and these questions include:

1. What are ways teachers can more effectively plan and revise plans in response to students?

2. How can teachers better understand the reciprocal relationship between engagement and comprehension to inform their teaching?
3. How can teachers better know their students when planning instruction?

Reflecting on What *Really* Happened

In this TAR, I learned that students make meaning when they are both engaged and when they comprehend the text. This research focused primarily on engagement, and I learned that engagement can exist *without* comprehension when students are familiar with the social and cultural contexts of a text since students like Ryder was able to construct written responses based on his background knowledge rather than the text. Also, when teachers move between different types of reading and classroom activities, students have more ways to engage with the material. For students like Louise, this is important because she does not contribute to conversations so she needs to be able to assert her learning in other ways.

Thinking back to the beginning of my career in Alaska and up to the end of this research, I realize I have come a long way in terms of understanding my students as the vibrant individuals they are. Often times, throughout my three years in this rural classroom, I would point to the trauma and vicarious trauma that plagued my students. I would blame frustrating behavior or poor academic performance on *all* the problems they experience *out there*. In fact, my first semester of teaching in Alaska was mostly about me learning that I am not here to rescue my students—that if I wanted to do a good job in my classroom, I needed to see their strengths and equip them to provide, protect, and advocate for themselves and their community. In order to do that, I needed to stop seeing my students as injured victims. I needed to pause and listen without judgment to students when they said, “Can I tell you what really happened?”

This TAR is a clear reminder to me of how strong and communicative these students are. They know that they have been in the backseat of big conversations (Alaska state funding, educational policy, environmental issues, language loss, and more), and they want to have a seat at the discussion table. In order to teach my students, I need to know them, and I can enhance and sustain their engagement (and comprehension) by knowing and responding to their experiences, curiosities, and values.

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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



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Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

November 21, 2017

To: Leslie Patterson
Principal Investigator
From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB
Re: [1151574-1] Engaging Bilingual Learners Through Controversial Texts

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Engaging Bilingual Learners Through Controversial Texts
Received:	November 5, 2017
Expedited Category:	6 and 7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	November 21, 2017
Expiration Date:	November 20, 2018

This action is included on the December 6, 2017 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.

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Appendix B

QAR Comprehension Questions form March 15, 2018

Name: _____

Yuuyaraq Introduction

What is the main focus of Harold Napoleon's introduction?

What is the purpose of this paper? (p.4)

What actions is he calling his readers to take?

What do you think Napoleon's feelings were as he wrote this paper?

Who do you think Napoleon is writing this paper for?

Appendix C

QAR Comprehension Questions from March 22-23, 2018

Name: _____

Yuuyaraq: The Great Death

1. What does *yuut tuqurpallratni* mean? Have you heard this phrase before?

2. What events were probably the cause of the Great Death?

3. In what ways has the Great Death affected lives of people today?

4. Napoleon says, "the world the survivors woke to was without anchor...They woke up in shock, listless, confused, bewildered, heartbroken, and afraid" (p.11). What do you think Napoleon means by this?

Appendix C (Continued)

5. Does your world today look similar to the way Napoleon describes the survivor's world on page 11?

6. How did survivors first respond to the trauma they encountered (p. 12)?

7. In your opinion, how does the pain of the past influence the events that happen in the present?

8. What questions or connections do you have?

Appendix D

Excerpt of the discussion on March 23, 2018

<p>01 J: {reading question} <i>In what ways has the great death affected lives of people today?</i> 02 M: [shhh 03 T: {reading A's written response aloud} Misunderstanding and we don't know much 04 about our history because of the epidemic We do know most but not lots lots 05 T: So And what's the effect of that whats the effect of not knowing 06 M: mmmmm 07 J: Turning into a weaker culture... maybe and... 08 R: Its not strong as how it used to be like uh most of the teachings are just lost into the 09 ssss[muffled] 10 T: And is that a problem? 11 R: Yeah because most uh teach us about a way of living and what not 12 M: [mm 15 T: Do you think that the teachings are actually being lost or do you think that the 16 culture you know is adapting 17 R: [Its dissipating 18 T: Ooh dissipating 19 J: It's probably adapting to more of a white culture 20 R: Its like most of the traditions is fading away 21 T: Mhm 22 J: [and-- 23 R: [Cause we gotta learn English uh you know 24 C: [reading or saying something in Yugtun 25 R: And our elders don't teach us much of our culture any more 26 T: Why do you think that is? 27 R: Because most of us students 28 C: [They [I remember one thing they said that school was on the way 29 J: And 30 R: [Cause they think having an education is more important than these teachings 31 and the way of living 32 T: The elders think that or the people coming into here think that 33 J: Everyone 34 R: You know its like um cause nowadays you gotta have education to live ya know 35 T: mhm 36 R: and you gotta work for it and like we how we did back in the days we didn't have 37 education or schools it was mostly about living off the land 38 T: {looking at another student} You're thinking what are you thinking 39 (pause) 40 J: And I heard one thing about uh the elders saying that the generation this generation 41 doesn't like actually listen or 42 T: hmm 43 J: don't actually listen to what they talk about so they stopped talking</p>	<p>Teacher reads M's response as requested</p> <p>In line 05, I am asking Muxy to expand on her written thought by explaining the relationship between not knowing history and the current context.</p> <p>I am asking Ryder to qualify the current strength of the culture by taking a stance</p> <p>I entertain two possibilities for students to consider. Ryder and Jacob take different approaches to answering this question.</p> <p>I am asking Ryder to explain why teachings have changed, and this question asks him to use his knowledge</p> <p>Clarifying who "they are in line 30 so I can understand student's meaning.</p> <p>Responding to body language, noticing a student has been waiting to share</p>
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Appendix D (Continued)

<p>44 T: When you hear elders say that or you hear others saying that about your generation 45 do you agree with them(?) Do you see that in your generation 46 J: Kind of because most of the teenagers and kids nowadays only be on their cell 47 phones and social media and stuff (pause) and like school, sports 48 M: {deep sigh/breath}</p>	<p>Asking for students to share their perspective on the elders' opinions.</p>
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