



Camps as an Environment for Science and Culture

As educators seek more effective ways to teach students, camps have emerged as successful means of sharing information and experiences that are not possible in the regular classroom setting. Camps provide young people with the opportunity to interact with Elders and instructors in an environment that naturally promotes learning. Science and tradition blend naturally in a camp away from town.

Educators often talk about using the local environment and doing more hands-on activities. Until students and teachers break out of the classroom for extended periods of time, this will be an unfulfilled vision. At camp, there is endless opportunity for hands-on, culturally relevant activities.

In the late 1990's the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative gathered a great number of people from around the State who were involved in organizing and running science and culture camps.

The meeting participants were like-minded people who have, through trial and error, planning and revising, conducted camps in almost every possible Alaskan setting. The purpose of the meeting was to allow participants to learn from each other and take careful notes from the experts so others could duplicate the successful practices and avoid the difficulties.

Among those describing their efforts were representatives from the following:

- Academy of Elders Camp
- Camp Water Juneau
- Alakanuk School
- ANSWER Camp
- AISES Camp Fairbanks (Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp)
- AISES Camp Afognak

TYPES OF CAMPS

There are three possible types of camps:

- * Camps where traditional knowledge is the primary focus.
- * Camps where western science is the primary focus.
- * Camps where the intent is to blend both western science and Alaskan tradition.

Different orientations:

Staff

When the camp staff plans the experience, learning objectives and correct behaviors can be identified and met. A camp with a common theme like "language," "tools," "art" or "travel" is more cohesive than one with fragmented parts. Camps with this approach tend to be well organized but the burden of direction is on instructors.

Students

When students bring a science project to develop, instructors become facilitators. This requires a higher level of maturity on the part of the students and greater versatility on the part of the instructors. Often there are supply issues, and trips to town are necessary to get instruments or hardware. However, when students come with enthusiasm for a personal project, motivation is high and results often impressive.

Elders

If there are enough Elders present, a dynamic unfolds as the generations interact with each other. Elders have information for which we haven't yet learned the questions. It is important to anticipate tools and materials they might need. An Elder-coordinator paces the Elders over the schedule, creating a setting where they can be most effective. Elders *do not* manage time the same way camp directors do.



Synthesis

The above three orientations can exist in any combination. A camp that is staff driven might be more like school than a summer camp. A camp that consists of only student projects has many loose ends. A camp that is totally Elder driven might necessitate putting away calendars as well as watches. A healthy synthesis is best.

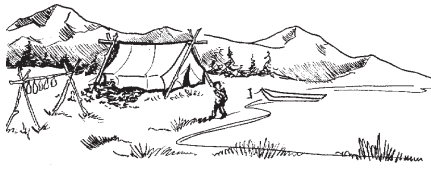
ESTABLISHING GOALS

Starting with clearly defined goals helps maintain the camp focus and final evaluation of the camp. Without clear goals, consistency in following years is impossible.

What are the goals?

- To inform/interest students in science?
- To culturally enrich students?
- To bring students and Elders together?
- To strengthen or rekindle the Native language?

Clearly define your goals and stick with them.



EVALUATION

A simple evaluation sheet will greatly help future planning.

Record suggestions for improvement right after camp while they are fresh in people's minds. Evaluate the camp in light of the stated goals. Three weeks after camp, most of the suggestions for improvement will be swallowed up by individual lifestyles.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PLANNING

Overall

Dates/location

- Study the weather patterns. Schedule camp dates according to the findings. Have contingency plans for inclement weather.
- Set camp dates to coincide with subsistence activities. (When do the fish usually run?)
- How long will the camp be? Shorter, smaller camps are better in the early learning years.
- Where will the camp be held? What location(s)? Is this location best considering the camp goals?
- What insurance constraints will you have to endure? Discovering that insurance doesn't cover boats under 32' will severely hamper a canoe trip.

Student Applications

First ask yourself:

- What age group will be served? Is the camp for

a specific type of student? Is the camp for all students?

Teaching styles differ greatly for different types of students. Students with behavior problems need more rules and structure. Motivated students function better with instructors as facilitators.

- Welcome handicap students, but ask about handicaps and medical needs ahead of time. Don't embarrass handicapped students by putting them in uncomfortable situations.
- Ask if students have medication needs that staff must supervise.
- Ask students about their personal interests.
- How will students be screened? The application process should be specific enough to determine whether a student meets the criteria or not. Sending students home for behavioral problems is expensive. Screen trouble before it arrives unless you are prepared to handle all situations.
- Should pairs of students be accepted from each village to minimize homesickness and reduce travel costs? Note: Trouble can arrive in pairs.

Logistics

* How will you prepare for medical emergencies? What transportation do you have available if something happens? Is there an EMT on staff?

* What means of communication are onsite? Telephone, CB radio, etc.?

* How long will the camp last? Will it be an overnight camp or day camp? Day camps are easier to plan, but do not seem to be as effective.

* Will you cook your own meals or hire someone? Food is an important link to contentment.

* If a bear event occurs, repercussions come from many sources. An experienced local person should be present whose judgment is respected by staff and community.

* What will be the student/instructor ratio? How many counselors will be needed? When the student/instructor ratio is low, there is less need for rules and structure. At one camp, younger students were accompanied by mothers and grandparents. It worked wonderfully, giving a real sense of family.

* How many students will be invited? It is much easier to start with select students in small numbers and increase over the years as experience grows. Usually you can count on ten to twenty percent of the students enrolled not coming because of last minute concerns.



* How much structure will there be? One camp scheduled every minute from getting up to bedding down. Another camp brought people together, scheduled three meals, and let it all happen.

* What region will the students come from? How much will travel cost? If one camp follows another, can money be saved by filling chartered planes in both directions?

* What insurance policy will cover the camp? Does it restrict water sports and activities? Some camp activities have been ruined at the last minute when the insurance regulations are discovered.

* What awards will be given at the end of camp, and on the basis of what criteria? Students need to know at the beginning what the standards are.

* Will you take many pictures? Photos not only help students reflect on the good times, they also help document activities to funding sources.

Students

* If the goal of the camp is to develop science projects, students should have several ideas in mind before coming to camp.

* Students need a checklist of clothing and supplies to bring.

* Students should have a very clear understanding of what the camp is about and how it will be conducted.

Failed expectations are the greatest source of discontent. There are few complaints when students know ahead of time what the living conditions and personal expectations are.



Staff

* If different instructors follow personal interests but do not coordinate with each other, the students receive a fragmented experience. If one instructor is teaching about northern lights, another is enthusiastic about nematodes and the Elder is trying to get the students to make a canoe, cohesion is missing. There is a difference between variety and scattered.

* It is better to have too much scheduled than not enough. Students often surprise themselves when they discover an interest in something they've never done before. Having a diversity of experiences available is always beneficial. It is easy to edit activities. It is difficult to improvise in a remote location.

It is better to start with more structure with the option of relaxing schedule and rules than imposing

structure on a situation that is out of control. When the student/instructor ratio is high, good counselors are more valuable than gold. Good female counselors are more plentiful than good male counselors. All counselors should be treated with respect, not like 24-hour-a-day baby-sitters. They are part of the team, and should be represented at all staff meetings.

* Planning meetings that are held at the camp location provide an important connection.

Tools/Materials/Equipment

* Each instructor should create a materials list for each planned activity. Every camp should have standard tools and materials. The list should develop each year. Certainly it includes tents, rope, axes, tarps, hammers, saws, and science equipment like thermometers, balances, magnifying glasses, tape measures etc.

* Several instructors have stated that a laptop computer with CD-ROM encyclopedia would greatly benefit the students who are doing research. However, the presence of a laptop computer can spoil the "flavor" of a traditional camp. At a remote camp, a computer requires a small generator and perhaps 12v batteries and inverter.



Rules

Using the local Native values as the basis for camp rules serves quite well. There is a greater sense of cooperation when camp authorities support the values that are the basis for the local lifestyle. Send them to students before camp, include them in the student agreement, and post them at the camp.

Before camp, students should sign a commitment to abstain from verbal, physical, substance, or sexual abuse, including improper touching. Curtail verbal abuse as soon as it surfaces.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE A CAMP

What are the rules? What behaviors are acceptable and which ones are not? What will the consequences be for negative behaviors? Who makes the rules? Are students involved?

How much technology will be involved or allowed? Computers? iPods? Cell phones?

What activities will be available? If it is a science camp, will there be Native dancing, beading and storytelling? Will accommodations be made for church services?



Will there be a Native language component in the camp? Immersion? Incidental?

How will you reconcile the difference between contemporary views of girls participating equally in all events with boys, and the traditional views of separation of certain tasks by gender?

Involve the Elders in this discussion.

Will junk food be allowed? If so, to what extent? Camps that forbid junk food have far fewer discipline and bedtime problems.

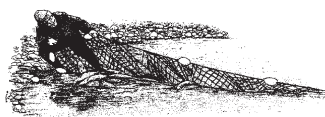
Will any kind of music be allowed? A blaring local radio station detracts from the camp experience, particularly if it is a remote camp. Do you want rap music around the campfire of a culture camp? It *has* happened. Sometimes the offenders are adults, like the cooks. This is hard to deal with after the fact. Establish the rules *ahead* of time.



Alaska Native Values

Kodiak Alutiiq

We are the descendants of the Sugpiak, the Real People. Understanding our environment and events that have shaped our lives and created the culture of our ancestors is vital for our children's cultural survival. The history of our people and our place in the world is a part of who we are today. Kodiak Alutiiq must learn and pass on to younger generations our understanding of our natural world: the sky, land, water, and the animals. As we meet the challenge of living in the 21st century, we must continue to live in honor of those things we value:



- * Our Elders
- * Our heritage language
- * Family and the kinship of our ancestors and living relatives
- * Ties to our homeland

- * A subsistence lifestyle, respectful of, and sustained by the natural world
- * Traditional arts, skills, and ingenuity
- * Faith and a spiritual life, from ancestral beliefs to the diverse faiths of today
- * Sharing: we welcome everyone
- * Sense of humor
- * Learning by doing, observing, and listening
- * Stewardship of the animals, land, sky, and waters
- * Trust
- * Our people: we are responsible for each other and ourselves.
- * Respect for self, others, and our environment is inherent in all of these values.

Yup'ik

Every Yup'ik is responsible to all other Yup'iks for survival of our cultural spirit and the values and traditions through which it survives. Through our extended family, we retain, teach, and live our Yup'ik way. With guidance and support from Elders we must teach our children Yup'ik values:



- * Love for children
- * Respect for others
- * Sharing
- * Humility
- * Hard work
- * Spirituality
- * Cooperation
- * Family roles
- * Knowledge of family tree
- * Knowledge of language
- * Hunter success
- * Domestic skills
- * Avoid conflict
- * Humor
- * Respect For nature
- * Respect For land

By the design of our Creator we were created Yup'ik in space and time; proud, for generations to come, of the values given to us by our Creator.

Athabascan

- * Self-sufficiency and hard work
- * Care and provision for the family
- * Family relations and unity
- * Love for children
- * Village cooperation and responsibility to village
- * Humor
- * Honesty and fairness
- * Sharing and caring
- * Respect for Elders and others
- * Respect for knowledge & wisdom from life experiences
- * Respect for the land and nature
- * Practice of Native traditions
- * Honoring ancestors
- * Spirituality

- * Love for Children
- * Hard Work
- * Knowledge of Family Tree
- * Avoidance of Conflict
- * Respect for Nature
- * Spirituality
- * Humor
- * Family Roles
- * Hunter Success
- * Domestic Skills
- * Humility
- * Responsibility to Tribe

Our understanding of our universe and our place in it is a belief in God and respect for all his creations.

Tlingit (from Walter Sobeloff sharing his thoughts on Native values)

- * Respect for self, and others, including Elders.
- * Remember our Native traditions, our families, sharing, loyalty, pride, and loving children
- * Responsibility
- * Truth and wise use of words
- * Care of subsistence areas, care of property
- * Reverence: “We have one great word in our culture: haa shageinyaa. This was a Great Spirit above us, and today we have translated that reverence to God.”
- * Sense of humility
- * Care of human body
- * Dignity; the Tlingit word for dignity is yan gaa duuneeek.
- * Peace; peace with the family, peace with the neighbors, peace with the others, and peace with the world of Nature

Iñupiat Ilitquasiat

Every Iñupiaq is responsible to all other Iñupiat for the survival of our cultural spirit, and the values and traditions through which it survives. Through our extended family, we retain, teach, and live our Iñupiat way. With guidance and support from Elders, we must teach our children Iñupiaq values:

- * Knowledge of Language
- * Sharing
- * Respect for Others
- * Cooperation
- * Respect for Elders



COMMUNICATION

- * Online registration makes enrollment painless. But parental permission slips must be hand carried by students.
- * Staff meetings before, during, and after camp are vital. The director should meet with the Elders, other instructors, and counselors separately and jointly.
- * Good communication is the lifeblood of camp. Before camp begins, communication with the staff, students, parents, and schools must be very clear so that responsibilities are understood. “Who, where, what, when, and how” are the key words. Reminders by e-mail or phone call are appropriate. Once school is over for the year, a major communication link is severed.
- * Students are disappointed if their expectations of camp and their experiences are very different. Communicate clearly before the camp begins. Describe what will happen, how, and why.
- * On travel days thorough communication is an absolute must. Marine radios, cell phones, or whatever it takes to have good clear communication will reduce stress tremendously. Responsible helpers are desperately needed on arrival day. Getting home is always easier.
- * Talking circles and student “family groups” are very

helpful in breaking down walls between people. Journals give insights to staff that help respond to student needs.

* Phones available in camp lessen the possibility of homesickness and gives recourse if there is an emergency. An unattended phone presents the possibility of phone abuse.

CAMP ORGANIZATION

One person must oversee the whole camp. It is folly to expect that person to also be an instructor. It just doesn't work.

Camp staff is made of the director, Elders, instructors, counselors, cooks, and transportation people. Coordination among the staff is vital to the flow of the camp. Do not assume everyone will understand his/her role or pitch in to help when there is a need. Simple job descriptions make life much easier. One person in charge of transportation is usually a great help as well.

SUCCESS FACTORS

While each camp has its own objectives and priorities; there are certain factors that contribute to positive results.

* With the presence of Elders, camps have stability, depth, content, and focus. Elders are a precious resource that cannot be programmed. They don't always enjoy good health. Often the schedule calls for five Elders and only one or two are able to attend.

* If the camp is community based, with opportunity for everyone to interact, there is great support. Some camps with road access have enjoyed the flow of community members in and out as personal schedules allowed.

* Camps that are based in traditional activities have strong support from the communities. Camps scheduled simultaneous with subsistence activities are very successful.

* Day camps draw from a broad base of talent in the community. Many instructors are able come for a few hours. Overnight camps have greater continuity. Both have advantages. A remote camp develops a pleasant rhythm after two or three days. If one of the leaders continually goes back and forth between camp and town, the rhythm is broken. He/she brings the pace of town to camp. It takes hours to recover.

* Early planning allows schools, teachers, and students enough time to respond to all camp requirements before school is over in the spring. January and February are not too early to get information to teachers and school districts.

* Weather has a tremendous effect on outdoor camps. Study local weather patterns, and plan accordingly.

* Camp location is very important. There are some activities that are natural in the woods, and others that are natural in a laboratory. The camp location should be consistent with camp goals. If it is a wilderness camp, it should be located in the wilderness. Elders are spontaneous. They need to be in their environment. Making a boat trip to get poles or basic materials hinders traditional activities. The basics need to be handy.

* If the students can roam away from the camp location, there is a greater need for chaperones.

* Some form of "show & tell" at the end of camp enhances the experience for everyone.

* Students like to take home a collection, a craft or something tangible. Memories and pictures are important, but a physical reminder of the events is significant: a basket, ulu, drum, headband etc.

* One camp required students to earn one award after returning to the village. Under the supervision of a mentor, the camper had to present to a community group what he/she learned at the camp. This made an excellent connection between the camp, the student, and the village.

* If one of the purposes of the camp is to develop science projects, boards should be available to organize and display student efforts and thought. Have a mini-science fair at the end of camp. A laptop, digital camera, and printer come in very handy if this is your goal. Hard evidence in the form of photos goes a long way in helping with the project.

* There is always a giant gap between camp and the classroom. Poster boards, photos, and videos help close that gap. If one person has the responsibility of informing classroom teachers about each project, there is much greater continuity.

FAILURE FACTORS

* Poor or late planning often leads to rounding up the camp quota a couple of days before the camp. This brings a group of participants who haven't filed applications, met requirements and don't know what to expect. They arrive with boom boxes and junk food saying they weren't informed. Once school is out, screening students and applications is most difficult.

* When students expect one type of experience and

encounter another at camp, they quickly resort to grumbling. They need to know ahead of time how much time will be spent on camp chores and compulsory activities each day.

* Bears are a constant concern in some camp locations. Expertise and strict supervision of students are necessary to prevent incidents.

* Often, camps attract “campfire Romeos,” a young man 18-21 who initially helps in transportation, firewood or other tasks... a good volunteer. Once he settles in, he gathers a bevy of young admirers around the campfire, and serves as a *constant* distraction until asked to leave. Sometimes the Romeo is a male counselor in a coed camp. Often he is the son of the cook or grandson of a participating Elder. Prevention is far more expedient than a cure.

* The worst-case scenario would be to have an injured student and no way to access medical services. This hasn't happened yet, but the possibility always exists in remote camps. Safety dominates all other concerns. An EMT on staff in very remote locations seems to be most sensible.

- Often, the greatest problem comes from a student whose parent is working at the camp, either as counselor or cook. This student feels like he/she has diplomatic immunity and special privilege. This is hard to deal with once it is in motion. The parent is often as immature as the child. Prevention of this problem comes by clear warning ahead of time that all young people obey all rules and there are no favorites.

Future

The learning curve would be flattened considerably if leaders of one camp attended camps in other locations to get ideas and a better perspective. This seldom happens because of the intensity of personal schedules, but would be most helpful.

Encouraging teacher participation during the summer is difficult, as many teachers need the few summer months to regenerate their energies. Offering college credit for recertification is an incentive. Teacher contact with Elders and their methods of instruction is always positive.

Many people have talked about winter camps, but there is no empirical data upon which to comment at this time.

CONCLUSIONS

Alaska is a huge state with a diversity of people, resources, and needs. However, there is a common theme that permeates Alaska camps. We want a healthy educational experience for our young people. This includes the integration of traditional activities with modern education. It includes professional teachers and Elders working together in camps for the benefit of the students. It includes a commitment that goes beyond funding and job descriptions. It touches the essence of why we live in this great land.