

# Education series seeks to bridge cultural gap

FAIRBANKS — Fred Young, a teacher at a small Yupik high school in Alaska, was convinced his senior students ought to start preparing for life after high school.

In Young's mind, that meant going to trade school, attending college or joining the military. He began an intensive effort to get his students to apply to schools, knowing that higher education could bring opportunities to both his students and their community.

What Young hadn't counted on was the belief in the village that more school — instead of broadening horizons — might only serve to further distance the students from their community and culture.

A year after he began the project, only three of Young's nine seniors had tried college or trade school. Young

was left wondering if his goal was unrealistic, if it was culturally inappropriate or if he had simply gone about trying to achieve it in the wrong way.

Young's case, titled "Cross-Cultural Counseling: The Guidance Project and the Reluctant Seniors," is the latest in a series of "Teaching Cases in Cross-Cultural Education" edited by Dr. Judith Kleinfeld, a professor of psychology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

While Young's and his community's names have been changed, his experience was real — and typical of what many teachers face when they venture into cross-cultural situations.

"The purpose of these cases is to alert prospective teachers to unfamiliar cultural communication styles, values

and rules," says Kleinfeld. "One of the ways in which human beings have always learned from each other is through the telling of stories. These cases serve as 'cautionary tales.'"

In Young's case, he first pressed the issue of more education, directly pressuring the students and their parents. Later in the year, he changed course — inviting Yupik community members to come to his classroom and talk of their hopes for their children's futures. The second approach resulted in a much more receptive audience.

"Teaching cases raise complicated ethical and pedagogical issues," says Kleinfeld. "By examining actual problems, students are better able to deal with situations they may face in the classroom in careful and intelligent ways."

Kleinfeld is one of the first educators in the country to use the case method to instruct prospective and practicing teachers. The case method was pioneered by law schools and business schools.

According to a recent speech by Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, the case method had resulted in higher tests scores and fewer dropouts in those medical schools. He believes it could also help bridge the gap between education textbooks and classroom teaching.

The case method centers professional education in real-world practical dilemmas. Kleinfeld's latest teaching cases are available for \$7.50 each from the Publications Center of the Rural College.