

UAA Interns' Rural Field Experiences 2008-2009

Who We Are: Abby O'Neill, Brooke Owen, and Krystin Willburn. We are Education Majors from the University of Alaska Anchorage and participants of the AEIN Rural Exchange Program. We are lifelong learners and teachers dedicated to educating all children. In the words of Howard Lester, *"We have been maturing as teachers. New experiences bring new sensitivities and flexibility."*

Brooke and Krystin went to Bethel and spent time at the Yup'ik Immersion Charter School, Ayaprun Elitnaurvik. Abby visited a school in Perryville that is part of the Lake and Peninsula District.

What We Did:

In Bethel, Krystin and Brooke observed several classes and attended the school's winter pageant. They also had the opportunity to process seals for seal oil, meat, and hide, as well as experience a steam bath.

Abby attended a PreK-12 school that had approximately 20 students. She toured the village, hiked a mountain, went to a family dinner, went to a movie and craft night, and helped with play practice. She also bonded closely with the teachers, and spent time with children in the classroom, teaching lessons and learning more about them.



Our Experience Taught Us:

The conflict between schools' needs to meet national standards, especially those required by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and the desire to teach skills and knowledge traditionally valued by the local community is more evident in rural schools than in Anchorage. As pre-service teachers it is important for us to think about how culturally appropriate curriculum can be incorporated into content required by federal regulations.

One of the things that was reinforced by the rural visit was what the role of a teacher entails. In the rural villages the teacher has the typical job of teaching the curriculum and standards, as well as being a leader, role model, record keeper, organizer, and volunteer. The responsibilities that were added into their job description were things like being a coach, advocate, counselor, disciplinarian, special ed teacher, head of clubs, drama teacher, and art teacher. On top of all this, teachers were the friend, the motivator, and at times the adopted guardian. Going on the rural exchange definitely showed us how education is different for everyone, but it also showed how our job as teachers can vary based on a student's or school's needs.

What we learned and applied:

- To be more observant and understanding of cultural differences.
- To encourage students to help others.
- The importance of a subsistence lifestyle.
- That our personal lifestyles and upbringing affect our perceptions and experiences.

Our vision of rural field experience:

"He who dares to teach must never cease to learn." - Anonymous.

The rural field experience only adds to a teacher's experience, education, and range of abilities. Once in a lifetime teaching opportunities are what help teachers become well-rounded educators.



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