

Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Ray Barnhardt, **Sean Topkok**

In 1995 the University of Alaska Fairbanks in collaboration with the Alaska Federation of Natives established the Alaska Native Knowledge Network to share and promote the exchange of cultural resources and knowledge among indigenous communities throughout Alaska and beyond. One of the major ANKN initiatives in promoting the use of indigenous knowledge has been the creation of a clearinghouse and database to identify, review and catalog appropriate national and Alaska-based cultural and curricular resources suitable for indigenous settings, and make them available throughout the state via the ANKN web site (<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu>). In selecting culturally relevant materials for the database and CD-ROM collections, we have sought to reach beyond the surface features of indigenous cultural practices and illustrate the potential for comparative study of deep knowledge drawn from both the Native and Western knowledge streams.

The knowledge and skills derived from thousands of years of careful observation, scrutiny and survival in a complex ecosystem readily lends itself to the in-depth study of basic principles of biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics, particularly as they relate to areas such as botany, geology, hydrology, meteorology, astronomy, physiology, anatomy, pharmacology, technology, engineering, ecology, topography, ornithology, fisheries and other applied fields. Requests for the cultural resources listed in the ANKN database has grown steadily, with over 1.5 million "hits" recorded on the web site each month.

One of the vehicles for bringing coherence to the ideas imbedded in the ANKN has been the development of a culturally-based curriculum framework for purposes of organizing all the curricular and cultural resources that are merging as Native people bring their knowledge to the forefront in the educational and research arenas. The "Spiral Pathway for Integrating Rural Alaska Learning" (SPIRAL), is structured around 12 indigenous themes and grade levels, so that the compilation of cultural and curricular resources can be accessed by clicking on the appropriate segment, which will then produce a codified list of available materials, many of which can be down-loaded directly from the ANKN web site.

For those communities and schools that have full technology access, we have been providing training in implementing "cultural atlases"—a CD-ROM/web site development process in which students research any aspect of their culture/community/region and assemble the information in a multimedia format through the use of technology. Cultural atlases engage students in information gathering and compiling processes that simultaneously enhance learning of subject matter, technology applications and cultural knowledge, with the results often of direct interest and service to their communities. Areas in which cultural atlases have been developed by students in various schools around the state include life histories, genealogies, place names, language documentation, uses of local flora and fauna, subsistence practices, community histories, traditional arts and crafts, mapping projects and weather knowledge. Sean Topok, the Inupiaq ANKN staff member responsible for the cultural atlas initiative will attend and present at the ELOKA workshop.