

Why X-CED should succeed in bush

By JEFFREY RICHARDSON

"It's a process that doesn't have definite times and hours. It goes on all the time; learning from your school work and learning from your living. It's the toughest way to get an education I know."

In this way, Joyce Shales describes what it is like to earn a master degree in education, not in a glistening university classroom, but next door to Alaskans who have been crying for quality education for a long time—the Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts living in more than 200 villages across the state.

Joyce is one of about a hundred students from Beaver to Shishmaref, from Atmautluak to Gambell and Manokotak doing graduate and undergraduate work in education under the University of Alaska's Cross-Cultural Education Development Program.

Recent interviews with several students in the program reveal an intense satisfaction with the program, despite its challenges and unique delivery system. But the students are also frustrated because federal support for the Cross-Cultural project (known as X-CED) is about to end and there may not be enough state dollars set aside to fund X-CED as it now operates.

Many X-CED students, who must also worry about how to pay their tuition, raise families, and sometimes carry out civic duties in their villages, are attempting to convince Gov. Jay Hammond and the Alaska Legislature that the state should pick up X-CED's administrative tab when federal funding runs out in June.

The X-CED program is also under pressure to expand into regions of the state not currently served, a proposition that not only involves financial considerations, but a question of preserving the quality of education that students now derive from a small, personal program.

The force behind X-CED is the handful of students who have opted to enter the field of education because they are confident that they can improve on the performance of several generations of non-Native teachers who have passed through rural Alaska and left behind a legacy of dissatisfaction. The tradition of education in the villages is marked by high teacher

turnover, a tendency on the part of teachers and administrators to look down their noses at Native ways and a certain ineptness at adapting to a rural setting.

The X-CED program was originally known as the Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps; X-CED as it is known today was actually formed in 1974. Being the off-campus program of the university's School of Education, students must meet the same requirements for an education degree as urban campus students.

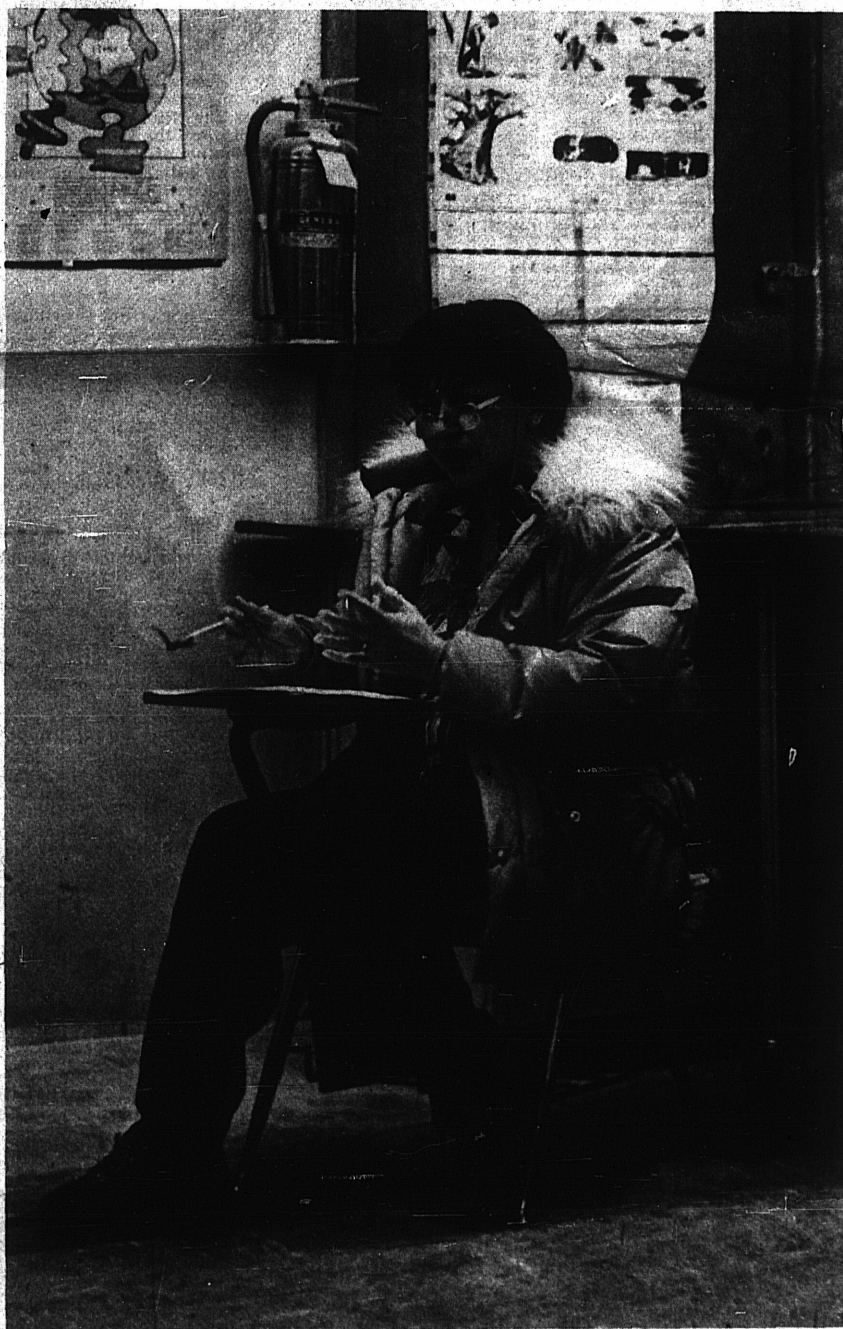
X-CED students receive their instruction through extensive book-reading assignments and special course packets and tapes prepared by on-campus instructors. Evaluation of students' grasp of course work is carried out through extensive written assignments. Most X-CED instructors are members of on-campus departments who take on X-CED students in addition to their on-campus load, although overloading is guarded against. In addition, five field coordinators (located in Dillingham, Ft. Yukon, Shishmaref, Tanana and Bethel) not only teach courses in their own disciplines but through personal visits to X-CED students in their villages, act as tutors and keep lines of communication between students and on-campus instructors open.

Policy for the X-CED program, within the framework of university guidelines set by the Board of Regents, is made by five regional panels consisting of students, faculty and community members, and a statewide consortium of panel members and at-large representatives.

Most X-CED students experienced poor teaching practices first hand during their early years and the Cross-Cultural Education Development Program was formed on the assumption that Native teachers, or non-Native teachers trained in cross-cultural problems, familiar with conventional teaching methods, could run a classroom without alienating students, parents and whole communities.

Ray Barnhardt, director of a special X-CED grant, outlined the assumptions under which X-CED has proceeded since its inception in 1970, in a recently published collection of essays on the subject of cross-cultural education:

"A Native teacher will be better able to assess and respond



Beverly Muhlendorf of Galena gestures as she explains her views on why X-CED should expand to meet the high demand for X-CED services throughout the state. She is a (Galena) community member of the Western Interior Regional Panel which oversees the admission of new students into the X-CED program in that region and formulates policy for X-CED delivery.

to the learning needs of a Native child. This assumption presumes that similarities in cul-

tural background between teacher and child will improve communication and thus foster

greater mutual understanding and learning.

"A Native teacher will pro-

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE THREE

● X-CED

CONTINUED OFF OF PAGE THREE

vide a model with which Native students can identify, thus motivating them to achieve greater educational success. This assumption presumes that a Native teacher will acquire status in the eyes of the Native community.

"A Native teacher will remain within the State and acquire greater cumulative teaching experience which will result in a broader and deeper understanding of local educational processes. This assumption is sometimes viewed as "parochialism," but it addresses the very real problem of transiency."

These assumptions are borne out by the X-CED students themselves when they explain why they set out on the long, difficult trail to earn a teaching certificate.

Gertie Brown of Huslia has been a teacher's aide and a Head Start instructor. She cited language differences as only one cause of friction between rural teachers and community members:

"Teachers just quit. I had to substitute a couple of times because they quit. They're teachers that come in from outside and they couldn't handle it. They think (Native students) should adopt their ways. I worked in the school and I disagree with what they do."

She pointed out that cultural differences that might seem insignificant took on ridiculous proportions when teachers and administrators chose to force the issue. She described an incident in which a teacher decided that blue jeans were not appropriate for the classroom, that youngsters ought to be wearing "school clothes." Such posturing raises the hackles of families who often cannot, or see no need, to keep two or three wardrobes for each child, as urban families often do.

Thelma Saunders of Kaltag said she is pursuing an education degree because "most of the (village) kids are way behind according to statewide standards. I thought me, being Indian, I'd be way ahead, there would be better rapport between students and teachers."

One student, who asked not to be identified, was highly critical of non-Native teachers untrained in cross-cultural issues because "they just don't seem to care what the kids think and what their thought processes are. They just don't give a damn.

They're in it for the money and that's it."

Bev Huhndorf, a member of the X-CED panel that oversees the program in the western Interior region, remembers teachers in Galena "who were afraid to walk down our streets. That's why we fought so hard for the X-CED undergraduate program."

Considering the feeling among rural people that X-CED is crucial to the future of quality elementary and secondary education in the bush, their concern over its financial future is not surprising. As Tanana Field Coordinator Patrick Dubbs told a recent student meeting:

"The funding is where this program lives or dies next year. Funding has not been solved, and until it is, it's uncertain what we'll be doing next year."

Yet the whole success of the X-CED program depends upon an administrative structure that allows students to remain at home, not only because many have families, but because the village setting is valued for allowing field work and observation to be carried out extensively and first-hand. And the success of this aspect depends heavily on travel funds to allow field coordinators adequate contact with students.

The financial difficulty facing X-CED results from the end of the current funding cycle of the federal Teacher Corps program. Teacher Corps has provided the bulk of financing for travel, instructors' salaries and administration. Teacher Corps, however, has restructured its operations and funds for program operation will be unavailable for at least a year and possibly longer. The only likely source of money to continue X-CED the way it now operates is the State of Alaska, but the Governor's office has indicated that it may not support full funding of the X-CED program, even if the Legislature approves it, because of Hammond's austerity approach to budget-making.

According to X-CED State-wide Academic Coordinator Mike Gaffney, the program already "operates on a real shoe-string."

Presently, X-CED keeps going with \$237,627 from Teacher Corps and about \$110,000 in federal bilingual money to pay for instruction. State General

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE EIGHT

● X-CED

CONTINUED OFF OF PAGE ONE

Fund monies amount to \$52,000. In addition, a \$95,000 grant from the Department of Environmental Conservation supports a few graduate assistants who bolster the academic part of the program by providing field assistance to undergraduate students.

Alarmed that the X-CED program might become the victim of budgetary politics, students from across the state met in Tanana in December to launch a united effort aimed at informing lawmakers and the public of the plight of the program. In a letter to Alaska Federation of Natives President Byron Mallott, X-CED student Ava Walsh, who chairs the program's statewide policy-making consortium, wrote:

"Unless X-CED gets state support those...active undergraduate students currently enrolled in X-CED will not be able to continue their education in the fall of 1978. Many of our students are approaching their senior year, and without your support of our program in the State Legislature we feel this unique and successful program will face losing some very important goals by moving away from rural Alaska."

In addition to doubt about funding X-CED's administrative costs, students must individually worry about financial support for their tuition and books. Funds for these purposes have come primarily from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Department of Labor under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). Apparently, at least in the Interior, because of communications difficulties between the funding sources, the two local organizations that disperse funds to students (Dena Aka, Inc., CETA and the Tanana Chiefs Conference, BIA), and X-CED, students have not known from semester to semester if they were going to have any tuition support at all.

Like anything else, X-CED has its detractors. One source who spoke to the Tundra Times as this issue went to press alluded to a high drop-out rate among X-CED students, poor individual performance and extravagant spending practices by X-CED staff. Such allegations would naturally lead to speculation that X-CED students are receiving instruction in the field of education under less

rigorous standards than on-campus education majors. This in turn could cast a pall over the ability of the students to teach after they graduate.

Yet X-CED students seem highly motivated, despite other responsibilities and the distraction of putting up the political fight to save their programs. Many are determined to stick with their families and their education, even though they must look forward to five years of work before completing their degrees instead of the standard four.

Although the road to the rural classroom seems long for X-CED students, there are small compensations along the way. For graduate student Joyce Shales, it is the realization that Native children can receive a quality education without losing their Native identity:

"The important thing is that Native people learn that what they think is true and valid. This kind of thing is critical if we're going to change Native education without putting down the Native culture, giving it the respect it deserves."

For under-grad Thelma Saunders of Kaltag, X-CED has made the impossible possible:

"I've always been interested in becoming a teacher, but I have six kids; the last time I was in a classroom was 1964. With X-CED, I could take care of my kids in my home and still get an education."

The students of the X-CED program are in the forefront of a broader group of young Native people who have begun to discover that village life and the traditions with which they were raised hold a certain value and are worthy of passing on to another generation. They feel X-CED is one tool they can use to hold their way of life together.