

Other Voices—

Bi-Lingual Education Stressed

Charles N. Zellers, the new BIA head of education is for bi-lingual education, according to a report from Washington. Mr. Zellers was a U.S. Office of Education official, who was named to replace Dr. Carl L. Marburger.

His feeling about bi-lingualism fits in with the present trend on the Navajo reservation. At the Rough

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"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." - Voltaire

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Rock Demonstration School, an experiment is going on in teaching both the Navajo language and the English language. No evaluation has been made, but presumably the experiment is working out satisfactorily. It has not been practical to teach Navajo in the Bureau schools but speaking the language, in certain situations, is not now discouraged. The Navajo language has always been used to some extent outside the classroom because this is the language in which the Navajo student feels most comfortable.

The new education commissioner was also quoted as saying he is for teaching minority groups in their own culture. He said he hopes to translate the inner city problems of Negroes and Puerto Ricans, with which he is familiar, to the Indian classrooms. "Schools should be run with a stress on the culture the kids understand," he said. "We shouldn't be transplanting youngsters into a middle-class American situation. Schools then bear no relationship to home." In effect, he was apparently saying that instructional materials should be oriented to the culture of the student.

Efforts are underway at this time to assemble Navajo culture materials for use in the schools. The Navajo Area of the Bureau of Indian Affairs has contracted with the University of New Mexico for a series of Navajo social studies units. At Rough Rock, work is well underway in compiling Navajo legends in book form for elementary school students, and the ONEO cultural center hopes to publish next year a book for high school students. The goal in all of these endeavors is to acquaint the student with his history and customs.

Recognition by the dominant society of the good in Navajo culture is long overdue. The Navajo has much in his culture that needs to be preserved and passed on, not only to his own children, but to all Americans. The remaining medicine men and storytellers are being called upon in this worthwhile effort to preserve the beauty and wisdom in Navajo culture. The effort may already be too late to preserve some of it.

As the past is remembered, the march must continue into the future. It should be kept in mind that most of the residents of the Navajo reservation are young people, and that half the population is under the age of 17. It is toward these people that educational efforts must be directed, and the main thrust must be on English, rather than Navajo. If these young people are to compete in the modern world, they must learn to speak English better than their parents and grandparents.

"Remember the past, take advantage of the present and prepare for the future." That is the ideal to which Navajo youth must aspire.

-The NAVAJO TIMES