

Study examines rural teacher effectiveness

FAIRBANKS — Effective rural teachers are like custom tailors. They fit serious, demanding academic instruction to the individual personalities and cultural backgrounds of their students.

This is the conclusion of a new University of Alaska Fairbanks study which investigated the work of six effective rural teachers. Their stories are told in "The Inventive Mind: Portraits of Rural Alaska Teachers."

"These portraits show what fine

teaching in rural schools actually looks like," said Dr. Judith Kleinfeld, the project's director and a professor of psychology at UAF.

"We describe Austin, an English teacher, and what he did when Curtis refused to wear a hearing aid. We show how Matt, a science teacher, stood up for academic standards and survived the superintendent's wrath by knowing the political lay of the land. We show how Nora, a Native elementary school teacher, used a local poster

contest to talk to her students about alcoholism, a major health problem in her community."

Kleinfeld's co-authors were Dr. William Parrett, an associate professor of education at UAF, and Dr. G. Williamson McDiarmid, now at Michigan State University. Each wrote profiles of individual teachers studied in the Effective Rural Teachers Research Project.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the teachers and students who were involved, their names have been

changed along with any information that would identify the communities in which they taught.

In addition to different teaching philosophies and strategies, the teachers themselves represent three ethnic groups — white, black and Alaska Native, demonstrating that teaching effectiveness can cross cultural lines.

Copies of the study are available for \$10 at the Resource Center, 7th Floor Gruening Building, Rural College, UAF, Fairbanks 99775.