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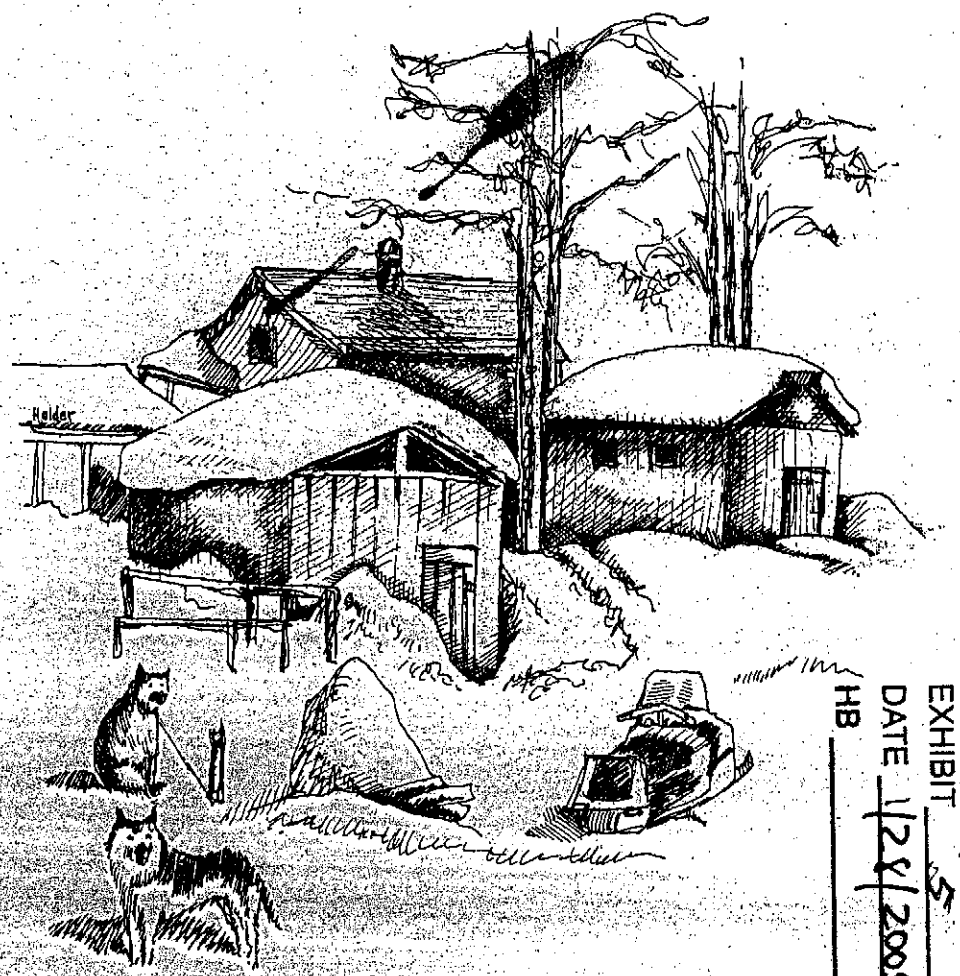
It Happens When We Get There



Conversations With Teachers In Alaskan Villages

Working Group
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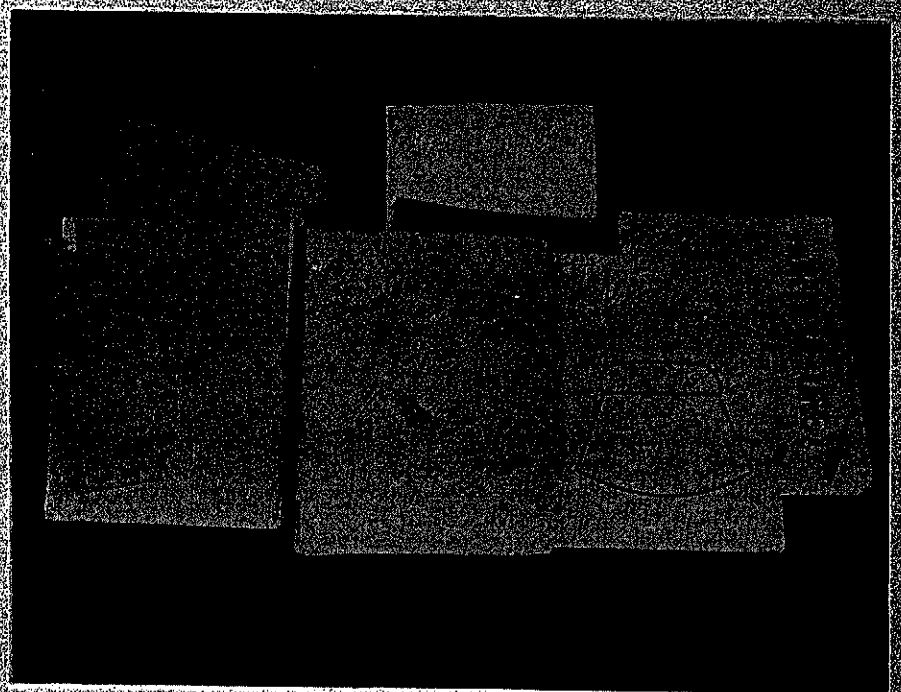

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The development of this booklet was based on the assumption that in rural Alaska appropriate teaching methods are just as important as relevant curriculum materials. Therefore, during a workshop in September, 1977, to adapt curriculum materials for use in rural Alaska, this booklet was developed from in-depth interviews with experienced "bush" teachers from interior Alaska. However, the booklet expanded beyond teaching methods, encompassing an exciting philosophy that teachers must adopt if they are going to adapt to village conditions and unique challenges in the classroom.

The instructional materials were adapted in the following subjects during the workshop: construction, agriculture, small engines, snowmobile, clerical and home economics. These materials were developed specifically for the schools involved and will not be available for dissemination. The observations summarized in this booklet are based on the opinions of a small group of teachers and should be used to gain insight into improving teaching methods rather than trying to generalize the observations to all villages. The teachers who were interviewed in developing this booklet are listed on pages 23 and 24. They reside in villages where the following languages and cultures exist: Yupik Eskimo, Central Yupik Eskimo, Suqpiaq Eskimo, Gevichin Athapascan, Koyukon Athapascan.

In order to adapt instructional materials for use in rural Alaska, bush teachers took instructional materials developed in other places and used the process summarized below:

GOAL: To adapt, adopt and develop curriculum for use in rural areas.

OBJECTIVE 1: To localize the curriculum in the community.

ACTIVITIES

1. What are the community needs which are related to the curriculum?

2. What are the community problems which are related to the curriculum?

3. What are the community strengths which can support the curriculum?

4. What can be done to draw on present programs in developing the new curriculum?

5. What are other considerations for localizing the curriculum?

OBJECTIVE 2: To personalize the curriculum for the student.

ACTIVITIES

1. What is the student's need for skill?

2. What is the employment potential and/or survival value of the skill?

3. What are other considerations for personalizing the curriculum?

OBJECTIVE 3: To motivate the student.

ACTIVITIES

1. What can be done to increase learning readiness?

2. What can be done to provide successful experiences for students?

3. What techniques can be used to develop empathy?

4. What can be done to provide a setting for learning by doing?

5. What can be done to provide for effective practice?

6. Where can relevant pictures, posters, charts, etc. be obtained?

7. What teaching resources are most helpful in rural Alaska?

8. What are other considerations important to motivation?

OBJECTIVE 4: To implement the curriculum.

ACTIVITIES

1. Repeat process in individual schools.

2. Follow up by administration.

OBJECTIVE 5: To evaluate the curriculum.

Introduction by: C. David Beers, Consultant

HOW THIS BOOK WAS PREPARED

This booklet is an attempt to reconstruct on paper some conversations held among various people with direct personal experience teaching in rural Alaskan villages. The intent here is to provide a written account drawn directly from informal discussion that preserves as much as possible the communication devices used in conversation. A beginning assumption for this approach is that people learn much about the world from talking with others, thus there must be something about the way language is used in conversation that facilitates learning.

This kind of thought opens up the possibility of trying to produce a document that utilizes conversation as a communication tool. A major challenge here is to find a way to translate flesh and blood conversations into something that will be worth reading from a piece of paper. The following activities were undertaken to try to meet this challenge.

A five-day workshop in the design of vocational education curriculum materials for rural Alaskan secondary schools was held by the Southwest Regional School District and the State Department of Education early in the 1977-1978 school year. Among the 16 workshop participants were teachers new to Alaska as well as teachers with varying amounts of village teaching experience. One purpose of the workshop was to discuss how the various curriculum materials designed at the workshop would be put into action by the teachers in the villages, and to prepare a document based on those discussions. Here are the guiding questions:

Imagine that you are talking with an interested friend about your own experiences teaching in rural Alaskan villages. What lessons have you learned about teaching in Alaska that would be useful to others? How do you go about translating curriculum guides and materials into learning experiences for students? What are the basic principles for implementing an educational program in an Alaskan village?

During the discussions about these issues, detailed notes were taken and a typed transcript was prepared, providing a data base expressed as nearly as possible in the words of the participants themselves. The transcript was edited with the intent of preserving the language and flow of thought of the original conversations, yet recognizing that spoken language and written language are not the same. Thus considerable editing has taken place - certain phrases have been deleted, others moved from one place to another, titles have been inserted, etc. - so that the written version is somewhat more focused than the original spoken versions. But the substantive points made in the written version are expressed in basically the language of the spoken versions, following the belief that the people who have direct first hand experience with teaching in Alaskan villages can speak best for themselves.

CONVERSATIONS WITH TEACHERS

BECOME A STUDENT

I think the best approach to teaching in bush Alaska is to go into the village and become a student yourself. If you approach native persons with honest questions about their way of life, they will respond openly to you. When I started teaching I needed a house to live in, and I wanted to build a log cabin. I asked the people for help. The first response was, "You are the teacher; you are supposed to know everything.". I told them, "You know how to build log cabins, I don't. I'm here to learn from you." When the natives realized I was asking an honest question and I intended to carry through with what they taught me, they were very free with their help. So together we built the log cabin I'm still living in years later. They saw me make a lot of stupid mistakes as I was building this cabin, because I didn't know what I was doing, and they could see that I have trouble learning new things too. This was important I think, looking back on it, because they could see that I am human too, just like them - the teacher is not perfect.

THE VILLAGE DOES NOT EXIST TO MEET THE TEACHERS NEEDS

I believe that teachers should not come into the village with the intent of changing the native. They should come with the motive of accepting people the way they are. A lot of do-gooders come into the village thinking they know it all and their purpose is to change the natives. The natives call them "brass buttons." The teachers need to understand that natives do not exist for that exalted purpose. The teachers should not try to push their own values onto the local people. The local people already have values of their own.

Some new teachers in Alaska seem to be more concerned with their own needs than with kids' needs, or with the village needs.

I HAD THE KIDS SIT IN A CIRCLE AND JUST VISIT

I was teaching a history class and it just wasn't getting through, Alexander the Great, The Westward Movement, and all that stuff. It was simply going right past them. One day I tried something else. I had the kids sit in a circle and just visit. The kids started asking me questions about myself, where I came from, what my family was like, personal things about my life. Those kids really became motivated. Now they were really talking, once the topic was centered on people. They were interacting with me in a way which I never saw before. This taught me that those kids can be motivated. They can get to school on time, they can learn - if there is something going on there which is important to them. Maybe the reason so many kids are tardy or absent can be found in what we are offering at the school. Perhaps we should be looking at ourselves instead of looking for the reason in native kids. They are never late for a basketball practice. Maybe there is a lesson in that. The kids realize that we are different than them. If we open up to them as people, let them explore these differences by asking their own questions, then they get to the point where they can see that there are also ways in which we are the same.

INTENSE COMMUNICATION IS THE MOST VITAL OF ALL TEACHING QUALITIES

I don't think it matters so much whether you are in Salt Lake City or rural North Dakota or an Eskimo Village. The one thing I think is most important is whether I can communicate with other people - can I get their respect? Can I show them that I give them respect? If you can be open and honest with each other, if you can share your feelings, you can have successful learning experiences with each other. The subject matter is not primary, in my view, it's the quality of the communication. Maybe the main emphasis in village education should be on teaching people to communicate. Intense communication is the most vital of all teaching qualities, and the one used the least!

OK GUYS — I'M GOING TO LAY SOME "FAT ALBERT" ON YOU

Humor is something I think is a major part of being able to communicate. I brought some Bill Cosby records to class that had me rolling with laughter - OK guys — I'm going to lay some "Fat Albert" on you! The native kids just sat there. They didn't get it. Well, I tried to explain it to them. That's pretty tough, trying to explain a joke. But out of the effort we began to communicate. They could see that I thought humor was acceptable in class, and they started to try out some of their humor on me, and things got better when we could laugh together.

FOR ME IT'S THE PEOPLE

You hear a lot of talk about how beautiful the Alaskan country is, and I personally agree that it is spectacularly beautiful. But for me it's the people; there are just a lot of nice people in the village I teach in. The people will welcome you into every house if you show interest in their ways, and if you try to adapt yourself to them. People will gladly help you if you ask for it and are willing to learn from them. You can get in with the people if you show some interest in their culture, if you can show them that their culture is important to you. They share with each other and they will share with you if you'll let them. I learned the most native words from an old man who did not speak a word of English.

HOW DID YOU DO THIS YEARS AGO?

A native might come over to visit you at your house and sit there without saying a word for two hours. At first it was pretty unnerving, but if you accept them into your life you get used to this, there are things that they will talk about. I'm really interested in the old ways of doing things, and many of the villagers really open up when I ask, "How did you do this years ago?"

I go to their native dances and try to learn the words to the songs, sometimes I've tried to dance with them. They know I'm interested in their ways, and they've welcomed me. I have tape recorded some of the songs at dances. They really like to listen to those tapes.

IT WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE GET THERE

The successful teacher in the bush learns to take things as they come, just as the natives do. The native's philosophy is, "It will happen when we get there." Clock time does not have the same meaning in the bush as it does elsewhere. Weather has a lot to do with their lifestyle and philosophy. You do things when the weather is right for it, and it doesn't matter whether you're white or native. You can't plan out a tight schedule, so you learn to ride with the tide, and things get done in their own good time. The natives extend this philosophy to the school, too, of course, and this can be real frustrating to new teachers. But in classrooms some of the best things have just happened spontaneously. Things just pop out that could never be fit into a tight lesson plan. And when things are going wrong you can just wait for a good day to come along. "It will happen when we get there" — if you can't adopt this philosophy you probably won't last long in the bush. And you know, you don't see many natives with ulcers.

NAA — DON'T THINK YOU'RE SOMEBODY

One problem is that the native kids' self-outlook is not high - they see themselves as making a lot of mistakes. One thing a good teacher should do is let the natives see you make some mistakes - this usually isn't too hard when you're new to the village. One of the things the kids enjoy the most is when I have trouble on my motorcycle. They think this is the greatest - to see the teacher laying in the dirt.

One thing new teachers sometimes do is take the attitude that there is only one way to do something, and that's the teacher's

way. I don't see it that way - there are a lot of different ways to make mistakes, there are a lot of different ways to get the job done right. The natives will say, "Naa - don't think you're somebody." If you must, create a situation where you can join the kids in laughing at yourself. It's the same in any society, if you try to smoke screen your way through, you will be found out.

COMMENTS ON ACCEPTANCE

The first and most important thing for a teacher in a bush village is to be accepted by the people, and I don't just mean the students, but the parents as well. If you aren't accepted by the parents, you won't be accepted by the students. My first year of teaching, it was very hard for me to feel that I had been accepted, and I almost did not come back for the second year. But the second year something happened, it was beautiful. I would recommend to new teachers that they try to get to know the kids and the community in a relaxed way, and let them try to get to know you. If you allow yourself to be an outsider, you will be one. At first concentrate on building trust and honest communication. The second important thing is to try not to project your own background onto local people - don't expect them to be just like you.

The first couple of weeks I was in the village the whole class went berry picking together. I think this was a good way to start. It helped them to feel comfortable with me - maybe because they were so much better at berry picking than I was.

As a new teacher I feel the need of language instruction in the native language. My aide is helping me learn Yupik, and we are using the bilingual tape cassettes and other stuff developed for kids to help me learn the native language.

Obtaining acceptance requires a great deal - it can take many years. (I'm married to a native from the area I teach in, and that became part of the acceptance I guess.)

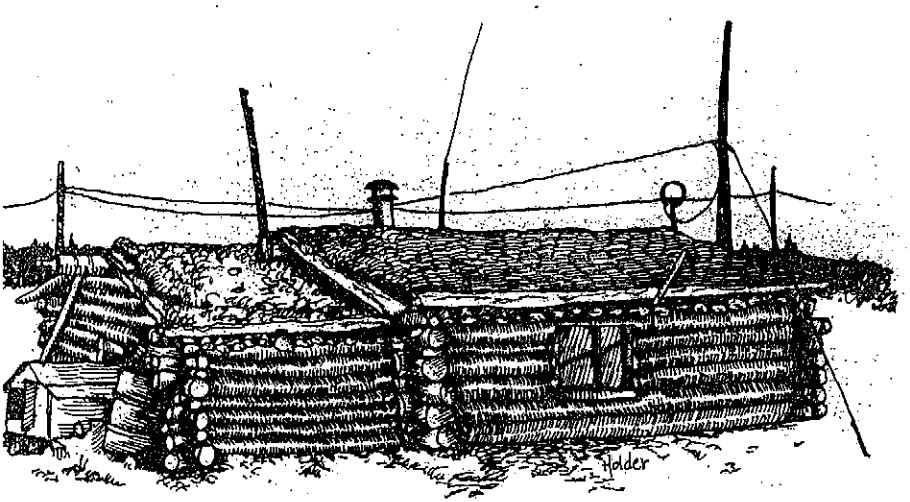
I've been invited out by the natives to go hunting, which is a compliment in itself. But to have this happen the natives have to see you as someone who can live like they do. As they say, "When in Rome . . . "

Community acceptance is critical, and it has to be earned. I make myself available to the villagers; for example, if one needs to be flown out in an emergency they know they can count on me.

Right now I live in a log cabin at the far end of the village from the school . . . I think it would be a mistake for me to live in the housing provided by the school, in fact I know it would be a mistake.

YOU HAVE TO BE YOUR OWN PERSON

About this acceptance issue - I'm a little bit different. I'm a loner; I always have been. I try to be fair and treat all people the same. But the fact is that I don't like to take steam baths; the last steam bath I took was in Vietnam - that was enough. I don't like to push myself on others and don't like to be pushed. This doesn't mean I don't have any contact with the kids or the village out of school, because I enjoy doing certain things which they also enjoy. I'll work with a kid in my front yard on a snow machine, because I like that. I like to go fishing, and so do they. The point is you have to be your own person.



GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT IS AN IMPORTANT EXAMPLE

If we are interested in bringing about change in a community, it is important to have an example of someone being gainfully employed in the village - someone going to work each day and getting things done. I'm not sure how this fits with gaining their acceptance and respecting their ways. Maybe we are imposing white man's culture on them to have an example of someone who can get things done living in the village, but I think this kind of example is important. It serves as an unspoken model for them, it shows it can be done.

WHY DO I NEED A REASON TO BE LATE?

At first I was uptight about the kids getting to school on time. One day I asked this kid why he was late; I wanted to know what reason he had for not being on time. The kid's response bowled me over - he said, "Why do I need a reason for being late?" And it was true, it had never occured to him that there might be a reason to be on time, either. It occurred to me then that maybe we are asking the wrong questions. I thought to myself, how could I motivate that kid to be on time? I offered to give the kid $5.00 if he could be on time for every day in the next week. He did it, and that was a good feeling to spend $5.00 that way.

THEY THINK THE WHITE TEACHER SHOULD DO IT

Natives have a different way of disciplining their kids than we have. The parents do not interfere that much with what a kid wants to do. Sometimes the village has bingo games that start about seven o'clock at night and last to maybe six in the morning, and if the elementary age kids want to stay up — the parents have no objections. The next day the kids are exhausted at school, or absent, and nothing gets done. The parents will agree with the teacher this is a problem, but they don't see it as their problem. That's the teacher's problem.

THEY LEARNED ABOUT DISCIPLINE FROM THE KIDS

I learned something about discipline from the kids. There were two kids who just hated each other, they were bitter enemies. Every day they got in some kind of scrap with bloody noses, the whole thing. I didn't seem to be able to influence the situation so one day I asked the other kids what we should do about the fighting. I let the kids talk about what could be done and let them decide. We had a token economy thing going in the class where certain activities had play money values attached to them. You earned token money for getting work done and to enjoy certain privileges you spend money. Anyway, the kids decided that fighting would get a one hundred dollar fine and you would have to stay in during recess and write "I will not fight" 500 times. This of course was way more punishing than anything a teacher would come up with. The kids also decided that before a fine could be levied, there would be a trial by jury. The 5 kids for the jury were selected by drawing from a hat, and the student body president was designated the judge by the kids. The next time a fight erupted all this machinery went into action, but the jury found it real hard to make a decision. Once all the responsibility for discipline was put on the kids' shoulders, they weren't so quick to complain about how arbitrary or unjust the teacher's discipline had been. They could see for themselves what we as teachers had to deal with. The discipline problems with those two kids who spent so much time fighting stopped, once the kids were responsible for enforcing the rules. The students helped me as a teacher in this case.

It is also important to apologize if you act unfairly toward a student and later recognize that. It is always best to apologize, even though some people say the teacher should never admit he or she is wrong. It almost always has worked out in my best interest to have publicly admitted a mistake I made and offer an apology. The kid's don't mind discipline when it's fair and consistent.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE GOOD THINGS AND IGNORE THE BAD

Positive reinforcement is real important to native kids. They really respond to praise. And you have to remind yourself as a teacher to keep praising them for things they are doing right. You have to pay attention to the good things and ignore the bad. If you hand out some negative reinforcement the kids are really hurt. They will turn you off and simply ignore you. If you give a kid an 'F', he or she will say, "I don't care." But you know they do care, they are just tuning you out and tuning school out. It's not worth it. As a teacher you need to learn to look for the good things the kids are doing — and that's different than the way I was treated in school.

TEACHERS AS TOURISTS: INUNDATION BY INNOVATORS

Teachers and administrators are often referred to as "tourists" by the people. How many school staff are really integrated into the village communities? In our district I would say less than 1 in 10. The rest are tourists who are there for 1 to 2 years. When you get a new person into the school, it's a whole new ball game and the kids know this. They come to expect it. The kids know when they can get away with a good snow job.

I can see that high turnover is a problem, but maybe there are some good things about it. The new teacher might bring new techniques into the classroom and the kids can be exposed to different ways to learn.

I disagree — the kids have been inundated with innovators.

In our village I can see definite signs that the quality of education is improving. For example, the 7th graders are now performing on a par with the 10th graders. I think one main reason it is getting better is that we have not had so much turnover in the last few

years. It takes several years for an individual to get it together up here, and it takes time to coordinate among the several teachers in the village, so that each can build on what the others are doing. If you have high turnover each year you can't get a system going.

THE CHALLENGE: COMBINE TRADITIONAL WAYS WITH MODERN WAYS

The most important thing is to know the students — to know what their needs are. For example, I learned how to make a traditional fish hook of moose bone from an old man in the village. Just before the ice fishing season when this type of hook was used, I taught the kids how to make these hooks, then we all went fishing together with the equipment we had made in school. This is the kind of lesson I think meets the students' needs. They were able to use what they had learned in school immediately for a practical end which had respect in the village.

The kids are not learning much traditional technology from their parents, but the parents seem to appreciate it when the teacher shows interest in the native ways of doing things and tries to make these things part of the school experience.

I don't know why the kids are not learning traditional ways from their parents. One thing probably is that sometimes you learn better from someone who is not your own parent. My father was a welder, and I never was interested in learning how to do what he did. Now that my home is in a remote Alaskan village I could really use the welding skills my father has. So maybe in some ways the natives are not so different than the rest of us.

Another thing is that the villages are right now in the midst of immense changes. The world the kids are growing up in is very different than the one their parents knew. In my village, most of the parents of the kids now in high school never went to school a day in their lives, and some of the kids look down on their parents

for that. A major challenge for a village teacher is to help the kids realize that the way of life of their parents is not wrong — it deserves respect. The native parents are living in a manner that has permitted their ancestors to live successfully in this land for thousands of years. This is something no white person can claim. If those new teachers would go out on hunting trips with parents, they would learn to respect what it means to live successfully with traditional subsistence knowledge. School would be a whole new ball game. But it is also important for the teacher to recognize that the world of the native is changing, and the kids need preparation for the new world which they cannot get from their parents. I guess that's the biggest challenge: making school a place where kids can learn how to cope with the new changes coming into village life. You've got to somehow combine respect for traditional ways with the capacity to deal effectively with modern ways.

JUST SITTING THERE WATCHING

I saw something in the village that has implications for how we conduct schools. A native teacher-aide was building a boat, and the kids were just sitting there watching. We would say in our culture that it should not be done that way, the kids should have the chance to work on the boat themselves if we can expect them to learn anything from it. But I've noticed that the natives do that a lot, the adults are doing something and the kids just watch. Maybe it is a different way of learning.

IF YOU RUN A GOOD CLASS THESE KIDS WILL LEARN

I don't feel there is a great deal of difference between a good teacher here and anywhere else. Maybe the kids are different in some ways, but you go along with that and do the best you can. You work with them where they are. If you run a good class these kids will learn, just like anyone else. Everyone up here talks about the hardships in bush teaching, and there are a lot of things that detract from classroom activities — but in my experi-

ence, these kids are as bright as new pennies. If they sometimes don't seem to be, maybe it's because they have been damaged by the school.

BEARS AND ALLIGATORS

I was teaching one day and it was obvious that the kids were gone — I had lost them. So I just slipped in this sentence: "I was scuba diving one day and I saw an alligator." All of a sudden the kids came back. They started to ask about the scuba gear, about the alligators, about where I lived in such a place that had alligators, and I was able to lead the discussion back to where they lived in such a place that had bears. Bears and alligators, it was a great discussion.

SADDLIN' SNOW-MACHINES

That reminds me of another adventure I had teaching history. I was trying to get the kids to consider the Westward Movement, and they were not having any part of it. Well I have a saddle I brought up to Alaska with me — I grew up around ranches and have had horses and cattle on my ranch. We got to talking about how that saddle was used, and I brought some slides I took, showing roping, branding, and so forth. Before long the kids were figuring out ways to put that saddle on a snow machine and lasso some unsuspecting village doggie. They really got into the Westward Movement, since I was able to tie it to something from my own personal experience.

PICTURES ARE FOR TEACHERS

When we work with vocational education courses, like small engine repair, we have found it is best to start the class with the actual engine. Don't start with the tools, don't start with a picture of an engine. The pictures in the manuals are for the teacher to use to figure out things they don't know about engines. It is deadly to start the kids with the pictures and the words rather than the real thing. Let them start right out with hands-on experience.

DON'T THINK THE FOUR WALLS ARE THE WORLD

I think teachers should try to organize as much of the instruction as possible around outdoor activities. The kids live outdoors except when they are confined indoors by the school. I think one of the keys to successful teaching in the villages is to utilize outdoor resources. Just go out with the kids to collect arctic cotton to stuff dolls — go out to pick berries to make jam. Don't think the four walls are the world.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW — YOU'RE NOT AN ESKIMO!

When I first came to the village I wanted to try to encourage the native crafts. They said, "What do you know — You're not an Eskimo." But I went to the women in the village and learned to make mukluks, skin purses, and so forth. By the end of the year I didn't hear those comments anymore — I guess I had gained some credibility with them.

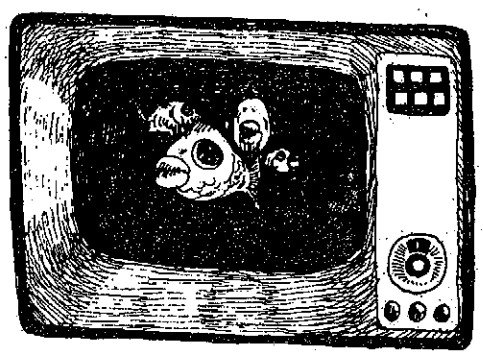
The community is more involved in extra-curricular activities than in the daily instructional routine. It is through the extra-curricular activities like crafts that the school is being integrated into the community.

ANY CANNED OPERATION IS PURE ENTERTAINMENT

I've found that TV or any other canned operation is pure entertainment to the native kids. They relax and laugh and enjoy themselves, and afterwards if you ask questions about the show, it's obvious that it has gone right by them. This holds true for the vast majority of the audio-visual stuff in our classrooms, and for most of the other so-called "educational" materials, for that matter.

Some films and A V materials are pretty good for instructional purposes, but I show the educational TV at night for the village simply for entertainment. But one reason the kids seem to have trouble learning from the TV and films is the language barrier, which, when you think about it, is a strange thing to say about materials that are supposed to emphasize visual learning. I guess the point is that most films and TV shows rely a lot on sophisticated verbal communication.

Sometimes films really help to turn kids on. Once in a history class I showed a couple of good films about Columbus which had some glorious pictures of sailing ships. For the next several days almost all of the kids were drawing sailing ships day and night. Some of them are still drawing sailing ships two years later. Something clicked!



THEY LEARN BY WATCHING EACH OTHER

I've noticed that when natives want to explain things to one another they learn by watching each other. I travel and hunt a lot with some of my in-laws, who are natives, and on a trip they might not exchange 10 words with each other. If I am riding along with them I'll be doing most of the talking, asking about the names of creeks, about the plants — trying to get to know the countryside the way they know it. They will answer my questions, I guess, because they have adapted to my way of learning. But they have become used to learning without doing a lot of talking. They bring this into the classroom too. Sometimes they will just sit and watch you without saying a word.

AS A TEACHER I'VE CHANGED A LOT

I tried to have the students lead a current events session. The white kids seemed to do fine in leading discussion in front of the other kids, but the native kids just wouldn't do it. I had to consider this an idea that failed. My training as an undergraduate included a lot of exposure to the ideas of open education, and of course as a student who had endured so much of the traditional approach in my education, I was all hopped up over the idea of leading my own classes in the open approach. Sometimes I am shocked at how much I've changed since coming to Alaska, because after the first year I've gone to an orientation that emphasized the basics much more. I still would not say I'm a traditional teacher in my philosophy, but I'm closer to the "back to basics" movement than I would have anticipated, and I insist on firm discipline.

HOW FISH CAMPS INFLUENCE WELDING INSTRUCTION

I've noticed as I have been living with and working with village people that they do one thing very intensely for a while, then shift to doing something else very intensely. This is common in the region I'm from anyway. For example, right now the people are at fish camp. Day and night they are working, catching fish, cleaning fish, and drying fish. It absorbs all their attention and energy right now. In a month or two they will shift to hunting, and pursue it with the same kind of concentrated intensity. In the spring they get caught up in a huge flurry of activity around sled building and dog racing. From these observations I have been asking myself — is there anything I can do in the school setting that reflects the fact that they organize their own activities into sharply defined outbursts of concentrated activity? One reason this seems like an important issue to me is that the kids' attendance in school is affected by these kinds of village activities. Students who go with their families to fish camp may be out of school for several weeks. And we have said that we don't believe we should change their native ways, that we as outsiders should respect what we find in the villages. So what do we do? One thing I have done is organize the basic skills part of the curriculum on an individual basis, so when students are out of the class for a period of time, they don't miss out on what has happened while they were gone. The students can pick up where they left off in reading, math, etc., because I'm working with individualized, self-pacing materials in those areas.

But what I've been really working on lately is how to apply that observation about how the natives organize their activities to how I organize school activities. So last year I tried to apply these ideas with a welding class that I organized for small schools in our region. I gathered together some welding equipment I owned and some material provided by the district and set up an intense one week session on welding.

All day everyday for a week we lived and breathed welding, just like all day everyday they live and breathe fishing when they are in fish camp. I worked out the academic credit issue by reasoning that three one week sessions would equal the number of course hours of a regular class taught one hour a day for a semester. These three sessions should not be held back to back in one three week burst, because I noted that by the end of one week they were slowing down, that after being away from it for awhile they were anxious for the next week-long session to begin. I think you can let the interest of the kids in the particular subject dictate how long you run the course. And I was sure I didn't want to hold the course in town where the regional high school had been located, because most of the bush kids historically had done very poorly when they had come into town for education. That was part of the reason for having the small high school program in the first place. So we brought several kids together in one welding course, but we brought them to an outlying village like the ones they live in. I loaded all the machinery and materials for the class and flew into that village. The kids helped me unload and set up so their involvement started with hands on experience doing real work. It was not just a classroom exercise set up for them by someone else.

WE JUST WANT TO LIVE IN THE BUSH — WE DON'T NEED SCHOOL LEARNING

I was asked by the special education kids, "Why do you try to teach us? We just want to live in the bush; We don't need school learning to do this." My answer is that there are things you do right now living in the bush that school learning can help you with — knowing how to read can help you order supplies you need from catalogs, for example. The point here is that I try to accept the way the village is — I don't want to try to change that. But a teacher can help the people who live in the village deal more effectively with the realities of life in the village, especially now since so much change is coming into their lives whether they want it or not. I still don't believe that the teacher's role should be to convince them that they need school learning in order to change what they are doing now — maybe this is too subtle a distinction. It's hard to say it — but I think it's important.

HOW DO YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF?

One of the challenges of teaching is trying to look at yourself as a teacher and a person, and look at the community, the classroom, and the individual students, for the purpose of trying to learn from the experiences you go through. How do you learn about yourself? How do you learn about other people who live around you? How do you learn about the kids and the world which they see? What I have done is take 15 minutes or so at the end of each teaching day to look over the day, by myself, and to try to identify any experiences in that day from which I can learn. I ask myself, "What can I do differently tomorrow based on what happened today?" I find this activity helps me unwind from the rush and intensity of the teaching day. One of the things that I like about teaching is that I learn so much myself. I've learned a lot so far and I expect to keep learning, because I can see that I still have a lot to learn.

Participants, by: Tom Tingle, Southwest Region School District

". . . a bit on background . . ."

During the 1976-77 school year the Southwest Region Schools developed a secondary curriculum guide for grades 9-12. The objectives in this guide was the foundation from which the curriculum materials were developed.

In order to help the school district implement the vocational education programs within the schools, a vocational education materials workshop was organized. The primary purpose of this workshop, from the standpoint of the school district, was to produce vocational units of study applicable to the village schools.

Since this was a pilot project (the first of its kind in Alaska) the investigation of some other questions was added to the list of workshop goals which included:

- Can bush teachers, utilizing a process of localizing instructional materials, adapt materials produced in other areas for use in small rural, isolated schools in Alaska?
- Can this process be applied in the other curriculum areas?
- How much time is needed to adequately complete a curriculum designed workshop of this nature?
- How many educators should be involved?
- What are the best sized working groups for this type of project?
- Should both experienced "bush" teachers and new recruits be used as components in the workshop?
- How do you evaluate the materials and the product implementation process used in the workshop?

". . . meanwhile, down in the trenches . . ."

Fifteen educators actively participated in the workshop. Others added bits and pieces from the Fairbanks area as they became available.

Consultants, State Department of Education:

Gladys Tinney, Juneau, Alaska
Verdell Jackson, Juneau, Alaska

Consultant, Cross Culture Education:

David Beers, Portland, Oregon

Educators, Lake and Peninsula School District:

Jeff Selvey, Kokhanok
Elliot Drager, Chignik Lake

Educator, Yukon Flats School District:

Roy Smyth, Fort Yukon

Educators, Southwest Region School District:

Kathy Cooper, New Stuyahok
Jim Hunter, Manokotak
Kim Hubert, Togiak
Mark Leamy, Levelock
Chip Martin, Togiak
Greg Paxton, Manokotak
Ron Ronkin, New Stuyahok
Linda Sexton, Manokotak
Roger Skogen, Koliganek
Tom Tingle, Dillingham

The group was divided into the following curriculum area groups:

Home Economics: Kathy Cooper, Linda Sexton

Agriculture: Jim Hunter, Elliot Drager

Clerical: Kim Hubert, Greg Paxton

Construction: Chip Martin, Jeff Selvey, Roger Skogen

Small Engines: Mark Leamy, Ron Ronkin, Roy Smyth