

Boarding Home Rural Students

By DIANNE ANDERSON

Thirty eager faces turn toward Robert Lintott, 25, each morning. Lintott is an English teacher at Dimond High School but he is much more to these particular high school aged youngsters.

Lintott teaches them English, true. He also teaches them social studies and how to get

along in an urban environment.

He talks about dictionaries and he talks about application forms and the Alaska Medical Center. He also talks about native land claims, government, and the role of the citizen.

Lintott is one of six such teachers in the Anchorage Borough School District who are working with new-to-the-city native students in a two-hour-a-day Core program. All of the students are participants in the boarding home program.

Core is not a new concept: taking several subject matters such as English, history, geography and current affairs and combining them into one course.

But this class is new in that it was especially developed for the native youngsters coming to the city with few or inadequate communications skills.

Most of the youngsters, although all of high school age, read at about fourth or fifth grade level.

"This in no way reflects on their ability, drive, potential or intelligence," Lintott says.

But lack of skill does affect their progress in other areas. Much of the problem can be attributed to their competency with the English language.

The youngsters are also very shy and withdrawn in the world at large. Anchorage and the large student body at Dimond High are sometimes overwhelming.

By way of background the state of Alaska began its boarding home program some five years ago in answer to an ever present educational problem in Alaska: lack of secondary school facilities in the bush. Alaska had traditionally sent its high school aged native children Outside to Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools.

Under the recent program, some youngsters can elect to stay in Alaska by coming to

one of the more urban areas, living with foster families, and attending an urban high school.

A number of cities and towns participate in the program but the vast majority of youngsters come to Anchorage. Of this year's 980 boarding students, Anchorage has 337 and Fairbanks has 186.

Not all of them will succeed in their new life.

It was this lack of probable success that particularly troubled Lintott last year when he first became acquainted with a few of the students.

Not to be defeated in his attempts to teach, the young, fourth year teacher began interviewing other teachers at random about their experience with boarding home kids in their classes. He found that he was not alone.

"The hard-core silence can be a bit disconcerting to any teacher," he commented while talking about the students' reserve.

Lintott then talked to the state's boarding home coordinators. He stopped by the police department. One Saturday night, note pad in hand, the teacher explored Anchorage's "Native Strip," the string of bars along several blocks of Fourth Avenue.

The section serves as a meeting place for many persons, including natives newly-arrived to the city looking for friends and relatives who came before them. Lintott met a few of his students.

It was evident that something was wrong. "We brought them into a large school and a large town, something they aren't used to. Then we said, 'sink or swim.'"

"We hadn't made any overt effort to provide for their success, and therefore we were contributing to their failure," the teacher said.

Lintott made the same state-

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ments to the faculty representative council of the Anchorage Borough Education Association. He asked the group to take a firm stand on the need for improvement in native education in Anchorage, which they did.

Apparently others had been concerned with the problem, too. Les Wells, director of secondary education for the Anchorage schools, approached Lintott to help draw up a proposal to submit to the state Department of Education for monies to develop a program to help acclimate the youngsters coming in from the bush.

The state provided some \$5,000 for teachers and counselors' salaries for several weeklong curriculum writing and orientation programs.

The new students were brought in early for a three-day intensive get-acquainted program with the teachers, counselors and fellow students. An extensive tour program was drawn up to familiarize them with the city. It was useful, the kids said, but terribly hectic.

Next year, the orientation program will be stretched out over a longer period, Lintott said.

When September came, Lintott said 30 of the newly arrived youngsters in his own Core class; there were supposed to be only 25.

Not all of the boarding home children are in the Core program, it should be noted.

"We're concentrating on the new-to-Anchorage kids rather than those returning boarding home students," Lintott said.

Those youngsters especially in need of help with communications skills get first priority. Of the 331 kids in the Anchorage boarding home program, 180 to 190 are in the special Core program.

Dimond High has two Core classes. One is taught by Lintott and the other by Mrs. Phyllis Sullivan. East's groups are directed by Mrs. Laura Bernhard and Clude Carrington and West's by Bob Marlin.

Mrs. Pat Wendt teaches the class at Wendler Junior High. The teachers were chosen on the basis of interest and ability, Lintott said.

Counselors who participated in the special orientation were Jean Portlock, East; Mrs. H.L. Burkheimer, West; Mrs. Maurina Bowles, Dimond; and Mrs. Betty Ramsey, Wendler. Mrs. Mimi Martin, boarding home consultant, and Mrs. James Cox, representing the boarding home parents, also contributed.

Mrs. Pat Darby, state home-school coordinator, believes it is a little early to evaluate the difference between the boarding home youngsters in last year's program without Core and this

year's kids with Core.

But according to talks she's had with several of the teachers, it seems to be working out extremely well, she said.

"Core provides a stepping stone for jumping into urban living," she explained.

The school district is also apparently pleased with the program. It is one of several programs the district is attempting to establish for the native student.

A Rural Transitional Center is now underway and a social studies course on "Alaska Native History and Culture" is available on the secondary level, according to Curriculum Director Wells.

Wells also noted that the Instructional Television Center is developing a 15-film series on native culture for use in the seventh grade classroom.

Lintott is especially pleased with his students' progress.

"In four days, the kids were giving oral presentations from their seats on life in their individual villages," he said.

Now they can talk before the class with little problem.

But the shyness and uncertainty is slow to dissolve outside the classroom.

"I took them to the library this morning and showed them where everything was and how to use it. I had hopes they'd each find a book or newspaper or whatever, but they all wanted very definitely to go back to their classroom after the tour was finished," Lintott commented. "They felt uncomfortable. They weren't ready to venture out into the world at large. They have a long way to go in social ease," he noted.

The youngsters may transfer out of the Core program anytime they and their counselor feel they can function adequately in a regular English or social studies class. In the meantime, of course, they are attending regular classes for the major portion of the day.

Some have already progressed to the point where they are ready to leave the class. Others have found it necessary to drop out of the boarding program itself.

One boy realized after a few weeks that the hectic pressured life in the city and large school was becoming detrimental to his health. The young man returned to his village.

"This speaks something about our life style. We who are wrapped up in this urban context have a whole lot to learn from this other culture," Lintott said.

The kids think so too. During a dictionary drill, one of the village boys told Lintott that he would send home for his Eskimo hymnal so that Lintott could study the syllables in the Eskimo tongue.