

A VCP area pioneered bilingual education

By CATHY COLLIER

Bilingual education in the Kuskokwim area dates back to the fall of 1969. A bilingual planning conference was held in Anchorage in December of that year. During the summer of 1970 the first training for

teachers and aides was held at the University of Alaska under the direction of the Alaska Rural School Project. This training was instrumental in launching the bilingual elementary program in three village schools in the Kuskokwim area.

The initial development of these programs was funded by ESEA Title I and some BIA funds. The three schools which started the bilingual elementary education program in 1970 on an experimental basis were Akiachak, Nunapitchuk, and

Napakiak. By 1976, 15 schools in the Kuskokwim area were operating bilingual elementary education programs. These villages were: Akiachak, Nunapitchuk, Napakiak, Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Quinhagak, Tuntutuliak, Eek, Kwigillingok, Kwethluk, Tununak, Chefornak, Nighmute, Kongiganak, Atmauthluak. The continued funding of these programs has been through ESEA Title I, BIA, and REAA.

The activity which cannot be provided through Title I is career oriented training. This training was initially provided through workshops and summer school sessions at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and Kuskokwim Community College. After receiving funding through ESEA Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act, Kuskokwim Community College began the delivery of regular teacher education courses in January 1976.

Yup'ik Teachers

Since the Yup'ik teachers are the mainstay of the bilingual elementary Program, it is not possible for them to attend college courses on campus during the school year. The future of bilingual education in this area depends upon these Yup'ik teachers eventually earning their college degree and being hired as certified bilingual elementary teachers. As the bilingual teachers could not come to the campus Kuskokwim Community College took the campus to the students.

Two field instructors fly to each of the villages in the Title VII project every two weeks to spend one to two days working with their college students. In spring 1976, this included all 15 villages and a third traveller. Due to a reduction in funds in fall 1976 only 8 villages could continue to be served and the staff was reduced to two travellers.

Title VII Instructors

The two Kuskokwim Community College instructors travelling to deliver bilingual degree courses under the Title VII program are:

Catherine Collier, who has a B.A. degree in Anthropology from Reed College, a B.S. degree in Elementary Education and a Master's degree in Education (Bilingual/Bicultural Curriculum Development) from Utah State University. Ms. Collier has 6 years experience in cross-cultural elementary education with the Apache and Navajo Tribes. This is her second year with the Kuskokwim Community College program.

Fred Bigjim, an Inupiat from Nome and former AMU professor, has a B.Ed. in Secondary Education from the University of Alaska and a Master's degree in Education (Administration) from Harvard University. Mr. Bigjim has also attended law school and has been an active member on several state and national education boards including the Board of Regents for Haskell Indian Junior College and the Native Instructors Caucus of Kuskokwim Community College.

Associate Degrees

The courses which have been delivered in this program since January 1976 include: English, mathematics, speech, psychology, history, linguistics, and education courses. Several of the students (bilingual teachers and aides) will be completing their Associate of Arts Degree in bilingual education at the end of summer school and most will be finished by the end of Fall semester 1977. The A.A. marks the halfway point for these students in their pursuit of teacher certification. Upon completion of their A.A. degree the students will continue working toward their B.Ed. Degree and teacher certification by taking upper division course work.

The students in this program are highly motivated and concerned about their education and the continued development of bilingual education programs in the Kuskokwim area. Degree oriented education in bilingual instruction is imperative for continued high quality delivery

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of bilingual elementary programs and their expansion to all predominantly Yup'ik speaking communities in this region. The 30 bilingual education students taking courses from Kuskokwim Community College are eminently competent in both their academic performance and their instructional expertise in the bilingual classrooms. These students are the preeminent stars in the future of bilingual education in the Kuskokwim AVCP region.