

# Running Down Status Native Education Like Patchwork Quilt

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In attempting to run down the current status of Native education in Alaska, the problems encountered were so widespread, so diffuse, so complex, the task resembled that of putting together a patchwork quilt — with-

## 'Whale Is'...

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whale stronger.

It is very true, too, even now. Then as soon as it is known that a long line of boats is formed, meaning that the whale has been killed a mile or two down at the sea, it is barely seen. But by close watch by the people of the village, it is known to all that whale has been killed and now is being towed into the shore ice. The boats are far out. It will take hours to get home with the whale.

And all the boats, sometimes 12 of them, towing with young walrus hide rope.

Every strong arm is needed to bring the whale which weighs tons to the shore.

Catching a whale used to be so great an event to Eskimos that they handle it very sacredly, and it certainly is as the whale is captured in the ocean.

And it is the very livelihood of the Eskimos. It is killed in the ocean with much courage and skill.

And soon they came to the landing at the ice shore, to the place of a certain captain who is blest with the whale.

As soon as it is known who the man is, the married women of the tribe make their way to the home of the man who caught the whale. With tears in their eyes, they walk to the home. Humble women have a right reason to go.

There, by the home of the captain, they sit on the whale bones singing some whaling songs, and at the chorus they repeat the name of the captain and the harpooner who had bravely thrown the harpoon at the great whale.

This goes on throughout the time the men are cutting the flippers and the tail flukes.

First the wife of the captain meet the boat approaching the ice shore. She is dressed in a special costume she has just for this occasion. On her hair, she is also wearing something special. She also has a dish of some food specially fixed for this time.

As the boat comes, she reaches out to give the dish of food to the harpooner as he approach the ice shore with his paddle raised up. He receives it and takes one piece, a mouthful, and passes it on to all the crew and to the captain.

When the dish comes back, the harpooner gets on the ice shore. He and the captain are wearing their special visors, kept just for this occasion.

They make their way to the captain's house with seal skin pokes, again a special thing and a special way. As they arrive, they put the pokes on the Eskimo tent that is made up like the top of a Eskimo house. This is never done at any other time, only when whales are caught.

All this time women are chanting the songs repeating the names of the captain and the harpooner who so heroically did his job.

All the time the women sang until the flipper mungtuk is cut in the light of the western sky after sunset. If this is done at all, it is done only when a whale is caught. If this is violated, some curse is likely to come.

All the other ceremonies were very sacred.

out a pattern. The result somewhat resembles what is commonly known as a "crazy quilt".

There is no dearth of well-intentioned, idealistically based, multi-funded, promising programs initiated. If anything, there are too many programs, often working at cross purposes.

What appears to be needed is a central organizing force to correlate all efforts and avoid costly, wasteful duplication. In other words, fewer dollars spent administratively and more dollars spent directly on the individual student.

Granted that no one in any of the programs would argue against such a move, how in reality is it to be accomplished? Utopian ideas have rarely seen much longevity in the history

of education.

What is far more predictable is that out of all the various proposals, schemes, political issues, and genuinely enlightened educational programs now in existence, a kind of compromise solution toward better Native education will go forward.

What is clearly evident is that it will indeed go forward and that the motivating force behind this movement must come from Native leaders.

This is not to say that the State of Alaska cannot be the central educating agency, bearing the overall burden of funding. Alaska's Native children are very much citizens of this young and vigorous state of ours and very important citizens at that.

As such, they have a right

to the finest education that the state can provide: the newest materials, the best teachers, and most excellent schools.

At the same time, they are also inheritors of a much older culture, of wisdom and arts, of music and dances, and of legends and games that pre-date the white man's entrance into the Alaska scene.

It would be a great loss if they were asked to merely exchange the one culture for another, for the white man's culture.

How much richer to retain the one while adding the other, to achieve a symbiosis of cultures, an overlapping and interweaving, forming an ever richer pattern of choices.

This the State of Alaska school system cannot provide on its own, for the State of Alaska is not the aboriginal source of this cultural material.

The source is the entire Native community, from the smallest village with its unique traditions to the powerful and new regional corporations.

These Native corporations have as awesome a responsibility to the Native young people as does the State of Alaska. Most of the leaders of the Native movement are themselves young men who are not too far removed from their own struggle for education.

With the much-awaited settlement of the land claims, the

Alaskan Native for the first time in a long, long epic has the potential to shape his own history. That one of the first concerns is to be education is not at all surprising.

What shape and in what direction Native education will go at this point is difficult to predict. Experimental programs, by their very nature, must be allowed to expand, contract, and flow. In their newness lies their full potential.

There must be an ever-productive exchange of ideas between the various agencies involved in education, an exchange without competitiveness, an exchange whose sole goal is the best possible education for every Native child.

## Senator Case Seeks War's End

"The bombing points up the essential importance of ending American involvement in Southeast Asia. We must renew our effort to... to fix a firm date for the final termination of all United States military involvement, subject only to the release of American prisoners of war.

"So long as we are involved, the bombing will continue," declared Senator Clifford P. Case of New Jersey.

## Bills 421-22-23-24...

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to hang onto their land. They did not have time to try to hang onto their culture at the same time."

"Now that their fight for land is resolved," he said, "they are finding out you can be swindled out of your culture, just as you can be swindled out of your land."

During the '60's at the University of Alaska, a series of circumstances resulting in a coming together of a fortuitous group of people: Dr. Krauss, Irene Reed, Martha Teeluk, and Paschal Afcan.

Together they are responsible for the Eskimo Language Workshop, which has done pioneer work in bi-lingual education, is standardizing the orthography or method of writing Eskimo, and is producing books for use in schools where the children's first language is Eskimo.

The Yupik dialect of the Eskimo language had first priority in their work because of several factors. It was the most viable language still extant and numerically represented the largest group of people in which the language was in everyday use and was the primary language of the people.

It is a shocking fact that no classes in the public schools in this language were established until the fall of 1970. No books in Eskimo were in use in the schools.

Dr. Krauss's library contains several books produced by the Russians for their Eskimo people, a much smaller population than Alaska's, as far back as 1930 and beyond. The illustrations and the language are Eskimo.

"They put us to shame," said Dr. Krauss.

It is not enough to concentrate on the Yupik language, Dr. Krauss affirms. There remains much work to be done on Pacific Yupik, St. Lawrence Yupik, Inupiat, Aleut, all the Athapaskan languages, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian languages.

There are villages where an appreciable portion of the youngest children Athapaskan: Nikolai, Northway, Tetlin, Arc-

tic Village, Venetie, Birch Creek, and some at Ft. Yukon.

The State Operated Schools are about to begin work in bi-lingual education in these villages with the help of Bible translator-linguists in these areas: Ray Collins in McGrath, Richard Mueller in Ft. Yukon, and Paul Milanowski in Northway.

Gary Holthaus, director of bi-lingual education for SOS, is responsible for the vigorous development of the state's bi-lingual education program.

Only the villages of Venetie and Tetlin are not yet served by these programs, as they are still on the BIA school system.

The Senate bill makes this provision:

"A state operated school which is attended by at least 15 pupils whose primary language is other than English, shall have at least one teacher who is fluent in the Native language of the area where the school is located. Written and other educational material, where language is a factor shall be presented in the language native to the area."

The other portion of the bill seeks to establish an Alaskan Native Language Center at the University of Alaska for the documentation, preservation, study, and cultivation of the languages of the Native people of Alaska.

Schools now spend thousands of dollars teaching Alaskan children to speak French, German, and Spanish, at the same time, allowing the Native languages of Alaska to die out.

Paschal Afcan of the Eskimo Language Workshop, wrote the following in support of the bills:

"I could merely remind you of the past history of our Alaskan Natives: they have been neglected in almost every way conceivable, in terms of quality education, socially and culturally, especially with respect to their languages and equal opportunity in many other areas."

The bills now pending are a long overdue effort to end this historic neglect, and to persevere for all Alaskans, the human speech of its earliest inhabitants.

## Carter on Education...

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of education, to getting that particular concept of education moving. Up to now, we have not had time to look at the broad spectrum of education."

At AFN, Gene Murry Larsen heads up a staff on education with nine field people who travel throughout rural Alaska.

"We are hoping," said Carter, "to use these same people to outreach at all levels of education in Alaska from Head Start to high school."

"If we could have utilized this board for broad purposes of education, we would have taken over all Head Start training in rural Alaska."

On the subject of Mr. Friese and the State Operated Schools, Mr. Carter said: "Stan Friese is relatively new and I don't think he has his hand on the pulse yet."

"The AFN attempts to work politically to get the right people on the boards."

Mr. Carter then discussed the

flow of funds that would be incoming from the Land Claims Settlement.

"The majority of our working capital will be coming in the first five years of the Act."

The AFN expended a great deal of careful planning on an analysis of the scheduling of manpower resources to protect the integrity of the fund, so that at the point where the flow slows down, proper business investments will have been made to maintain the economic level. "You have to have viable business enterprises," said Carter, "and in order to run a business, you have to have trained people."

He drew a large square underlying all the notations he had made on the page as he talked. In this square, he wrote one word in very large letters: EDUCATION.

"And that's where you have to begin," he said.

## Trials, Tribulations...

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was the best tool for cleaning the corners.)

The school is built on a hill away from the main village and on windy nights when the ice is bare, the De Marco's sometimes have to crawl home on their hands and knees.

Mike is also in charge of maintaining the school light plant which can be quite a responsibility in the winter above the Arctic Circle. If a part gives out he must wait for delivery by the twice weekly mail plane which can't fly in bad weather.

Often, when the part comes, it's the wrong one because the home office of State Operated Schools have a confusing record of the type of machinery installed at the Pass.

As for the teaching job itself, the De Marco's find some of their material as useless as the generator parts they get by mistake.

The Anaktuvuk children speak both English and Inupiat but are fluent in neither. They need special teaching aids. Their teachers know such materials are being developed but finding out where to obtain them isn't easy.

Communications with the State Operated Schools' main office in Anchorage is bad. From correspondence one gets the impression that some staffers there have never seen a bush school or an Eskimo village and believe that what works for Southern California schools should apply to all.

It's difficult for bush teachers to communicate with each other too. When De Marco requested leave to attend a workshop for village teachers in Tanana he

was informed by the Anchorage office he would have to make the trip on his own time and money, which he did.

In addition, there are village problems that need attention. Not many people at Anaktuvuk speak English as a first language and the De Marco's are often called on to help untangle the red tape that materializes when the village deals with outside government agencies.

The teachers believe the villagers should make their own decisions and they try not to meddle, but they want to help where needed and they're needed quite often.

One project they're working on currently is establishment of a junior high school so Anaktuvuk teenagers won't have to travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to continue their education.

The project has been stalled in the Anchorage office for some time but the village of Kivalina successfully sued the state for a similar program and the De Marco's think Anaktuvuk's prospects look good.

And they're hopeful their own teaching program will improve. Teachers of State Operated Schools are planning to go on strike if their demands for better teaching materials are not met and despite the problems of communication, they're well-organized.

The De Marcos plan to keep plugging for improvements and are confident enough in the future so that they're negotiating to buy a sod house in the village and become well established full-time residents.