

Cooperation necessary for quality education

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Editor's Note: Because so many people attended the workshop on working with villages in school classes, many people at the workshop, including this writer, had to listen "from around a corner." Because of that, the names of people speaking were impossible to obtain. We apologize to the many people speaking that we were unable to give them credit for their valuable comments.

Village leaders and village school teachers and officials must be willing to work together to make the school program meaningful to students.

That is the message coming from one of many workshops in bilingual-bicultural education conferences being held in Anchorage last week.

Hundreds of school teachers, aides and principals from throughout the state gathered for the eighth annual conference on education for people of many cultures and different languages.

As almost 100 persons crammed into a two-room workshop room, Richard Nelson told them that all the resources available in a com-

munity should be used in the schools so that students are more interested in what is being taught.

But as the two hour talk wore on, participants began to agree that the attitude of school and village people toward one another were of vital importance to that effort and the quality of education.

One Alaska Native teacher said that one problem facing teachers and villagers is the fact that there often is mistrust for the school workers toward the villagers and the same mistrust of the school workers from the villagers.

One woman told of a teacher in her village who taught for a year and spent most of his time in his home compound. "He was afraid of the Indians," she said as many people nodded in agreement and laughed.

One woman told the others that new teachers in the Bush have problems because they often spend time in their houses or only with other teachers instead of going to local events and becoming involved as they might if they were in a town with mainly people of their own ethnic background.

Nelson said "newer teachers



Members of the Yupik Dancers offered one of several cultural entertainment presentations at the education conference.

are spending time separate from their community or with other teachers. How meaningful it would be and how important it is to spend time with the elders, adults in the com-

munity and to get an idea of what is there."

He said that teachers must get involved in the community "to take themselves out of the authority roles and become learners in certain context," so they can become more aware of the lives of their students. That knowledge can only benefit teachers and students, he said.

Nelson told the group that teachers from a dominant society must use local resources to make the dominant society's educational offerings more appealing to the minority culture students.

He told teachers to look around them to see what there is in their villages that can be applied to the educational lesson being taught.

One example mentioned by a teacher was dog mushing. Students can use dog mushing to study transportation, the economics of dog mushing, history of dog mushing and even stories written about dog mushing.

Teachers were told to use the human resources of each community . . . to talk to the elders of the community outside the school and to ask them to come to schools to help teach and to add the rich knowledge of local people to the school lesson.

Nelson said he also thinks each school should gather everything it can about the school and the region around it so teachers, and villagers can look at it and think about the area they live in.

But, he also told teachers that they shouldn't believe everything that is in the books.

One teacher said others should go to community members to seek information and help with lessons but another woman said she couldn't get that help from her community because of mistrust. Nelson said that teachers shouldn't let themselves be turned away from the learning benefits to be gained if they are told "no" once or twice.

"People in the villages are used to helping if you ask them when they need help," said one man who later told the group that they must also learn to "bite your tongue and shut up. We white folks don't like to wait for an answer. We have to hear talking all the time . . . so when we ask a question we're more likely to answer it ourselves while the person is thinking of an answer . . . If you can learn to shut up and wait you'll get smart."

Other comments made during the workshop included discussions on different kinds (Continued on Page Five)

Teachers told to be flexible

(Continued from Page Four)
of knowledge.

"Science is not the only way of looking at the world," said Nelson.

He said when he first started teaching, he tended to teach a scientific belief as fact. Then he met a man who asked him how he knew something was fact.

The topic he was talking about was the scientific belief that the Bering Straits land bridge is responsible for Alaska Natives coming to this continent from Asia. But a man in his class asked, "How do you know that is true? My people have other ideas about

how we got here."

Nelson said he never taught that one belief was the absolute correct one after that.

"Bring in the village people and their knowledge and ideas. The fact that so many people are being excluded from school knowledge is a tragedy.

He said that schools should teach people to think and give them information about what is being considered by different groups of peoples today.

One man asked why American society is "so possessed with the idea that someone must possess only one body of knowledge to be thought educated. It's how a person thinks

that is education."

Nelson ended his talk with words of encouragement for the teachers to remember the importance of Native cultures, knowledge and traditions.

"Native traditions in Alaska are by far and away our most valuable treasures. We may have oil but that will eventually run out. What won't run out is the knowledge and traditions of Native people. If we accept that knowledge and allow the knowledge of traditions into the schools, we can play a key part in allowing the Alaska Native peoples to keep their traditions."