

## CHAPTER 4: TIME AND LOCATION: DAILY CYCLE

The time and location values that people possess are not to be taken lightly in a consideration of education problems in a culture. Such patterns of dealing with the environment on any scale (seasonally, weekly, daily, hourly) impinge directly on the shape that an optimum education program will take. Those who have attempted to establish vernacular literacy programs in Irian Jaya's lowland hunting-gathering cultures often show awareness of the cultural time and location values they must consider when planning the timing, location, and scale of their educational endeavors. Cycles of large scale time units (weeks, months, seasons, years) are one element educators consider in the design and practice of educational systems in a hunting-gathering society. Special attempts to solve the problems presented on this time scale include some temporary removal of language helpers from their local culture, constant and careful review of lesson content, the portability of teaching materials and assignments, care in identifying and remediating individuals who need special care, and the design for non-sequential lessons and units to accommodate the mobility of students. Such adaptations tend to be made on the large scale planning of curricula and strategy for building literacy programs.

Once a program is begun, however, a set of adaptive strategies that are just as crucial are the adjustments to the cycles of smaller units of time. In other words, attempts at adaptation on the large scale must be carried out on a daily basis. What looks good on paper, and might be easily carried out were local conditions constant and predictable, may be a mess if not translated into the local culture on a day-by-day or minute-by-minute basis. Planners and leaders of literacy programs in Irian Jaya have learned to be aware of such changing conditions as weather, cultural patterns of daily time use, intrusion on the local schedule by outside events, work roles of students and the corresponding impact this makes on who is available for class when, and the need for the scheduling of teacher training sessions on a regular basis.

#### Weather and the Time of Day

Even the weather can interrupt or enhance the educational endeavors on a particular day:

"With weather, if it's a wet day, well, they might not have class until ten o'clock or so, when the sun's shining, but if it's a nice day, they might start at six o'clock or so." [Bev Winch about Dani at Karubaga]

Planned school day schedules follow a general pattern in Irian Jaya: most observed classes began quite early in the morning (Figure 1). Some variations on this exist:

Figure 1: School Times

Place	Start	End	Date	Comments
Ngguberini	9:00	10:40	2/23	8:00 usual, held for us
Holuwon	6:30	8:00	3/16	Regular class
	9:18	11:40	3/16	Teachers
	14:27	16:00	3/16	Teachers
	6:30	7:45	3/17	Regular (Plane 7:46)
Sumo	6:30	7:30	4/13	Young children
	6:30	8:15	4/13	Strugglers
	7:30	9:00	4/13	Bible school students
	8:30	9:55	4/13	Main class
	16:00	17:05	4/13	Help for main
	16:00	17:05	4/13	Help for Bible school
	6:00	7:00	4/14	Young children
	6:15	9:15	4/14	Main class
	6:30	8:15	4/14	Strugglers
	7:30	9:30	4/14	Bible school students
	16:00	17:15	4/14	Help for main
	16:00	17:00	4/14	Help for Bible school
	6:00	7:00	4/15	Young children
	7:30	(9:30)	4/15	Plane due 8:15
Testega	6:23	7:20	5/14	Unusual Friday class
Fau	6:50	8:52	6/23	Student work 7:00 - 7:50

late afternoon classes (after 1600 hrs) are used in some locations, and the one instance of a mid-day class was during a teacher training seminar at Holowon, where literacy teachers from several days walk away had come for a few days of intensive training.

Of the Isirawa class, Carol Erickson Kalmbacher reflects on the parameters of a typical teaching day:

" Except that they are semi-nomadic, and so a course has to be taught that deals with short term subjects, and timing too. I had two classes; one was at 6:30 in the morning, and the other at about 4:30 or 5 in the afternoon. So they could be out in the forest, wherever, most of the day. And I think the morning class was the best. I would get them real early."

[Kalmbacher about ISIRAWA 5/19/87]

Kalmbacher's plans for the Isirawa classes are similar to those followed by Les Hensen at Sumo. Again, the timing for such classes is prompted by the local necessity for larger blocks of time at day times when food gathering work is not interfered with. Highland agricultural groups face similar time restrictions, as seen in Testega. Heat and humidity take their toll on concentration, and thus become other factors in the time picture, reducing the available "prime time" even further. Figure 1 also illustrates the patterns of daily time use in these locations: none have regular classes meeting near noon or even in the late afternoon. When such meetings, almost all-day sessions, were held at Holowon, it was with

the understanding that this was a rare seminar to which teachers had walked hours and even days. Whether such a midday session would have been held in a lowland location is doubtful. Holowon is at 3300 feet, Testega at 3600, relatively cool locations in Irian Jaya. And Les Henson reports that the theological education component of the Sumo educational program employs a schedule similar to the literacy segment, with a fairly long break in the hot part of the day.

#### Work Roles

Besides acknowledging mid-day fatigue problems, another highland program takes note of another factor in handling the daily schedule:

Sims: "We found that we needed to do that same sort of adjustment, have classes early morning, and have women first, because women have the heaviest responsibilities in the garden, women go first, and then the men. Well the teachers also have to go to their gardens, they also have to work, and therefore have to have a decent hunk of the day free for them, so they can only run so many classes in a day. So they haven't decided what they're going to do about it, but I put the question to them 'what do you want to do about it?' and they're thinking about running classes late afternoon for, say, the brighter students, because the sort of mental deterioration during the day as you get tired wouldn't effect the brighter ones as much as someone struggling really hard in the early classes. So the early ones, the slow classes would meet early, and the brighter ones later. [that way the morning isn't all taken up for teachers.] Prime time in the day is open for

everybody, teachers as well as students. While they're getting the hang of it, that sometimes runs pretty late. But it has to." [Sims about Ketengban]

Several emphases here bear amplification. Although sex roles are often seen as a power issue in education, they are also a logistics issue: women in the language groups in question here have different tasks than men do, and thus have a different time window when they can attend class.

#### Need for In-service Teacher Training

Also, indigenous teachers, coming as they do from the same culture as their students, and sometimes being only a few years ahead in their schooling, need much supervision and preparation before they can teach the next lesson. Many Irian Jaya literacy programs have made this kind of close supervision an important part of the program.

So teachers have become another "class", another group that needs to be fit into limited daylight hours, hours limited also by the need for food acquisition and the handling of the problems of daily living. Several strategies are used to integrate teacher training into an ongoing program. Joyce Briley describes the program developed at Aurime by the DeVries: "they teach the

teachers everyday how to teach that lesson, then they go out and teach it." At that location, earlier published primers are now supplemented for teachers by one page of teaching instructions for each lesson. This guide is reviewed by the teachers with supervision from the DeVries before each lesson is taught.

#### Outside Intrusions

On mission stations where the only outside source of supply is an irregular visit by a small aircraft, the day the airplane comes is a day of messed-up school schedules: everyone runs to the airstrip at the first sound of an approaching plane. Since my visits to all these charted locations except Ngguberini was by plane, the last class I observed was usually interrupted by the impending landing of a plane to take me away. In Testega, class was cut short so we could finish breakfast and begin the almost one-mile walk to the airstrip after the pilot reported his estimated time of arrival over the radio. Although my situation as itinerate observer placed me in a slightly different position than the more permanently based leaders of literacy programs, the intrusion by aircraft dramatizes some of the everyday improvisation these people must make in their plans.

Daily Schedules and the Pursuit of an Asmat Story

Many of the scheduling parameters already discussed in this chapter may be clarified by focusing on one linguist's pursuit of a full text, transcript, and interpretation of a traditional story from the Asmat. Implicit also in these incidents are some examples of most of the daily schedule issues already discussed in this material.

Generalizations about hunting-gathering people having short attention spans, or not liking long times of one activity, or even of eschewing lots of time indoors, need to be approached cautiously. Collection of some indigenous tales in Asmat entailed some revealing contact with local storytellers and their environment. From his previous recording of tales, linguist Cal Roesler expected that a story we had been invited to hear on 1 May 1987 might last about twenty minutes. We went to the manhouse at the village of Waw, with enough tape for four hours of stories, and the story began at 14:20. At 14:29, all children were sent away, as befits a traditional story of this type: only initiated males or authorized visitors may hear it. At 16:45, with the teller having taken a short bathroom break at 15:10, we were told that they had reached "a good place to stop for now", but that the story, if continued, would last until sunset at least. So

much for the rumor of a people who hate enclosed places, long stretches of the same activity, and projects that entail intense concentration! Cal then made arrangements to continue recording the story at another date. [Notes and tape 8A and B, 1 May 1987]

His subsequent pursuit of this text suggest several features of roles and patterns of storytelling among the Asmat, and also suggests some of that culture's codes about schedules and people's use of time. Later that month, Roesler wrote:

"I went back to the Waw manhouse to record the rest of that story the other day, but the teller was sick, and told me he would send word when I should come. We have been really busy the last week, but I will contact him again shortly if he doesn't send word soon . I will send you the info on that story as soon as I can. [Roesler letter of 22 May 1987]

A natural event such as a hunter getting sick is not seen as a crucial problem; he would send word when he was better. And note the missionary's plan to follow up on this: "I will contact him again shortly if he doesn't send word soon."

". . . regarding further details on the folktale that you recorded, shortly after I wrote to you I went back to Waw to ask about getting the recording completed, but the story teller had gone to the jungle to do some logging for a local company. He has not returned yet, and so I will be late in getting the information to you. However, I will do it as soon as possible."  
[Roesler letter of 13 June 1987]

The plan has been thwarted! Notice the evidence of outside forces in this culture: the missionary wants to record more of a story about the past (it in fact is an origin tale, about the first people to live and survive in these jungles), and a logging company is employing local people. Logging is a slowly developing industry in Irian Jaya. In the 1950's oil exploration was carried on in Asmat territory. The reference to being "late in getting the information to you" is to my request for this material before I left Irian Jaya on June 28. But correspondence continued after I returned to the United States.

" I was finally able to get the rest of the story recorded this week. Sorry it has taken so long. I had some other people listen to it, too, and they said it is a mixtue of tarey atakam (considered by the Asmat to be historic) and ji atakam (considered to be mythical, and told purely for entertainment). This is strange because a number of times the story teller, Seypinkan, stated that it was a tarey atakam and not a ji atakam. At any rate, the gist of the story is as fllows (apparently not a typical story, at least in the opinion of some others who heard it.) The thrust of the story is to relate how the Sirec (Eilanden) river came into existence." . . . The people here tell me that each clan has their own version of this and other stories. It might be possible that the Waw clan (in whose manhouse we recorded the story) actually customarily tell it as it was told to us. Another possibility is that the teller didn't want us to hear the genuine account."

[Roesler letter of 1 August 1987]

And with that letter was an English version of Seypinkan's story:

Story by Seypinkan. Asmat at Waw manhouse, Ayam village. 1 May - 1 August 1987. [Paraphrase by Cal Roesler and informants]

"There was a man by the name of Bewerpic who lived by himself. Two women who were living in another place found him, and took him home to be their joint husband. One day Bewerpic went out and urinated. Later his two wives went out and urinated too. The urine became a small stream of water that flowed down to the ocean. The stream was very shallow. At night a canoe came into existence. Bewerpic took a spear and a snake and put them in the front of the canoe. The spear and snake followed the stream to the ocean, and as they travelled the stream developed into a large river. Then the spear and snake returned to where Bewerpic was living. Bewerpic got in the canoe and went with them to the mouth of the river, leaving his wives behind.


There was a tributary that emptied into the Sirec river. At the mouth of the tributary there was another man by the name of Bewerpic and his wife living. The first Bewerpic is referred to as "Upriver Bewerpic" and the second as "Downriver Bewerpic". Downriver Bewerpic and his wife had a lot of possessions in their house, such as bows and arrows, varieties of spears, dog tooth necklaces, large decorative shells, and stone axes [CR: things highly valued by the Asmat].

One day Downriver Bewerpic went hunting pigs using dogs to chase them. His wife stayed home, climbed an "ucuw" tree and danced. She did this every day for some time. Because of her perspiration the strings holding the decorations (she had decorated herself with various typical Asmat decorations) were weakened, and finally broke. Her decorations all fell off into the water. At the same time all of their possessions that were in the house fell into the water and disappeared. When her husband returned from hunting and found that all of their possessions were gone he did not beat his wife. Instead he took her younger brother and put him in a fire. His body was badly burned. He fainted, but did not die. His sister rescued him from the fire.

The boy's family took him, and moved to a place upriver on the tributary. The boy's wounds finally healed. He had been thinking about all of his sister's things that had disappeared, and decided to try to replace them. He went to another river where he found a family living. This family had a lot of possessions like the things that the burn victim's sister had lost. He asked for them, and they gave them to him. He took these things and gave them to his sister. Then he killed his sister's husband in revenge for having put him in the fire and causing him to be burned severely."

The importance of this story to this present study goes far beyond its folkloric nature. Unlike the story told by class members in Sumo, or the ones written as assignments for David Martin or Joyce Briley or Janet Bateman, essentially current, "made-up" stories, (though each of those cultures have different ways of categorizing such things), this is a myth that is part of a body of myths. It is an officially sanctioned story in the sense that there were others storytellers present (and in fact Seypinkan consulted them about details, or more accurately, they corrected his recollection of river names, chronology, and the like).

More significant than the content of this story are the conditions of its telling and preserving. The time lapse from the beginning of the telling to the end, the willingness of the teller to finish the story at all, and to discuss related issues, and the overall generosity with time demonstrated by this story are all features of the



culture which might surprise some who seek to introduce educational systems to groups of hunter-gatherers.

The conditions around the collecting of this story does not suggest a short-sighted, short-remembered group of hungry people with hunting on their minds and therefore no time to remember and tell stories, but reflects a group of people much like the readers and writers we know from other contexts: interested in their heritage, interested in a good story, and willing to take the time, though not necessarily on a scale with which we are familiar, to tell or listen to a story in the company of friends.

Generosity, and perseverance, and foresightedness, all virtues for the folklorist and the educator, need to be practiced not only on the large scale clarified in Chapter Three, in the major cycles of culture change and subsistence, but also on the daily level of workers sick and food needing to be brought in, and rain keeping people from their usual plans. These issues have been the province of this current chapter. Of course, another aspect of cultural adaptation in educational settings is that of the interaction between student and teacher, the ways that text and materials and teaching styles and testing systems are made to conform as closely as possible to the culture in which the schooling is being conducted. As this material is presented in Chapter Five, it will be

worthwhile to note the interaction of the three time scales within which Irian Jaya's vernacular literacy education is conducted.