

# Village TV viewers studied for effects



**TRAINING FOR STUDY** — Residents from 10 rural villages came to the University of Alaska, Fairbanks recently to train for important roles in a study of the effects of television on new rural audiences. From left, rural resident Rodney Tickett confers with UA researcher Dr. James Orvik. Continuing, rural residents (seated) Buddy Pestrikoff and Dorothy Lee look over materials with Dr. Larry Gooding, UA researcher, standing behind.

(UA photo by Evan Bracken)

FAIRBANKS—Eleven rural residents came to the University of Alaska, Fairbanks recently to train for important roles in a study which began in January in their villages.

The study monitors social and behavioral changes in 10 rural communities after state-sponsored television broadcasts begin. UA researchers involved in the project, Drs. Norma Forbes, Larry Gooding and James Orvik, said the new television audiences present a unique opportunity to study the effects of television.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the study is based on data collected by the 11 rural residents. At the recent UA training workshop, they learned techniques to make detailed observations of children and to conduct interviews with adults.

They live in Cape Pole, Whale Pass, Akhiok, Old Harbor, Holy Cross, Anvik, Shageluk, Grayling, Ambler and Buckland. These are the communities selected for study with the aid of the Telecommunications Committee of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

Observations and interviews in the villages began early last month. Orvik explained data is being collected before the television turn-on date (scheduled for mid-January). Another collection period and perhaps a third will follow in the spring and/or fall. The information will then be correlated to determine changes corresponding to the television influence.

The researchers will use the information to look at three categories of effects. These are the active, replace and holistic effects. Each scientist is responsible for a separate component.

Forbes' area is the active effects. These are the effects which the contents of the medium (television) have on viewers' lives. Much of her work

will focus on children.

Active effects can be seen in imitation by children of what they see on television. "There is a considerable amount of data indicating that viewing violent T.V. increases aggressive and violent action in children," Forbes said.

She adds that viewing pro-social behavior such as sharing and helping seems to have a positive effect, increasing that type of behavior. The children will be observed in natural settings, like the playground.

The second component, replacement effects, will be sought through extensive interviews with adults in the community. As the word suggests, these effects are the behaviors which are dropped or replaced by television viewing.

"It's the community interactive patterns that I'll be interested in," said Gooding. "Visiting patterns. Friendship patterns." The researchers think some behaviors will conflict or compete with television. In other words, they can't be done while a person watches television.

An example of a competitive behavior, Gooding said, would be going to the movies. This

important social activity in the villages occurs at the same time television will be available. He explains a drop in movie attendance will be significant since this is a communal activity while television is viewed in a more isolated environment.

The third component, holistic effects, will again focus mainly on children. Orvik explains the search for these effects asks the question "Is it (television) changing the whole person over a period of time?" He said these effects come in small increments and may take place over a long time. This may affect the age and extent to which a child's sense of freedom and independence is established.

He speculated that the way children learn critical living skills such as hunting, fishing and food preparation may be interrupted. These are skills related to the preservation of culture. He has no prediction which way these things will go when television comes. "It may take a long time for television to have an effect in this regard."

The study is funded for 17 months. Orvik said the reports will disguise the identity of individuals and villages to ensure confidentiality.