

# Education seminar offers discussion of Native issues

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The Fourth National Circumpolar Seminar on Education (originally funded by the Ford Foundation in 1975) was held at Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territory, Canada, June 28 to July 2.

Other seminars have been held in Alaska, Greenland and Norway to discuss common educational problems.

This seminar was a little different. In addition to offering an opportunity for local Native residents to discuss problems and possible solutions, the ministers of education or their representatives from the Northwest Territory, Yukon Territory, Quebec, Labrador/Newfoundland, Greenland and the commissioner of education

from Alaska met to review problems and solutions from a government perspective.

This government perspective will certainly be influenced by local Native perspectives.

A series of principles seems to have survived this seminar, and the other three seminars held over the last 10 years.

These principles are:

- The cultures of the indigenous populations of the North are important and must be maintained.

- The school's culture must reflect the communities served and motivate young men and women to work toward a meaningful role in life as adults.

- Community members — leaders, parents, elders — must become involved in the educational process through

high expectations and support for students, monitoring their progress in school, influencing the curriculum and how students are evaluated and creating a local climate that supports schooling.

- The world in which Northern peoples live is constantly changing and schools must be prepared to accommodate that change.

- School curriculum must provide a comprehensive program that allows for a student's personal best in academic, physical, social/cultural, psychological and traditional development.

- Students must be allowed choices between vocational/technical, business or professional careers and understand how each of those relates to rural/subsistence economies.

- Governments that have imposed themselves upon aboriginal populations must be flexible and responsive to the special needs of those populations and provide real opportunities for people to contribute to the society in which they live.

The next seminar is currently scheduled to be held in Fairbanks in 1989 at the University of Alaska campus if things go well for the planners and some funding help is identified. I would anticipate that the State Department of Education, the University of Alaska system and Native communities and professionals that are interested will play a role in planning and implementing the seminar.

As commissioner of education, I certainly look forward to a serious international discussion on the education of Natives of the North.