Likely to Huddle in Anxious Silence

Unless Student from Bush Has Warm, Demanding Teacher

FAIRBANKS — The Indian or Eskimo student who leaves his village to attend an urban high school is likely to huddle in anxious silence in the back of the classroom unless he has a teacher who is both warm and demanding, writes Dr. Judith S. Kleinfeld in a new University of Alaska report.

But teachers who are effective with urban white and black students are not always effective with village Indian and Eskimo students.

"Effective Teachers of Indian and Eskimo High School Students" is the second collaborative report from the university's Center for Northern Educational Research and the Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research.

It follows Dr. Kleinfeld's study of the Boarding Home Program, which also emphasizes the positive approach — finding out what kinds of boarding home parents work best with native students. Both studies were requested and supported by Jim Harper, director of the Division of Regional Schools and Boarding Home Program in the Alaska Department of Education.

Because teachers today are trained to be "professional," which means impersonal, it is often difficult for them to express personal warmth to native

Huddle in Anxious Silence . . .

students, writes Dr. Kleinfeld. Teachers forget that classical views of the educational process emphasized the importance of a close interpersonal relationship between the teacher and his student.

Those teachers who show warmth, especially by nonverbal behaviors, like smiling, close body distance, and touch, have students who learn more, she says.

Equally important, in her view, is the teacher's ability to express his concern for the native student by demanding a high level of academic performance rather than giving the student only passive understanding and sympathy.

Where the teacher babies the native student, he learns little. Also, this type of teacher behavior may stimulate prejudice in urban students who resent the teacher's favoritism, she maintains.

Certain teaching styles work better with certain types of students. This is illustrated in Dr. Kleinfeld's typology of effective and ineffective teachers, which classifies teachers according to personal warmth versus professional distance and active "demandingness" versus passive understanding.

The "traditionalist" teacher is often successful with similarly subject-oriented white and black urban students. Eskimo and Indian students, however, often interpret his professional distance to mean that the teacher dislikes them and is prejudiced, Dr. Kleinfeld finds.

Although the "sophisticate" teacher may be effective with certain types of urban students, his passive sympathy and fascination with cultural differences leads him to demand little and, in fact, frequently to embarrass native students by emphasizing their nativeness, she says.

"Sentimentalist" teachers are ineffective with all students, but they are most harmful to native students in an integrated classroom, Dr. Kleinfeld writes. Their warm, undemanding style allows white and black students to act up, which finally forces the teacher to react angrily toward them.

However, native students are usually too frightened to misbehave and the teacher remains friendly toward them, she says, adding that this apparent teacher favoritism angers the urban students who try to even things up by being hostile to the natives.

It is the "supportive gadfly" teacher who is successful with all kinds of students because he demands achievement within the context of an extremely warm personal relationship.

Native students interpret the teacher's demandingness as personal concern and feel it is their reciprocal obligation in a very personal relationship to learn what the teacher asks them to, according to the researcher.

Schools in Alaska are said to be already benefiting from the findings of this research. Dr. Kleinfeld has presented videotapes of successful and unsuccessful teachers at teacher workshops in many Alaska communities.