



An investigation of factors related to teacher attrition in Alaska native village schools, as perceived by school administrators
by Lisa Jean Stroh

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in School Administration
Montana State University
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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors inherent in Alaska bush schools that related most highly to teacher turnover. These factors were examined in relation to each school district's geographic location within Alaska to determine if specific identified factors were related to school district location.

The Superintendent, or designee, in each of the 46 Alaska bush school districts completed a survey, indicating on a Likert-type scale, their perceptions of each item's level of relationship to teacher turnover. Once the survey's reliability was established, a Principal Components Analysis was applied to the responses of the 23 survey items. Examination of the unrotated factor structure indicated that a single factor was measured by the survey. The single factor was a combination of four sub-factors—all present to varying degrees. The sub-factors included professional, personal/family, geographic, and socio-cultural issues.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted on the categorized survey items to determine if a relationship existed between the five Alaska regions and reasons for teacher turnover in Alaska bush schools. The findings indicated that, statistically, there was no significant difference between specific identified factors and location of the school district within Alaska.

The means for each of the 23 survey items were calculated within their respective sub-factors to examine tendencies and trends among the sub-factors. While each region had a unique ranking of the 23 items, the means of the items were so similar that they did not reflect significant differences.

This study's respondents made several comments following the survey's open-ended question. Some comments centered upon the multi-dimensional role of a bush teacher and the sheer volume of stressful situations those teachers tended to confront on a regular basis. This study's respondents also perceived that in many situations family issues tended to be one of the main reasons why teachers left their bush jobs.

Based upon these findings, it is concluded that: (a) there is no single reason that is individually associated with Alaska bush teachers leaving their current teaching positions; (b) the reasons why teachers leave their current teaching positions are due to a combination of sub-factors which include professional, personal/family, geographic, and socio-cultural issues; and (c) the reasons why teachers leave their teaching positions does not appear to be related to their respective school district's geographic location within Alaska.

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AS PERCEIVED BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

By

Lisa Jean Stroh

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

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in

School Administration

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY - BOZEMAN
Bozeman, Montana

March 1999

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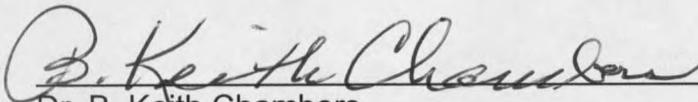
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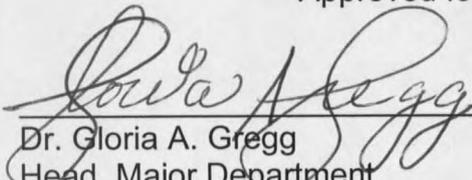
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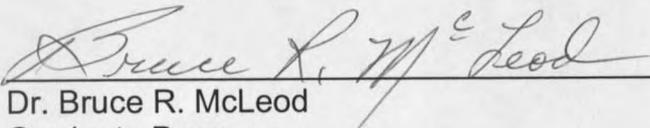
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Date March 31, 1999

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my very dear husband of fifteen years, Robin, and our wonderful sons, Robert (age 7) and Benjamin (age 5). They have wholeheartedly supported this endeavor and have helped me to maintain my focus on this project. For the boys, they only knew that Mom was going to the "duck pond" (on the MSU campus) to study. I love them so much and look forward to having more quality time to spend with them. This accomplishment has only been obtained through their love, understanding, and encouragement. May they truly realize they were the *wind beneath my wings*.

I would like to thank my mom and dad, Helen and Gordon Waller, who taught me to have high aspirations and to never cease from striving to reach my personal goals. They believed in me, provided me with a secure upbringing, which fostered pride in doing what was right. The strong sense of family and the rural way of life will always be a part of my heart. May they always know how very much I appreciate and love them!

I would also like to thank Mrs. Bernice Bren, my fifth and sixth grade school teacher. She not only challenged her students to high academic standards, but she cared deeply about each child and modeled the importance of becoming good, moral citizens of society. Her legacy will live for generations to come.

Two others, who are now in heaven, have made a significant impact on my life. My grandpa, Floyd Quick, taught me to always keep a sense of humor. Casey Yarger taught me to never give up—for we are placed on this earth for a reason—and that quality of life is not measured in number of years, but in happy memories made with our family and friends.

This accomplishment has been a combined effort of many people. I appreciate my many friends and family, who have generously given of their time and talents, so that I was able to concentrate on my studies. This is truly a celebration for us all!

Finally, I would like to thank the Lord for giving me the wisdom, guidance, and perseverance to attain this truly personal goal. May every day of my life reflect His work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the chair of my committee, Dr. Keith Chambers, the readers Dr. Richard Howard and Dr. Joanne Erickson, along with the other members of my committee, Dr. Jana Noel, Dr. Boyd Dressler, and Dr. Richard Stout, for their help in this project. Special thanks to Mrs. Linda Winters, my devoted editor, whose patience and expertise is very much appreciated. Also, a big thanks goes to Mr. Dean Evans for assisting with the visual graphs.

I wish to thank the 46 respondents of this study, who graciously gave of their time to share their experiences, insights, and perceptions with me. Without them, this study would not have been possible. My sincere hope is that, through this coordinated effort, the students of bush Alaska will benefit richly from this research.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors inherent in Alaska bush schools that related most highly to teacher turnover. These factors were examined in relation to each school district's geographic location within Alaska to determine if specific identified factors were related to school district location.

The Superintendent, or designee, in each of the 46 Alaska bush school districts completed a survey, indicating on a Likert-type scale, their perceptions of each item's level of relationship to teacher turnover. Once the survey's reliability was established, a Principal Components Analysis was applied to the responses of the 23 survey items. Examination of the unrotated factor structure indicated that a single factor was measured by the survey. The single factor was a combination of four sub-factors—all present to varying degrees. The sub-factors included professional, personal/family, geographic, and socio-cultural issues.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted on the categorized survey items to determine if a relationship existed between the five Alaska regions and reasons for teacher turnover in Alaska bush schools. The findings indicated that, statistically, there was no significant difference between specific identified factors and location of the school district within Alaska.

The means for each of the 23 survey items were calculated within their respective sub-factors to exam tendencies and trends among the sub-factors. While each region had a unique ranking of the 23 items, the means of the items were so similar that they did not reflect significant differences.

This study's respondents made several comments following the survey's open-ended question. Some comments centered upon the multi-dimensional role of a bush teacher and the sheer volume of stressful situations those teachers tended to confront on a regular basis. This study's respondents also perceived that in many situations family issues tended to be one of the main reasons why teachers left their bush jobs.

Based upon these findings, it is concluded that: (a) there is no single reason that is individually associated with Alaska bush teachers leaving their current teaching positions; (b) the reasons why teachers leave their current teaching positions are due to a combination of sub-factors which include professional, personal/family, geographic, and socio-cultural issues; and (c) the reasons why teachers leave their teaching positions does not appear to be related to their respective school district's geographic location within Alaska.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1997) is to ensure that "all communities have teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to teach so that all children can learn, and all school systems are organized to support caring, competent, and qualified teachers in this work"

(p. 16). This commission believes in three simple principles, as follows:

1. What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn.
2. Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools.
3. School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well. (p. 6)

The Commission believes these three principles are essential in order for schools to provide quality education to students so that they will possess the needed skills to successfully live in the twenty-first century. As stated above, the teacher is a critical factor in the success of students. Good teachers must be trained properly and recruited. They must encounter working conditions that foster retention.

However, Barnhardt, Director of Cross-cultural Studies at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, reports in his research that the turnover of teachers in Alaska's bush schools is disproportionately high as compared to urban schools within Alaska, as well as nationally. He goes on to explain that throughout the United

States, including Alaska, the teacher turnover rate is 13.7% while the teacher turnover rate in Alaska's bush schools averages 30-50% each year (Barnhardt, 1999). Dr. John Antonnen, longtime Alaskan educator and recent retiree from the position as Director of Rural Education Preparation Program (REPP), also reports the 30-50% teacher turnover rates in Alaska's villages. Dr. Ray Barnhardt, University of Alaska Fairbanks professor, points out:

Of the 2,368 teachers in Alaska's bush schools during the 1998-99 school term, nearly one-third are new to their positions. That compares with about 12% in the urban schools [in Alaska] (including 104 brand new positions in Anchorage). While rural schools employ only one-third of all the teachers in the state, they typically hire over two-thirds of the new teachers each year, most which originate from outside the state. This means that at the present time, the potential for improving the quality of education in the rural schools has an upper limit that is established by the average three-year cycle of staff turnover. (1999, p. 2)

The focus of this study was to identify the factors most highly related to teacher turnover in Alaska's bush schools. Subsequently, through this research, recommendations were formulated which will provide universities and colleges insights about the preparation of prospective teachers for the bush, and will assist bush school districts in recruiting efforts, as well as in retaining exceptional teachers. "Through these efforts, [Alaska's] students may come closer to gaining their educational birthright—access to competent, caring, qualified teachers in schools organized for success" (p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the high teacher turnover rate in Alaska's bush schools. In order for students within Alaska to fully benefit academically, these students must be taught by qualified, caring teachers who provide a cohesive education program (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Unfortunately, a cohesive program can not be achieved when Alaska's bush schools experience a teacher turnover rate up to four times that of the national average (Barnhardt, 1999).

Purpose and Significance of This Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors inherent in Alaska bush schools that related most highly to teacher turnover. Secondly, these factors were examined in relation to each school district's geographic location within Alaska in order to determine if specific identified factors were related to school district location.

Although some teacher turnover in public schools may be unavoidable, normal, and even beneficial, high rates of turnover are of concern. They may indicate underlying problems, and because in and of themselves, they can disrupt the effectiveness of the school program. (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Given national and state educational reforms which issue high school diplomas contingent upon the exhibition of specific student standards (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996), Matthes (1987)

believes that a stable core of teachers is absolutely essential to achieving effective schools, which provide students with opportunities to achieve these national and state standards. He writes, "Teacher stability within the job is critical!" (1987, p. 27). Sher (1981) believes research must look closely at teachers. He states, "After all, neglecting teachers in an examination of rural education is like discussing rural health care and overlooking doctors or discussing agriculture and ignoring farmers" (p. 261).

In order for students to fully reach their academic potential, teachers must provide continuity with the curriculum. That can only be achieved through a stable workforce (Matthes, 1987). However, this notion seems rather unlikely, given Alaska's 30-50% rate of teacher turnover in bush school districts (Antonnen, 1998).

Research Questions

Specifically addressing the problem of teacher turnover in Alaska bush schools, this study was designed to answer two questions:

1. Which factors inherent in Alaska's bush schools are related most highly to teacher turnover?
2. Is there a difference in the rankings of importance in the identified factors across the five regions of Alaska (i.e., Northwest, Interior, Southwest, Southcentral, and Southeast regions)?

Definition of Terms

Definitions used in this study were formulated after a thorough review of related literature and from the expert opinion of Ms. Laura Walters, Research and Data Analyst for the State of Alaska, Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Municipal and Regional Assistance Division (Walters, 1998).

In order to address the research questions above and to arrive at valid answers, it is of utmost importance for this study's definitions to accurately and appropriately represent the concepts upon which this study is based. For example, diverse cultures and underlying infrastructures within communities help to define its degree of ruralness. Likewise, no *one* of the factors such as community population, road accessibility, economy, ethnicity, or school size can serve as the single factor when defining an area (Walters, 1998).

Teacher Turnover: Caused when a teacher either does not choose to return to employment in the same school the following year, or the school district chooses to non-retain the teacher for the next school year; the teacher may teach in another school district the subsequent year, or the teacher may leave the teaching profession entirely; synonymous with the term *teacher attrition*.

Regions of Alaska: For the purpose of this study, Alaska school districts were divided into five distinct geographical regions per the Alaska Teacher Placement Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks (Appendices A, B, and C). These regions are also noted in the Alaska Department of

Tourism's Web page and various brochures that are widely distributed.

The five distinct geographical regions are:

- Region 1: Northwest
- Region 2: Interior
- Region 3: Southwest
- Region 4: Southcentral
- Region 5: Southeast

Factors: Elements inherent in an Alaska Native village and school, which may be related to teacher attrition; Sher (1983) describes these general factors as *conditions, characteristics, and compensation*.

Sub-Factors: Specific categories, when in combination with each other, define the *factors* as stated above.

Professional Sub-Factors: lack of adequate lesson planning, poor student management skills, lack of collegial spirit when dealing with peers and others, desire to seek professional growth opportunities elsewhere;

Personal/Family Sub-Factors: spouse not content living in the village setting, a feeling that one's own children are not living in a safe/healthy environment; and

Geographic Sub-Factors: isolation from own culture and friends, goods and services not readily available, cold/harsh climate, inadequate housing situations;

Socio-Cultural Sub-Factors: lack of cultural sensitivity, lack of ability to deal with community "politics," religious affiliation not congruent

with community standards, and lack of ability to deal with disheartening social issues (e.g., child abuse, suicide).

Alaska Native: A person whose ethnicity includes Eskimo, Aleut, or Native Alaska

Indian. The Native Alaska Indian group is comprised of two sub-groups, the Southeast Indians (comprised of the Tlingits, Haidas, and Tshimshian Indians) and the Athabascan Indians who reside in central Alaska.

Although Alaska has three very distinct Native cultures, sometimes they are all simply referred to as *Indians*. This is primarily done when grouping Alaska Natives with the American Indians who live in the contiguous United States. Due to the small student population nationwide, these students are rarely represented in sufficient numbers in national education surveys to permit reliable and valid generalizations concerning their characteristics. However, this group was included in the 1990-91 and 1993-94 national studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. A summary of findings is included (Appendix D).

Indian: Refers to people of an indigenous culture. For purposes of this study, this term will refer to all Native Alaskans (i.e., Eskimos, Aleuts, and Native Alaska Indians).

Alaska Native Village: A small Alaska community of usually less than 1,000 people, generally predominantly Alaska Native residents; they are a tribe because they share common ancestors, a common language, and live together in a group; this community is usually not accessible by road.

For purposes of this study, the term *Alaska Native village* is synonymous with the following terms: *bush*, *Alaska bush*, *bush village*, *bush community*, *village*, *Alaska village*, and *school communities in Alaska*.

Public School: A school within Alaska that is funded by federal, state, or local monies.

Alaska Bush School: A remote school in Alaska usually having a student enrollment of less than 100 students; most, but not all, bush schools are primarily comprised of students of Alaska Native origin; these school districts are the focus of this study (Appendix E).

Alaska Native School District: A public school district located in Alaska whose combined student population is predominantly composed of Alaska Native students with most of its schools located in very remote areas of the state usually not accessible via the road system. These school districts are the focus of this study, with their respective superintendents participating as the study's population. Two school districts, Kenai Peninsula Borough Schools and Kodiak Island Borough Schools, have some schools which fit the definition of Alaska Native villages and some schools which fit the definition of an Alaska Urban School as defined below. These two school districts were included in the study. However, the participants in these two school districts were directed to respond to the survey's questions as they

pertained to only the Native village schools within their respective school districts.

Native Alaska Teacher: A certified teacher who holds a Type A, Provisional, or Temporary Alaska teaching certificate *and* teaches in a public school in Alaska *and* ethnically identifies with one of the Alaska Native ethnic groups (i.e., Indian, Eskimo, Aleut) as described above.

Non-Native Alaska Teacher: A certified teacher who holds a Type A, Provisional, or Temporary Alaska teaching certificate *and* teaches in a public school in Alaska *and* claims a type of ethnicity different from the Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut groups. The non-Native teacher is usually thought of as being Caucasian. However, other ethnic groups are included in this category.

Bush Teacher: A certified teacher who holds a Type A, Provisional or Temporary Alaska teaching certificate *and* also teaches in a remote area in Alaska. A person may be of any ethnical origin for purposes of this study.

School Administrator of Alaska Bush Schools: An employee of an Alaska school district, who currently holds a Type B Alaska Administrative certificate, *and* is either currently working as a school administrator, *or* has been responsible for the overseeing of an Alaska bush school. This person may include the school district superintendent or his/her designee.

Indigenous: Native; living naturally in a particular region or environment. This term refers to the Alaska Natives absent from the Western world influence.

Culture: Customs and traditions inherent in a group of people.

Alaska Urban School: A school in Alaska, commonly on the road system, located in a community of usually over 1,000 residents in a community where goods and services are readily available. However, exceptions include the towns of Juneau and Kodiak proper—both islands, but each with a flourishing economic base with goods and services readily available.

Alaska Urban School District: A public school district in Alaska comprised of only urban schools (see definition above); for purposes of this study, urban school districts were excluded from the sample (Appendix F).

State-owned School Districts: School districts which have a specific purpose as set forth by the state; for purposes of this study, they were excluded (Appendix F).

Lower 48: Slang word usually meaning the *contiguous forty-eight states in the United States*.

Outside: Slang word for *outside the State of Alaska*, usually refers to the *contiguous forty-eight states in the United States*; however, it may also mean the state of Hawaii.

Road System: The conventional roads in Alaska.

Remote: Not on the Alaska road system; inaccessible by conventional means (e.g., car, and pickup).

Summary

Teachers are critical to the process of providing quality education for students. The retention of teachers plays a major role in developing cohesive educational programs in which students can thrive academically (McIntosh, 1989). The purpose of this study was to identify factors inherent in Alaska bush schools that related most highly to teacher turnover. Secondly, this study sought to determine if a significant difference exists between school district geographic location and the specific identified factors.

In the next chapter, a comprehensive review of literature will provide the reader with insights regarding teacher attrition in general, as well as teacher recruitment and retention. Conditions, characteristics, and employee compensation of Alaska's bush schools and communities will be examined. Finally, a comparison will be made between Alaska bush schools and rural schools of the Lower 48.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In Chapter 2, employee attrition in general, is discussed, as well as national research concerning teacher turnover in public schools. Teacher recruitment and retention in Alaska is analyzed according to Sher's (1983) three factors: *conditions*, *characteristics*, and *compensation*. A comparison will be made between school and social factors in Alaska's schools, as well as those found in schools in the Lower 48. Finally, this chapter will include an overview of several programs that are focused on Alaska bush teaching.

Teacher Attrition: Related Research

Bluedorn (1978) defines teacher attrition as any change in the membership state of an individual. This process may mean that teachers leave their current positions in a school district on their own initiative (e.g., changing school districts, but remaining in the teaching profession; quitting the teaching profession for a job outside the field of education; retiring). Teacher attrition may also include teachers leaving their jobs as a result of actions taken at the school's initiative, such as non-retention or dismissal of teachers. Bluedorn (1978) refers to two types of teacher attrition—voluntary (teacher initiated) or involuntary (school initiated).

Employee attrition in any organization can have a positive or a negative effect upon the organization and/or the specific employee. In terms of the public school system, much emphasis is placed upon the importance of the classroom teacher and his/her role in providing a safe, stable and enriching environment for students (Matthes, 1987). Naturally, the most common time for teacher attrition is between school terms. However, due to extreme conditions in some of Alaska's villages, some teachers may not choose to stay the entire year. Thus, the stability, of the organization suffers (Matthes, 1987).

Cotton and Tuttle (1986) discuss the financial aspects associated with employee attrition. These expenses may include costs associated with recruitment, selection, and training of new employees. Although these initiation costs may be somewhat substantial in terms of time and money, Cotton and Tuttle (1986) point out that one of the positive aspects of attrition in an organization is the subsequent ability of the organization to replace the position with a less experienced, less costly employee. However, the authors also warn that when attrition rates get too high, the effectiveness of the organization suffers.

When examining various attrition models, March and Simon (1958, as cited in Weise, 1990) believe the voluntary choice to leave a position is based upon the individual's perception of the current situation and the desirability and ease of movement. They also contend there is a "critical level of satisfaction-

dissatisfaction that determines whether an individual begins to search for another position or decides to remain in his/her current placement " (p. 53).

As previously stated, job attrition does not necessarily mean the employee resigns from the organization. Jackofsky and Peters (1983) distinguish between inter- and intra-organizational movement. As this relates to the school setting, one might surmise the high teacher turnover rates in small schools are higher than turnover rates in big schools simply due to lack of available intra-organizational movement opportunities.

Herzberg (1968) and Flowers & Hughes (1973) note that there is a difference between *job dissatisfaction* and *lack of job satisfaction*. For example, a teacher may remain in a position he/she enjoys, even though there may be much external dissatisfaction being exerted by the community. However, if job satisfaction is not present, he/she will likely desire to change positions (as cited in Weise, 1990).

McIntosh, in his article, Retention of Teachers in Rural Areas, points out, "Many rural recruiters readily admit that successful recruitment is much easier to accomplish than successful retention." Helge (1984), on the basis of a national survey, asserts that recruiting and retaining qualified staff is the greatest problem facing rural educators [and schools]. Although there is very little research available concerning teacher retention, this seems to be the main problem rural schools are facing today (McIntosh, 1989, p. 19). According to Matthes & Carson (1989), little is known about those factors that attract an individual to a

particular school district. Furthermore, even less is known about the factors that might cause an individual to consider a position in another school district.

Encouraging the best available teachers to come to schools in sparsely populated areas and then making the position attractive for them to remain there long enough to provide a lasting, positive contribution is a long-standing problem. Sher (1983) suggests that attracting and keeping competent individuals to teach the *three Rs* in rural schools is largely a function of the *three Cs: conditions, characteristics, and compensation*.

- *Conditions* include environmental surroundings, including cultural, housing, and recreational facilities.
- *Characteristics* refers to the quality of personnel produced by pre-service programs, and whether they are oriented toward rural teaching through either background or training.
- *Compensation* includes not only a reasonable salary, but also incentives for choosing a rural career and rewards for excellence in teaching.

In this study, Sher's (1983) framework guided the review of literature and analysis of a survey to identify the factors most highly related to teacher turnover and to determine the relationship of these factors to geographic location within the State of Alaska.

Next, an overview of Alaska and its public school system will be examined through Sher's (1983) framework of *conditions, characteristics, and compensation*.

ConditionsAlaska: Its Location and Its Communities

“When Alaska is described to people who have not visited it, the most frequently used word is *unique*. Numerous factors intertwine to make Alaska an exciting, rapidly changing, diverse, and complex place” (Hecht, 1981, p. 186). Alaska is the largest of the United States in area, twice the size of Texas (Alaska Department of Tourism, 1998), and equal to one-fifth the size of the contiguous 48 states (Hecht, 1981) (Appendix G). It also boasts the northernmost (Point Barrow), the easternmost (Simisopchnoi Island in the Aleutians) and the westernmost (Little Diomedede Island) points of the U.S. This is possible because Alaska straddles the international dateline (Alaska Department of Tourism, 1998).

Alaska competes with Wyoming for the smallest population in the nation (People’s Almanac, 1997). With its current population of 606,000 people, Alaska has less than one person per square mile, as compared to 72 people per square mile, which is the national average (Alaska Department of Tourism, 1998). Approximately half of the population lives in Anchorage, Alaska’s largest city, which claims a population of approximately 250,000 people (People’s Almanac, 1997). “The rest of the Alaska citizens reside in or near the 200+ small towns and villages which are scattered throughout this immense state” (Hecht, 1981, p. 186). Hecht (1981) writes,

Alaska's landscape ranges from rugged mountains to flowery tundra to rain forests. The climate varies from the extreme winter cold of the north to the milder rainy weather of the Southeast, and 90 degrees Fahrenheit summer temperatures are not infrequent in the Interior. (p. 186)

Not surprisingly, Alaska's location contributes to its uniqueness. It shares no common boundary with the rest of the United States (Appendix H). It is a member of the circumpolar community, if one were to view the area from above the North Pole (Appendix I); and "culturally, racially, and linguistically, its original inhabitants are closer to those northern neighbors than to the peoples of their own nation" (Hecht, 1981, p. 186).

The State of Alaska is rich with natural resources. The Alaska Department of Tourism reports (1998),

- Proceeds from natural resources within Alaska generate 90% of its state's revenues;
- Twenty-five percent of the oil produced in the United States comes from Alaska;
- The seafood processing and fishing industries are also important to Alaska's economy, as the waters are rich in salmon, crab, halibut, and herring;
- Forestry is especially important in the Southeastern region of the state, as it provides thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue to Southeast Alaska; and
- Monies generated from tourism are increasing, as the state attracts over 1.1 million visitors annually. (p. 35)

Ground transportation is very limited throughout the state. Therefore, people rely heavily upon air and water travel for transportation from place to place. In fact, Juneau is the only state capital in the Union which can be reached

solely by boat or plane. Boats, snowmobiles, and four-wheelers are invaluable means of transportation within the various villages, as the extent of conventional roads is quite limited (Darnell, 1994; Hecht, 1981).

Perhaps what makes Alaska truly unique is its Native population. In 1996, Alaska Natives constituted 16.5% (approximately 100,000) of the state's total population. Eighty percent of the Native population resides within one of the six urban cities, while about 20% of Alaska's Natives live within the 200+ villages scattered throughout remote areas of the state (Darnell, 1992). Furthermore, there are over 20 different Alaska Native languages spoken throughout the state (Kawagley, Norris-Tull, & Norris-Tull, 1998). Most, but not all, bush communities in Alaska are primarily comprised of Alaska Natives (i.e., Indians, Eskimos, or Aleuts).

Alaska Bush Communities: Then and Now

Most of today's Alaska Natives are descendants from the nomadic hunters and gatherers who crossed from Siberia to North America over the Bering Land Bridge that connected the two continents. These original Alaska Natives developed into three distinct groups: Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts. In fact, the term, Alaska Native, refers to these three racial/cultural groups (Hecht, 1981). However, in some studies (e.g., Schools and Staffing Survey as conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics), these three groups are classified as simply *Indians*, and are therefore, considered synonymous with the American

Indians of the Lower 48. A brief history of each Alaska Native group is described below:

- Indians – The Indian nations settled in Southeast Alaska. This region had lush forests, a mild climate, as well as abundant fish, game, and edible plants. The Tlingits (pronounced Klinkits), Haidás, and Tshimshian Indians thrived in this area. Their highly developed culture produced totem poles, ceremonial costumes, and exquisite blankets. The Tlingits were also fierce warriors. When the first Russians tried to settle in Southeast Alaska, the Tlingits drove them out, despite the guns and cannons brought by the intruders.
- Eskimos – The Eskimos scattered throughout the Northern and Western Regions of Alaska. In this harsh land they hunted, fished, and gathered the berries that grew during the brief, cool summers. Eskimo hunters harpooned whales from small, skin covered canoes called *umiaks*. Eskimos also hunted for walrus, seals, and polar bears. They followed the herds of caribou that migrated across the tundra.
- Aleuts – The smallest group of Alaska Natives, the Aleuts, settled mainly on the land named for them, the Aleutians. They were hardy people who lived off the sea. Their food, clothing, shelter, and tools came from creatures living in the ocean or along its shoreline. Exceptional sailors, the Aleuts sometimes paddled hundreds of miles in skin-covered canoes, called *bidarkas*, to trade, visit, or stage daring raids on enemy villages. (Alaska Department of Tourism, 1998, p. 1)

While Native culture remains strong in these remote villages of Alaska, rapid advances in communications, transportation, and other services have dramatically changed the lifestyles of many Natives. Many families in rural Alaska maintain the traditional indigenous lifestyle that is largely dependent on subsistence hunting and fishing. Wild foods (e.g., salmon, caribou, moose, and numerous wild berries and herbs) form a major portion of their food supply, and many rural residents rely on commercial fishing in the summer months as their

main financial support (Kawagley, Norris-Tull, & Norris-Tull, 1998). Some Natives still carry on the traditional folklore such as basket weaving and ivory carving. These items are usually sold to tourists instead of being used for everyday tasks.

Some Natives manage and staff multi-million dollar businesses such as complex social programs or their respective Native Corporation headquarters (Kleinfeld, 1992; Alaska Department of Tourism, 1998). These Native corporations were formed after the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed by U.S. Congress. In this Act, Alaska Natives received 44 million acres of land and almost \$963,000 in exchange for the extinguishment of their aboriginal land claims. The cash and lands became the property of the 13 regional, 4 urban, and the 200+ village Native corporations formed by the Act. Any Native Alaskan born before passage of the Act, *and* who could prove one-quarter Native blood ancestry, was eligible to enroll in a local and regional corporation. This entitled him/her to 100 shares in both the local and the regional corporations (Alaska Department of Tourism, 1998).

The use of modern conveniences is increasing in rural Alaska. Technology such as computers, televisions, satellite dishes, telephones, guns, steel traps, microwave ovens, refrigerators, powered boats, four-wheelers, and snow machines are all commonplace in Alaska villages of the 1990s. However, many of these conveniences which make life tasks easier, also produce noise, which is very disconcerting to some of the traditional village residents (Kawagley,

1995). Kawagley, in his book, A Yupiak Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit (1995), discusses this situation:

It always surprises me to see houses falling into disrepair, rifles and shotguns rusting, and many other modern tools and appliances lying about, not being cared for, while Native artifacts, such as harpoons, ice picks, adzes, and crooked knives, seem to be much better cared for.

One elder said that fur hats are "so much more efficient, warming, and closer to the heart" than manufactured hats made of man-made materials. Maybe there is still a oneness with nature and all beings that governs the modern Yupiak worldview. (p. 84)

Some Natives are working closely with huge corporations, paving the way for increased oil exploration and development, especially on the North Slope. At the same time, other Natives feel "overwhelmed and displaced of their land" (Kawagley, 1995, p. 12). According to Kawagley,

The Native people are considered transmutable and physical elements of the environment and objects that can be removed to a new village site, where they often become "human animals in a cultural zoo." . . . Already, there are several villages where affluent outsiders can fly in to view the Natives in their natural habitat, a demeaning practice to the people on display. (p. 13-15)

As noted in the above excerpt, there is a feeling of uneasiness between fellow villagers when discussing progressiveness or preservation of their culture (Kawagley, 1995). In Kawagley's book, A Yupiak Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit (1995), he describes the village life in these changing times:

The Yupiak people have found many ways to adapt to changing times through a blending of old and new. Sometimes the blend has been met with success and other times it has not. For example, most villages have no qualms about taking advantage of federal and state grants for generating electricity, roads, airports, housing, and assistance to the needy. This has brought new opportunities to the village, and local administrators have learned to

account, budget, report on activities, and to live by the rules and regulations attached to these new institutions.

From the point of view of some elders, however, this is seen as a disease of the newer generation, especially with respect to assistance to the needy. In their view, it has effectively relieved villagers of their self-esteem, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-determination. (p. 79)

These changes in technology, economy and lifestyles for the Alaska Natives have not come without a price. Statistics obtained from the last published annual reports from the Alaska State Division of Family and Youth Services (1996), are evidence that many Alaskan families are under extreme stress and that many Alaskan children are at great risk of harm or delinquency (P. Nakamura, personal communication, June 26, 1998) (Figure 1).

While the role of the State of Alaska Department of Youth and Family Services is to protect children at risk of abuse or neglect and to rehabilitate youthful offenders while protecting communities, this agency writes, "This mandate is greatly influenced by Alaska's geographic size and complexity, unevenly distributed population, cultural diversity, and relative inaccessibility to rural villages" (1996, p. 4).

In summary, Alaska is a state of much uniqueness (Hecht, 1981). However, with this uniqueness come situations and conditions which create tensions and stress in the lives of its residents (Kawagley, 1995; Darnell, 1992; Kleinfeld, 1992). Conflicts also arise when Native children are being taught in school by predominately non-Native teachers (Lipka, 1994). McIntosh (1989) cautions:

Those being recruited need to know not only the strong points of the district and community, but also any limitations which might affect either their willingness to sign a contract or remain after the first year of teaching. A high level of awareness of teaching and living conditions before the contract or remain after the first year of teaching. A high level of awareness of teaching and living conditions before the contract is signed will certainly eliminate some of the unhappiness that may result after a teacher arrives in the community. (p. 26)

Figure 1. Alaska Statewide Statistics Relating to Children

EACH YEAR . . .	
1 in every 2,198 children	Dies of either homicide, suicide, or unintentional injuries
1 in every 65 babies	Is born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) or Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE)
1 in every 18 babies	Is born with low birth weight
1 in every 12,454 children	Commits suicide
1 in every 207 children (ages 6-18)	Is admitted for inpatient psychiatric care
1 in every 11 babies	Is born to mothers with fewer than 12 years of education
1 in every 8 babies	Is born to teenage mothers
1 in every 89 children (ages 6-18)	Is arrested for felony offenses
1 in every 14 children	Drops out of school
1 in every 17 babies	Is born to unmarried parents (ages 13-18)
1 in every 35 children (ages 6-18)	Is reported runaway
1 in every 52 children	Is abused and neglected (substantiated reports)
1 in every 5 preschoolers	Is living below the poverty level
1 in every 9 children	Has no health insurance
1 in every 8 children	Receives Aid to Families with Dependent Children
1 in every 6 children	Is living in single parent households
<i>Source: Alaska's Health and Welfare, 1993; Public Health Background DPH, June 1993; Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics, 1990 Annual Report; 1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, Alaska, 1992; Alaska's Adolescents, A Plan for the Future, 1994, as cited in the Alaska Department of Health & Human Services, 1996).</i>	

Historical Background of Alaska's Public School System

The parents, grandparents, and ancestors of today's public school students have experienced a shifting of administrative objectives and structure since schools began in Alaska during the 1700s. Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Hagstrom (1985) and Darnell (1970) complement each other's views when describing this ever-changing history of public schools in Alaska.

- Traditionally, the education of Alaska Native children reflected indigenous values and prepared children to live as their ancestors had lived. The boys were taught how to hunt and the girls were taught skills concerning food preparation.
- During the 1700s to mid 1800s, Russian missionaries with the purpose of Christianizing the Native population founded religious schools. The main emphasis was on religion and literacy so Native children could read Scriptures.
- In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from Russia and many of the Russian missionaries withdrew from the state, leaving Native education very neglected for many years.
- Almost twenty years later, in 1884, the Organic Act appropriated \$15,000 to the education of Indian children. This money was distributed throughout the state, primarily to any of the mission schools still in existence.
- In 1894, the U.S. Bureau of Education took over the administrative responsibilities of Alaska's schools in order to provide a separation of church and state. The educational objectives assigned to these schools were that the children must be kept in school until they acquired what was termed a common-school education (practical knowledge of some useful trade). The law stated, "We believe in reclaiming the Natives from improvident habits and in transforming them into ambitious and self-helpful citizens." (as cited in Darnell, 1970, p: 4)
- In 1905, the Territory of Alaska took over the education of the White children, but the Secretary of the Interior (located in Washington,

D.C.) continued to take responsibility for education of the Native children in Alaska.

- In 1931, the Secretary of the Interior transferred responsibility for education of Alaska Natives from the Bureau of Education to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). With the appointment of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1934, the BIA adopted a dual-purpose education for all Native Americans, including Alaska Natives. Upon taking office, Commissioner Collier proclaimed, "Indians whose culture, civic tradition, and inherited institutions are still strong and virile shall be encouraged and helped to develop their life in their own patterns, not as segregated minorities but as noble elements in common life. At the same time, the individual Indian is entitled to every opportunity that the nation offers to any citizen. This means that he is entitled to the fullest educational privileges, not in sequestered institutions but in the schools and colleges which serve us all." (as cited in Darnell, 1970, p. 7)
- Until the 1970s, many of the native schools were operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs who placed predominately non-Native administrators in leadership positions within predominately Native schools. At this time, the State of Alaska assumed financial responsibility for the elementary and boarding schools.
- In 1976, while school consolidation in most of the United States was creating larger administrative units, the Alaska legislature divided the former State Operated School System into 21 small, regionally controlled school districts called REAAs—Regional Education Attendance areas. Although these small districts created potential opportunities for local control, their small size created problems with their ability to obtain necessary materials to adequately teach the small numbers of students and with their ability to develop programs to serve children with special needs such as those with fetal-alcohol syndrome. Also, secondary students who sought an education were forced to leave home and enter boarding schools or attend town high schools through the boarding home program.
- Students' inability to fit comfortably back into village life after attending the regional high schools and the appalling alcohol abuse and suicide rates in the student populations, led policy-makers to reevaluate the regional high school concept.

- Finally, in the lawsuit *Tobeluk v. Lind*, the State of Alaska (in an out-of-court settlement) agreed to provide high schools in all Alaska bush communities that requested them. Most bush communities, 126 in all, wanted local high schools. High schools were constructed in dozens of villages. Parents wanted their children at home and valued the opportunity to have more control over staffing and curriculum. But these small high schools found it difficult to provide diversity of teachers, specialized courses, and a variety of extracurricular activities. As a result, the state government re-opened Mt. Edgecumbe, formerly a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in Southeast Alaska, as an option for rural secondary students. (Darnell, 1992, p. 28)
- At the present time, student applications for Mt. Edgecumbe exceed the school's capacity. There is a movement to provide new boarding schools for Native students. However, providing more boarding schools creates a problem in that the loss of students and student revenues from the small high schools would make it even more difficult for these small schools to offer high quality education to its existing students.
- Although many effective programs have been developed for Native students, the small size of many rural communities and school districts, the stress caused by rapid cultural change, and the tension between the western and indigenous world-view still create policy problems which need attention. (Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Hagstrom, 1985, p. 1-6; Darnell, 1994, p. 1 -37)

At the present time, the structure of Alaska's public school system is as

follows:

- The state consists of 52 school districts and six state-owned schools. Of the 52 school districts, the student population ranges from nearly 50,000 students in the Anchorage Public Schools to less than 50 students in the Pelican City School District. By the criteria, as defined in this study, six school districts are considered urban and 46 are considered bush schools. However, two of 46 bush school districts are comprised of both urban and bush schools, as defined by this study, by using the data from the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs (1998).
- Prior to the 1990s, Alaska was not considered in national school reform efforts, primarily due to its "separation from the contiguous

forty-eight states and because of its distinctive characteristics.” (Hecht, 1981, p. 192)

For example, in 1978 a memo was sent by the Rural Education Project Director to the Center for Northern Educational Research (as cited in Hecht, 1981). This memo stated: “Alaska’s situation is considered too unique to be of general applicability elsewhere... Alaska was one of “those situations in rural America where cultural/social and geographical conditions are sufficiently unique [that it] requires very different approaches to improving education.” (as cited in Hecht, 1981, p. 208)

However, the State of Alaska, and the Native villages in particular, have *not* been left off any of the national, state, or local educational reform movements of the 1990s, no special provisions have been made concerning the unique cultural/social or geographical conditions. With these reforms, come a great deal of added accountability and pressure for teachers to prepare *all* students for post-secondary pursuits. These standards have been set forth by national and state committees for *all* school age children, with no differentiation between teaching/learning abilities, styles, or situations.

- In conclusion, throughout the history of the many, varied school systems of Alaska public education’s past, non-Natives have consistently determined policy and have developed the programs. They have done so under the premise that “they know what was best for Native education.” (Darnell, 1970, as cited in Norris-Tull, 1957, p. 132)

Students and Classrooms of Bush Alaska in the 1990s

What is the profile of students attending today’s Alaska bush classrooms?

Research indicates that:

- One third of Alaska’s school age population fits one of the various definitions of “students at risk” (Darnell, 1992).
- Poverty is a factor in many children’s lives. In fact, children living in poverty are one-third less likely to graduate from high school than other children. Over 47% of village students lived in poverty during

the 1990-91 school year, as compared to only 17% of students in Alaska non-bush school districts (Alaska Economic Trends, 1992).

- In some school districts, up to 30% of the elementary age Native children are academically functioning below grade level. In grades 7-12, the number increases to over 40% (Alaska Department of Education, Extent of the At-Risk Population, 1990). This figure is also consistent with the 1996 report that notes the latest figures available (Report Cards to the Public, 1996).
- Based on the last census, which was completed in 1990, approximately one in seven Alaskans is functionally illiterate in English (Darnell, 1992).
- Nearly 40% of students are classified as *bilingual/ bicultural* as compared to less than 4% of students attending non-bush schools in Alaska (Alaska Department of Education, 1997).
- Over 12% of all school-age students are classified as "Chapter 1" pupils. This means their educational attainment is below the level appropriate for children of their age, according to the regulation of the U. S. Department of Education. In Alaska's non-bush schools, less than 4% of the student population is classified as Chapter 1 pupils. While considering that Native students, in general, make up 16% of the total school population statewide, they make up over 49% of Chapter 1 students statewide (Alaska Department of Education, 1993).
- Approximately 30% of freshmen entering Alaska's high schools, statewide, will not graduate (Alaska Department of Education, 1990).
- In some school districts, especially in the Southeast and coastal districts, the student transience rate is as high as 48% per year (Alaska Department of Education, Report Card to the Public, 1998).
- In a national survey of Indian and Native Alaskan youth, 21% of the girls and 12% of the boys had attempted suicide, 46% of the girls and 56% of the boys had used hard liquor, and 26% of the girls and 9% of the boys had been sexually abused. (Whitney, 1992, p. A-1, A-10)

Characteristics

According to the Alaska Teacher Placement Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks (1997), each year approximately 85% of all Alaska teachers hired for the upcoming school term are *imports*—hired from out of state, usually from the Northwestern United States. Although Alaska villages are comprised of up to 95% Native students, 95% of all Alaska bush teachers are non-Natives (Alaska Natives Commission, 1993). Darnell (1992) and Norris-Tull (1997) explain Alaska's bush teaching situation:

In many cases, unfortunately, newly-graduated teachers or outstanding teachers from other areas are simply not prepared or do not have the background to succeed under the demanding conditions found in many rural [Alaska] villages" (Darnell, 1992 p. 9; Norris-Tull, 1997, p. 137).

Who are these prospective teachers and why do they seek a teaching position in Alaska? Some of these candidates are seeking the *adventure* of The Last Frontier and others are simply seeking the *salary* of The Last Frontier (Anttonen, 1998). Carol Barnhardt (1982), researcher and author, describes these new teachers to Alaska as having,

. . . missionary zeal. The lures of high salaries or quests for adventure have often been the motivating forces responsible for the steady influx of teachers from Outside. . . . The importation of teachers from Outside has had its advantages and disadvantages. They usually bring with them new perspectives, new ideas, and very often a great deal of enthusiasm. However, those qualities are almost invariably dampened by the reality of long, harsh winters and the prolonged isolation from familiar people, places and goods.

Adjustment to the physical environment is minor, however, compared to the complications that are created by the fact that Alaska is composed of diverse groups of people whose cultural

backgrounds often differ radically from those of teachers from Outside. It doesn't take teachers long to discover that their own value systems, life styles and ways of teaching and learning are often not shared or even appreciated by the students and families in the communities they are trying to serve. This discovery can quickly lead to feelings of frustration, anger, inadequacy and anxiety for teachers and students, which in turn often leads to dropping out—by teachers and students. (p. 12)

Alaska Bush Schools – Are They Meeting the Needs of Their Students?

One might ask, "Why do the students in bush Alaska experience so many academic and social difficulties?" According to Philips (1972), "The cultural incongruence between the home and school learning environments make it very difficult for Native students to learn to their full potential (p. 97). These complexities come into play when two fundamentally different worldviews converge and present a formidable challenge for students, as well as for teachers. To better illustrate this point, Knudtson and Suzuki (1992) have identified the distinguishing characteristics of both worldviews--of those of the indigenous peoples and those of the Western world in which most Alaska bush teachers have been raised and trained (Appendix J).

As Burgess (1978) points out, "Unfortunately, many instructors ignore culture and its impact on learning both in *content* and in *style*, rather than devising methods and techniques through which culturally diverse individuals approach problem solving" (p. 9). For example,

- Western education tends to emphasize compartmentalized knowledge (by disciplines) which is often decontextualized and taught in the detached setting of a classroom (Kawagley, 1995; Berger, 1977; Franklin, 1990; Livingston, 1981). Native people

have traditionally acquired their knowledge through direct experiences in the natural environment. For them, the particulars come to be understood in relation to the whole, and the laws are continually tested in the context of everyday survival. (Kawagley, 1995)

- According to Swisher and Deyhle (1987), Indian [Alaska Native] children tend to learn visually, by observation, manipulation, and experimentation in their Native setting (John, 1972; Kleinfeld, 1973; Rohner, 1965; Wolcott, 1967; Felon & Galloway, 1969). Rohner (1965) contends that in their school classroom, Native students must learn by verbal instruction, reading, and writing. The Western world approach to teaching is incongruent with their learning styles and affects their knowledge and demonstration of material taught.

Werner & Begishe (1968) also present evidence that many strategies of

Western world trained teachers are incongruent with the traditional culture's practices. For example,

- Indians [or Native Alaskans] seem to be unprepared or ill at ease if pushed into early performance without sufficient thought or the acquisition of mental competence preceding the actual physical activity. . . . This philosophy of learning for indigenous peoples can be summed up in the following proverb: *If at first you don't think, and think again, don't bother trying*. The non-Native approach stresses performance as a prerequisite for the acquisition of competence . . . This philosophy of learning can be summed up . . . *If at first you don't succeed, try, try again*. (p. 45)
- Western thought also differs from Native thought in this notion of competency. In western terms, competency is based on predetermined ideas of what a person should know, which is then measured indirectly through various forms of objective tests. Such an approach does not address whether that person is really capable of putting the knowledge into practice (Franklin, 1990). In the traditional Native sense, competency has an unequivocal relationship to survival or extinction. You either have it or you don't, and survival is the ultimate indicator. (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1997, p. 1)

Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Hagstrom (1985) suggest,

The lists of effective teaching practices are disappointing, that such teacher behaviors as holding high expectations have ambiguous meaning. For example, what about a teacher who is working with an Eskimo child who reads a story over and over and knows all the words but can't figure out what the story means? . . . The research of effective teaching attempts to specify universal scientific rules, but in many situations the rules do not apply [to the learning style of Alaska Native students]. (p. 93)

Although the researcher realizes there is no way to precisely pinpoint every teaching technique of non-Native teachers that tend to be incongruent with Native students, there is literature that addresses some of the differences between non-Native and Native teachers' teaching styles, due to cultural factors. For example, Native teachers tend to differ from mainstream non-Native teachers in the organization of classroom space and time (e.g., the way physical and personal spaces are arranged, and the pacing of lessons) and in the organization of classroom discourse (the culturally patterned ways of speaking in a classroom) (Barnhardt, 1982; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Lipka, 1994; Van Ness, 1992). Native teachers tend to use slower pacing of lessons and closer physical contact with students than do mainstream teachers. Native teachers also use a discourse style that includes a more even distribution of speech among students and teachers, speaking to a group instead of nominating individuals, and allowing multiple speakers to talk at once. Native teachers are more likely than mainstream teachers to use content related to the local environment. At the risk of over-generalizing, the differences in classroom organization and discourse

reflect important indigenous values of individual autonomy and group harmony (Lipka, 1994).

In summary, many Indian students come to school with a learning and interactional styles that are very different from the situations they encounter in the classroom (Swisher & Deyhle, 1987). This incongruity not only places students at risk, but it also places the teacher, usually a non-Native teacher, at risk as well (Gjelten, 1978).

However, many Natives are beginning to realize the need for students to be taught both traditional cultural material as well as academic curriculum as seen by the Western world. Kawagley (1995) writes:

In the past, Native people have tended to view formal education as a hindrance to their traditional ways, but they have begun to look at it in a different light. They are seeking to gain control of their education and give it direction to accomplish the goals they set for it. [They are] strengthening their own culture while simultaneously embracing Western culture as a second force that can help them maintain themselves with as much self-reliance and self-sufficiency as possible. Having always had to thrive in a tough environment, they know that knowledge can make it easier and less harsh . . . with a carefully developed technology supported by an attuned educational system. (p. 89)

Norris-Tull (1992), a professor and author regarding Alaska Native issues, believes there needs to be a balance between cultures, with each complimenting the other. He writes:

Children are the most important segment of any community, for each community's future lies in its children. To assure that future, the children must be given, through education, the skills that will enable them to succeed in life and the understanding that will continue the community's values. For Alaska Native children, this

means that they must receive an integrated education that encompasses two sets of skills and two sets of values.

The first set of skills is that necessary for the children to succeed in traditional Native lifeways. The second set of skills is that necessary for the children to succeed in Western society. The children's education must also integrate Native and Western values so that they are empowered in both cultures. The skills and values are inseparable, for mastery of one cannot be obtained without mastery of the other. (Norris-Tull, 1997, p. 143)

Compensation

Supply and Demand of Teachers in Alaska

According to Alaska Teacher Placement, the demand for educators in the State of Alaska continues to exceed the supply. In 1997, there were 1,330 new hires statewide and teacher shortages remain a problem (1998). Certain high demand areas such as special education and speech pathologist positions continue to remain unfilled, adversely impacting the consistency and quality of education in Alaska's classrooms (1998).

Projections indicate that Alaska's demand for teachers will be great in the years to come. The Alaska Teacher Placement's Statewide Educator Supply & Demand Report (LaBarge, 1998), states that,

In spite of a declining military deployment in the state, Alaska's population continues to grow. With the last four years' steady increase, and with the largest growth in Alaska's population being in the school-age category, school enrollments are expanding annually. This growth and other contributing factors increase the demand for more qualified teachers. Meeting such a demand is now problematic, according to the Alaska Teacher Placement Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

In addition to growing enrollments and teacher retirements, several other factors contribute to the difficulty in [the] recruitment [of quality teachers]. Declining school district budgets, static or declining salaries, reduced benefit packages, and drastic increases in certification costs has all impacted the recruitment of teachers to Alaska's schools. Alaska has lost much of its competitive advantage in attracting qualified educators. With the impending retirement of approximately 6% of the current education labor force, departing teachers could create more than 450 possible vacancies for each of the upcoming years. In addition, new positions will have to be created to deal with expanding enrollments and new programs. For these reasons, Alaska's demand for educators will continue to be high. (p. 20) (Appendix K)

Salaries and Incentives

On an average, Alaska teacher salaries are 128% that of the national average (LaBarge, 1999) (Appendix L). Some school districts provide other incentives such as district housing, longevity increments, tuition reimbursements, non-business travel, disability insurance, professional liability, travel insurance, and family medical insurance benefits (Appendix M).

Rural Schools: A comparison between Alaska and Lower 48

While some similarities exist between Alaska bush schools and rural schools located in the Lower 48, Alaska bush schools represent the extremes of many situations (Darnell, 1992). Miller (1988), in his article entitled, Teacher Preparation For Rural Schools, discusses some of the issues encountered by rural teachers across the nation. Sher (1977) warns the reader to not over-generalize characteristics of rural teachers or their community's situations. He states that there is often greater diversity found when comparing rural schools

among themselves than the difference found when comparing urban and suburban environments. He writes:

Rural America may well represent the single most diverse and heterogeneous group of individuals and communities in our society. The island village off the coast of Maine, a coal mining town in West Virginia, a ranching area in Wyoming, a college town in Minnesota, an impoverished community in the Mississippi Delta region, a ski-resort section of Vermont, a migrant-worker settlement in Texas, an Alaskan Native village near the Arctic Circle, and a prosperous grain-farming area in Iowa have little in common except that they are all classified as rural areas of the United States. (p. 63)

School Factors

Similarities. The similarities between the responsibilities of a teacher in an Alaska Native village or a rural school in the Lower 48 may be very encompassing. Teachers may find themselves teaching multi-age/multi-grade classes, have small student-to-teacher ratios, and may be responsible for the preparation and teaching of several different subjects (in which the teacher may or may not be qualified to teach). The rural schoolteacher usually is the main teacher for all students assigned to him/her, including the special needs children. Other similarities include extensive administrative, supervisory, extra-curricular, and maintenance responsibilities, coupled with fewer defined rules and policies, and a more informal administrative structure (Miller, 1988). As applicable in both areas, Rusyniak (1990) views many duties of a rural teacher or administrator as being "duties—some assigned, but most assumed" (p. 17).

Miller (1988) also comments, "If teachers come to a small, rural school with expectations predicated upon factors which relate to urban or suburban

schools, duties often defined by a negotiated master contract, they are likely to be sorely disillusioned" (p. 17).

Differences. In Alaska, unlike most Lower 48 states, a teacher is allowed to teach classes for which he/she is not certified if the school district believes the teacher has the skills to effectively teach those classes (Alaska Department of Education, Teacher Certification, 1998). One main difference between Alaska Native village schools and rural schools in the Lower 48 is the amount and quality of the curricular materials and the condition of the school facility. Given that Alaska's state expenditures per student is 149% that of the U.S. average, most schools within the state are very well advanced in terms of technology, with updated curricular materials and supplies (Alaska Department of Education, Report to the Public, 1997). Because of the extreme remoteness of the state, there are many distance delivery opportunities via the telephone, television, or via the computer for students and teachers (Anttonen, personal communication, 1998). The school facilities in most villages are very well built and maintained. In the 1976, out-of-court settlement for the case, *Tobeluk v. Link*, the State of Alaska agreed to build high schools in all the villages who requested them. Soon after this decision, dozens of villages received new facilities (or new additions built on to their existing facilities). As most of the schools in rural Alaska serve K-12 grade students, most Alaskan students continue to benefit from this settlement (Darnell, 1992). However, in many villages, schools are not able to take full advantage of technological advances due to inadequate telephone

service (some villages still use single side-band radios for telephone communication) or fluctuations in electrical current (some villages use a generator as their only source of electrical supply) (Kawagley, 1995).

Another major difference between the schools in Alaska and those in the Lower 48 is the issue of teacher compensation (i.e., salaries and fringe benefits). While rural teachers in the Lower 48 typically earn lower salaries and fewer fringe benefits than their counterparts earn in more populated school districts, cost of living expenses are lower in the rural areas than in the urban areas of the Lower 48. However, this concept is just the opposite in Alaska. Alaska teachers' salaries are higher than their counterparts in the Lower 48. Furthermore, Alaska's bush school districts tend to compensate teachers at a higher rate than Alaska's urban school districts (Alaska Department of Education, Report Card to the Public, 1997). However, according to Alaska Teacher Placement (ATP) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks,

Alaska's salaries have seen very little change since 1994. They are, however, doing better than the U.S. average. Since 1995, Alaska's beginning teacher salaries are the highest in the nation. With the average salaries at 128% of the U.S. average, Alaska's educators have one the highest compensation rates in the nation. However, several districts are no longer compensating for years of experience and are, therefore, bringing in all new hires at entry level. Some districts are only allowing up to four years of experience to new hires in their district. According to statistics compiled by the American Federation of Teachers, after adjustment to the cost-of-living index, Alaska's salaries still rank among the top 25 in the U.S. (Report Card to the Public, 1998, p. 23) (Appendices N and O)

Moreover, unlike rural areas of the Lower 48, the cost of living in bush Alaska is greater than in urban Alaska (LaBarge, 1998). In most cases, food and other needed items are flown to villages via air transport, which is very expensive. Also, air service is very costly if a person (and his/her family) needs to leave the village for any reason (e.g., shopping, medical care, or family related situations). Costs associated with building a house in a village can amount to as much as 132% more than if the same house was built in an urban area with Alaska such as in Anchorage. Also, some Native villages restrict non-Natives from owning property on Native owned land. This makes the opportunity of being a homeowner impossible for some non-Native teachers (Norris-Tull, 1997).

Socio-Cultural Factors

While teachers in bush Alaska and in the Lower 48 often experience difficulty finding, buying, and selling property, both groups experience the *fish bowl* effect. They are scrutinized by community members and have a very high profile within the school and community. Very high expectations exist for teacher involvement within community activities, and there is a great emphasis placed on informal and personal communications. While all rural teachers experience the above conditions to a certain extent, some researchers (Miller, 1988; Sher, 1995) feel Alaska's extreme socio-cultural factors are what truly account for the extremely high teacher turnover rates in these remote Native villages (Darnell, 1994).

Although some bush school districts in Alaska provide subsidized housing for teachers, many times these housing conditions are "far from adequate as compared to typical Lower 48 housing situations" (Anttonen, 1998). And with this subsidized housing comes school district chosen room mates. In an interview with John Anttonen, former Director of the Rural Educator Preparation Partnership Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and longtime bush school administrator (1998), he contends that in order for an Outsider to truly be accepted by the community, he/she "must live among the people". Anttonen goes on to explain that when a teacher lives in housing provided by the school district, a superficial barrier is created between the teacher and the local villagers.

Due to lack of roads and other recreational facilities, the school is usually the hub of the community in these remote villages. It is usually an expectation for school personnel to supervise these facilities during their after school hours. "More time at school means less quality time for the teacher to spend with his/her own family" (Anttonen, personal communication, 1998).

The physical, geographic, and climatic conditions of remote Alaska villages are also factors which teachers must learn to overcome. Darnell (1992) writes,

The physical environment of the rural schools is composed of an interrelated combination of dramatic extremes. Great distances separate small, isolated communities. Climatic and physical characteristics of the land are often harsh and unforgiving. There are great geographic, economic, historical, and cultural differences

