

In Yuk and English—

Bilingual Classes Click

COLLEGE, Alaska—In a one-story yellow school building at Nunapitchuk in Southwestern Alaska an inscription in Eskimo designates "The Eskimo Language Room".

Inside, since early last fall, 15 or 16 Eskimo children, not quite ready for the first grade, have been learning a newly developed alphabet for Eskimos speaking the Yuk (YOOK) dialect.

They give visitors dramatized presentations of "Goldilocksaaq Pingayun—Ilu Taqukaat" (Goldilocks and the Three Bears) and enthusiastically sing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" in the same dialect, one of the two most widely spoken by Alaskan Eskimos.

All of these children, as well as some in similar schools of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.) in the lower Kuskokwim River area, come from homes where Eskimo is the first language and English is a foreign tongue.

Two Eskimo teachers handle the Eskimo class work at Nunapitchuk in cooperation with but not constant observation by a white instructor. Pairs of Native teachers work similarly at Akiachak and Napakiak schools and at Bethel Elementary school, which is operated by the state.

For Marie Nick, one of the Native teachers, this is a memorable switch. For she remembers the day when, as a pupil in the same village, she had to go without lunch as punishment for uttering an Eskimo word on the school ground.

In the same school at Nunapitchuk the beginning Eskimo pupils spend about an hour a day being indoctrinated in English by a Caucasian teacher, Betty Perala. She sings, "Do you know what time is it?" and they pipe the reply, "It's time for English now." During this hour no word of Eskimo

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may be spoken.

Instead of "kavireliq" they talk of red. Instead of "Uivik" they speak of December. In place of "Aipirin" they mention Tuesday.

They are following this routine in a five-year pilot project in bilingual education, introduced this year in the three BIA schools and in the one at Bethel, run by the state.

The University of Alaska is a key partner in the University-federal-state program endorsed last spring by the U.S. Office of Education through the Federal Bilingual Education Act and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The University not only is training Native teachers to conduct the Eskimo language classes but its linguistics faculty has developed an Eskimo grammar and the University is making it possible for students to win a bachelor of arts degree with a minor in Eskimo.

Dr. Bruce R. Gordon, head of the department of linguistics and foreign languages, remarked that the University of Alaska is the only one in the country listed by a Modern Language Association survey as teaching Eskimo.

The catalog for the 1971-72 academic year will include not only elementary Eskimo in the Yuk dialect but elementary Inupiaq Eskimo, the dialect of Natives in the Arctic; intermediate Eskimo with linguistic analysis of folklore material; a course in the preparation of teaching materials in Eskimo; a special topics course and an Eskimo language workshop.

The alphabet consists of 18 of the symbols, plus the apostrophe, borrowed from the English alphabet.

Miss Irene Reed, who has been influential in developing a flourishing Eskimo curriculum, has eight Natives, mostly students working part time, on the workshop payroll.

Paschal Afcan, an Eskimo writer, artist and sculptor, based here, has written a number of the 40 workshop books for children, either published or headed for the printer, some of them illustrated in cartoon style by Andrew Chikoyak of the village of Tununak off the southwest coast.

"The Eskimos are remarkably creative people," Miss Reed observed. "The books, of course, are all culturally relevant but we deliberately do not exclude the outside world entirely. The Eskimos see it in the movies all the time anyway."

But the children's books, with titles such as "The Lazy Mouse", essentially deal with subjects familiar to the Eskimos. In "The Little Red Hen" there are ptarmigans, crows and shrews.

Miss Reed looks forward not only to the establishment of a major in Eskimo at the Univer-

sity, but "of a program of Eskimo studies linked with anthropology".

On her return recently from an inspection trip to Nunapitchuk she described the bilingual program's first four months as a success and said that 10 trainees now were enrolled at the University of Alaska receiving instruction as bilingual teacher aides in state-operated schools in the Bristol Bay area in the Southwest.

The program is to be initiated next fall in the villages of Togiak, Twin Hills, Manokotak, Aleknagik and Kongiganok. Villages themselves vote on the question of instituting bilingual studies.

"We intend that Eskimo will continue throughout the Natives' lives as a meaningful language," Miss Reed said. "Some people have felt that the only goal of bilingual education should be to make these people as efficient as possible in English. I disagree. I don't think that should be the only goal. Competency in English does not have to be accomplished at the sacrifice of Eskimo."

The workshop has started publication of the first Yupik (Yuk) periodical—Naaqsugenarqelriit (Things Worth Reading)—with contributions of prose and poetry submitted increasingly by villagers themselves.

Dr. Michael E. Krauss, known as the "father" of Eskimo studies at the University of Alaska, instituted them in 1961. A visiting Japanese scholar, Osahito Miyaoaka, who came in 1967, undertook with Miss Reed the co-operative teaching of the Eskimo courses.

While they taught, they, with Dr. Krauss and Mr. Afcan, developed the Yupik (Yuk) classroom grammar as a basis for college-level classroom instruction for those learning Yuk as a second language.

"It took some doing," Miss Reed recalled. "When teachers elsewhere in the country are teaching grammar they take a book off the shelves. We have had to write our own text and often were hard put to it to keep up with the classwork, Eskimo being a very difficult language."

Dr. Krauss, who has degrees from Harvard, Chicago, Columbia, Western Reserve, the University of Paris, and several other institutions, noted that Soviet Russia was far ahead of this country in developing textbooks for minority groups.

He said texts had been printed in Eskimo in Siberia since 1932.

"The United States and Canada," he added, "are 30 to 40 years behind the Soviets in their policy, in spite of the fact that the Eskimos constitute a vastly larger minority in the northern regions of America than of Siberia."