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Host: Larry Bethel, EMI
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Reflection Paper

Participation in the Teacher Industry Externship has been an enlightening experience for me. I was, originally, set up to work with the refinery in North Pole, Alaska, and expected to come out of the program with a math-related project to use in my classes. After a few changes, I entered the doors of Environmental Management, Incorporated of Anchorage, Alaska with a rough idea of the company from reading their website. What unfolded was a great opportunity for me to experience not just a specific industry but many different industries within the state because of what EMI does.

Environmental Management, Inc. is a two-part operation consisting of a training segment and a consulting segment. In the training area, Larry Bethel supervises the teaching of classes ranging from fall safety to hazardous materials handling to North Slope Training Co-operative to any Alaskan Industry company needing to have its employees trained in any of the various topics they cover. For consulting, Larry Helgeson heads a team, also, built to cover a wide array of needs including lead and asbestos inspection and management, underground storage tank management, and other multi-disciplined environmental management services.

Along with the change in my placement came a change in the project I exited the program with. Instead of a math-related project for use in my classroom, I saw a chance to help my school by creating a plan to use in the freshman orientation/life-skills class we have been trying to put together. I decided this would be a more beneficial project for a couple of reasons. First, our faculty has had many discussions this year about how to

raise participation and interest in our students, especially the many who have no desire for college because of the great opportunities this state has to offer to non-college bound students. Secondly, it just seemed too perfect of a fit with the information I was gathering and how easily it could be put to use for these students, as opposed to just taking it all to create word problems or a project. Not to say that I don't plan to use my experience for the benefit of my math students, but I felt the lesson I wanted to focus on for this externship was the one directed towards the life skills class.

This externship caused me to look at my own curriculum for several reasons. I am a math teacher, focused mostly on Algebra and Pre-Algebra this year, and certainly hear the age old "when am I ever going to need this outside of this classroom" like a broken record from my many students who currently have no aspirations for college because they can make a very good income in an industry job with a high school education. By learning a little bit about various industries in the state, the jobs they offer, what those jobs require, and the downsides to those jobs, I can now, not only give the students a very good answer to that epic question, but also give them a realistic visualization of the jobs they are setting themselves up for. My hope is that this will cause them to look beyond the money to see the danger and hard work that can be required of these fields. By no means is this an attempt to turn them away from these fields, but, instead, just an attempt to give them a better education of what they are going into so they can be more prepared if they still want to pursue them. From EMI's big safety component, I learned about many of the problems faced with industry workers and employers dealing with safety and responsibility issues. This information is going to be used to help explain the need for my students to begin practicing appropriate and

thorough responsibility practices early on in life so they can become part of the student's character. This will not only make them more employable, but also keep them and those around them safe.

Larry Bethel, as a strong supporter for raising the level of education for Alaska students looking to become industry workers, offered to have one of his instructors come to our school and speak to our students about the topics mentioned in the above paragraph. My principal, of course, is highly enthusiastic about this opportunity for our school, and has requested that I keep in touch with Larry often to make sure we all stay on the same page with this idea, and to get the details worked out.

Technology is a strong factor in the success in industry jobs, and, as such, it is vital that our future generations are educated in the use of the technologies that are out there. As with many areas of life, one of the earliest and best places for our students to experience and learn about technology is in the classroom, and schools of today need to be striving for technology advancement every year. I happen to be one of the lucky educators who have a technological classroom where my students interact with technology in some fashion daily.

The most meaningful aspect of my externship was definitely the knowledge I gained about life in Alaska, as I am new to the state, that I can now pass on to my students. Another aspect that is just as meaningful, and that was more of an unexpected benefit of the externship program, was that I took several classes from EMI. By taking classes, I was put into the student seat once again, and I was able to compare and contrast my method with the instructors I was learning from. This caused me to rethink some of my practices which I plan to improve on this year.

For prospective teacher industry externship participants, the most important recommendation I can make is to keep an open mind and don't try to have everything over planned. As with my experience, you can easily find yourself in a situation very different from what you expected that can turn out to be more fulfilling than you had originally thought.