

Three-Day Bilingual Education Conference

By DONN LISTON

Alaska Native Foundation

ANCHORAGE—Native people have a right to their language and a three-day conference here is examining bilingual programs presently in effect in the state and considering future possibilities.

Sponsored by the Alaska Department of Education, the

conference was held Feb. 19, 20 and 21 at the Gold Rush Hotel. Representatives from a number of agencies and communities were in attendance.

"It would seem a perfectly natural right of Native people to expect their children to be taught in their own language," said Pat O'Rourke, head of the Kuskokwim

Community College. The fact that there hasn't been a major uproar among Natives before now is due, I think, to their courtesy."

A panel discussion of present programs was held the first day of the conference, moderated by Sam Kito, who is presently the elected president of the Fairbanks North Star Borough School Board

and president of the Fairbanks Native Association. FNA is suing the school district for its lack of bilingual programs.

Dave Lanigan, representing the Alaska State-Operated School System spoke first of his agency's need for more bilingual instructors and materials. At present, ASOSS has 51 bilingual

programs and it is hoping to add another 10 during the 1976 school year.

Irene Reed of the University of Alaska's Yupik Language Workshop, explained her program, which has been developing materials and teaching instructors in bilingual education

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since 1970.

Presently bilingual curriculums are in Yupik and are institutionalized for grades 1-3 in all of the Bristol Bay and Bethel area schools and efforts are being made to expand the program into high schools, according to Reed.

Dick Mueller of the Summer Institute of Linguistics told the group that his organization deals primarily with developing alphabets and literacy and providing technical assistance for translating. SIL is a non-profit agency with each linguist supported individually.

"We're an organization of practical linguists," Mueller said. "We're primarily interested in providing technical assistance and linguistical information."

Dr. Mike Krauss of the Alaska Native Language Center explained that his organization was established by a 1972 act of the Alaska legislature. ALC is charged with the responsibility of scientifically studying, documenting and cultivating all Alaska Native languages.

"We have a very large scientific responsibility not necessarily related to bilingual education," Krauss said.

As a secondary function of ALC, bilingual teachers are trained and materials developed "but we cannot hope to do all we are expected to do with our budget although we do care about all Alaska Native languages," Krauss said.

ALC also receives a \$60,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities which is used by Alaska Native writers who wish to write in their own language. There are now 10 writers in the program, authorized to write anything they wish.

Sheldon Jackson College is training and assisting bilingual education teachers, according to Vesta Dominicks, who works in the effort. The college is presently assisting nine Southeast village teachers, providing instruction materials, conducting language workshops and providing teacher aides to assist primary bilingual teachers.

Susan Murphy of the Alaska Native Education Board explained that ANEB is a corporation with representatives from all 12 Native non-profit regional associations. While ANEB is concerned with all aspects of Native education in the state, its primary emphasis so far has been in bilingual teacher training and materials development.

Emil Kowalczyk, of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, explained that BIA presently has 51 day schools and a number of other Native education programs in Alaska. So far BIA has an estimated \$2 million invested in

bilingual-bicultural programs in Alaska.

Bill Vaudrin, president of the North Slope Borough University discussed the importance of bilingual education as it relates to the Native lifestyle and culture. Although the new university only started three weeks ago, 90 to 100 students are enrolled in what Vaudrin calls "the most important steps in education to be taken in Alaska in the past year."

O'Rourke explained that the Kuskokwim Community College has been active in teaching assistant teachers through an associate degree program expected to be expanded to a bachelor degree program soon. The college is also involved in adult literacy in 57 communities in the Bethel area.