



## Yurliq Nita

# Rearden

*Kotlik, Lower Kuskokwim*

### Helping Students to Become “Real” Human Beings

Yup’ik Elder once told me, “Everybody makes mistakes even the President. We should learn from our mistakes.” When I first started teaching, 28 years ago, I made many mistakes. I tried to be a teacher like the person next door, not of my culture. I imitated her instructions following a reading curriculum step by step and disciplining my students in her style and tone of voice, and dressed like her in high heel shoes and dresses to stand tall, poised above the height of my students. Students looked up to me with frowned faces probably wondering who I was.

of their small world and make associations with their environment that sparked their ideas and thoughts. Reading, writing, and math became interesting subjects to them. I was hooked on teaching! I loved seeing my students learn and gain knowledge not to be forgotten. A Yup’ik Elder taught one class I took which became a turning point for me. In this class I learned terms in Yup’ik that I had not heard as an adult. The term “yaaqvakaniq” means, “to move forward positively or beyond, while gaining knowledge of how to be a human being.” It was an eye opener for me.

***“We learn from our Elders. We learn from our Mistakes. We learn from our Stories. We learn from Education.”***

Three months along in my teaching career I realized I was teaching out of my cultural context; no modeling, no motivation, no individualizing, and not using strategies that were natural to me. When I adjusted my style of teaching, I started to connect with my students and wonderful acts of learning advanced. I assigned leaders in student discussion groups, accepted them as they are, and extended activities created by me with lots of hands on learning centers to reinforce what I taught. My students started to cooperate, listen, and get engaged in learning. **Being who you really are is the key to teaching. I cared for their learning and I respected who and where they came from. Teaching for fun started to emerge, as I continuously assessed myself. My responsibility was to help students become learners and to embed in their minds that they are going to succeed in education.** I put lots of effort into improving my style of teaching creating curriculum relevant to rural students. When teaching relevant units, I saw bright, little eyes come alive, hands coming up when asked a question, and some speaking for the first time excited about a theme they had knowledge of. Learning helped them make sense

**Rather than stopping at our mistakes, we need to learn from them and to move forward.** I continually enjoy learning new ideas and techniques of teaching, involving the values I was raised with. When I do this, I move forward. Teachers who model learning as lifetime learners assist students and prove to them we are all learners. Teaching with enjoyment, for the love of children, facing new challenges is on-going. I enjoy the art of creativity. **I try to teach each student whether they are a young child or adult as an individual. I focus on helping students to become learners and understand their own particular needs to become life learners.** It is a joy and gratifying to see the next generation of teachers, like her using the skills and values of being “real” humans. One parent responded to a teacher when asked, “What do you want your children to learn in school?” She said, “How to be a real human being.” Real human beings succeed in life through education. Let’s all practice what we know about how best to pass on knowledge.



Educator Nomination Submitted by the  
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