

'Bilingual Is Beautiful'-Barrow Develops Bilingual Education

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The sign outside the gymnasium that the junior high students use reads PIVRAUGVIK and the one above the lunchroom reads NIGIVIK.

In the hallway outside the main office a BILINGUAL IS BEAUTIFUL poster dominates the area. In one classroom the designation could be INNUPIATUN UKAGLUTIN UVANI: We speak Inupiat here.

Finally, bilingual education has come to Barrow, Alaska.

During the past three months in Barrow, 141 Eskimo junior high school students have been learning to read and write their native language—Inupiat Eskimo.

Classrooms in the Barrow junior high school are marked with Eskimo signs denoting the activity in each room. In a few weeks the flavor of the school is changing in a village where the vast majority has always been bilingual.

With 2100 residents, Barrow, the northernmost community in the United States, is also its

largest Eskimo village. Almost 700 students attend the local school. All but 24 of them are Eskimo. Almost overwhelmingly they speak and/or understand the Inupiat dialect.

Last year, the Barrow Junior High School, run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, applied for a Title I grant to introduce Eskimo literacy to its students. Prior testing showed that they were overwhelmingly ignorant of methods which had been developed to write their language and of literature written in Eskimo.

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After delays in starting, bilingual education became a reality in Barrow in October. Mrs. Martha Aiken and Mrs. Alice Hopson, both residents of the community who have spoken Eskimo all their lives and are familiar with the modern method of writing the language, serve as teachers.

According to the project proposal, purpose of the literacy program is not only to teach students how to read and write their native language but to upgrade their self image.

"This deficiency (illiteracy in Eskimo) reinforces a lack of positive self-image and difficulties in the affective domain by generating disrespect and embarrassment regarding primary language/culture and by placing an inordinate emphasis on English as the singular means of intelligent and meaningful communication and expression," Barrow junior high school principal Dave Fauske wrote in the project proposal for the literacy program.

Fauske, a young teacher who has been in Barrow for several years, is continually looking for means to make the school curriculum more relevant to Eskimo students.

Eskimo classes are one method, he feels of making the student feel the school is more relevant to the community.

Using a video tape camera provided through Title I funds, Fauske plans to film interviews with local Eskimo leaders, craftsmen and elders to present to the students in their Eskimo classes.

The video tape also provides a record of significant public events. Highlights of a recent hearing on local self government on the North Slope will be presented to students in their social studies classes.

Unlike the comprehensive bilingual language program in the Yukon Kuskokwim region (which speaks Yupik Eskimo), the Barrow program is more of a "stopgap" program.

By junior high school, students are already bilingual. They read and write and speak English. Most Barrow residents speak English and by the time they reach seventh grade, many youngsters have forgotten much of the Eskimo language of their

childhood.

"They are forgetting the old Eskimo words," explained teacher Martha Aiken in describing her students. "Now they seem to be getting back to it."

Mrs. Aiken's brother, James Naveak, teaches Inupiat class at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks where it was recently introduced as a language choice.

"We feel that we need to have seminars for those interested in teaching Eskimo language," Naveak reported on the problems.

At present, plans are to provide in-service training in Barrow for teachers in the Eskimo language program. Through this, University experts plan to introduce the teachers to teaching methods.

Both Mrs. Aiken and Mrs. Hopson have known the fairly new method of writing Inupiat for some years. Materials in this language are of recent origin.

In 1969, Dr. Roy Ahmaogak and Donald Webster of the Summer Institute of Linguistics published Inupiat Ukalaŋi—an introductory Eskimo reader.

Mrs. Hopson is Dr. Ahmaogak's daughter and has been familiar with the writing in which her father and Dr. Webster translated the New Testament for several years.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics has also produced an Inupiat Dictionary, an Inupiat New Testament and several pamphlets of stories.

Among the Eskimo activities being introduced at the Barrow school are Inupiat Christmas activities. This month, the Eskimo teachers are teaching fifth grade students to sight read Eskimo so that they can sing Eskimo Christmas caroles.

Other Eskimo activities will include poems, stories and perhaps an Inupiat school newspaper to be produced by students.

Members of the community at Barrow seem to be enthusiastic over the Eskimo program, though many feel it is a little to late. During coming months, the community will find out whether a local borough will gain control of the schools—and introduce further bilingual and culture programs.

Meanwhile, the bilingual education has come to Barrow.