Research Summary: Crago 1992

Title: **Communicative Interaction and Second Language Acquisition: An Inuit Example**

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Main questions:

- What role does culture play in communication between Inuit children, their families and caregivers, and their non-Inuit teachers?
- What socio-cultural factors affect how children learn and use a second language?
- What are the links between how Inuit children learn and use their indigenous language at home and how they learn and use a second language at school?
- How do Inuit families socialize their children to become cultural members? How do these interactions differ from those of their non-Inuit teachers?
- What can Inuit language learning and use tell us about how Inuit students may best learn a second language?

Some background ideas:

- Cultures have different ways to learn and use language. Language and communication are central to cultural identity.
- Parents and teachers feel frustrated with difficulties Inuit children have, when they learn a second language in the way their non-Inuit teachers expect them to.

- In North America and Australia a decade of research shows communication problems between indigenous students and their non-indigenous teachers.
- School offers a secondary form of socialization for children from indigenous, minority cultures. Many students learn a second culture when they learn a second language.

Main comments and conclusions:

- There is more than one way to learn a language – be it a first or second language. Cultural variations affect how we learn and use language.
- Non-native educators from around the world need to be aware of ethnicism – the conscious or unconscious denial of the cultural ways of non-dominant cultures.
- Educators need to look at and learn from the ways indigenous people instruct and bring up their children – traditions from long before formal schooling.
- Inuit parents do not normally ask their children to display knowledge that the parents already know. For many Inuit children, question and answer classroom teaching practices differ sharply from their early language socialization. This important difference separates home and school discourse patterns for indigenous students and dominant-culture teachers.
- Inuit children are raised to take the role of spectators; they observe and listen to knowledgeable adults. Adults do not consider spoken language as proof a child is learning language. They value early physical competence more highly than the display of spoken language.
- Inuit children live in a society where sibling caregiving is a norm. People recognize that children's peer talk, away from adults, is a very necessary part of language learning. Based on this, teachers could use cooperative, peer-interactive activities.
- Teachers may try to transfer learning models from one indigenous culture to another. To successfully implement learning strategies,

teachers need to accommodate the exact cultural context of the students they teach.

- Teachers need to use strategies for second language learning that come from knowing what cultural membership means to indigenous children. Language teaching and learning connect directly with the ways different cultures communicate.
- There is potential for teachers to use Inuit children's first language competencies to enhance their second language learning.
- Inuit teachers and bilingual instruction materials and curriculum help to make the transition from first to second language easier. Students gain conceptual understanding from Inuktitut materials and transfer the learning to the same subject matter in the second language.
- The fundamental cause of success or failure may lie in **what** educators communicate to children rather than students' second language fluency. We need more research about what kinds of interactions and communication cause indigenous, minority students and their parents to 'mentally withdraw from academic effort'. We need to continue to explore the cultural and communicative aspects of second language learning.