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Barrow today: Education

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Series: ATS-1 Educational Satellite Project Tapes

Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

Tape begins with drumming and singing. Barrow Today talks about education in Barrow and about coexistence of the two cultures.

The speaker [Harold Kavelook] asks what they have been doing in schools to teach their Native children, what they are teaching and what their goal is. The children are taught Western, non-Native culture which involves knowing English language which allows people to compete with English speaking world. Oral expression and communication are very important skills in selling one's ideas to other people.

The narrator interprets that for Harold Kavelook, supervisor of the primary school and a Barrow Native, English language is important as it allows one to compete with dominant culture. Barrow's classrooms recreate the typical atmosphere of Lower-48 classrooms in which teachers stress the English language and introduce the children to a middle-class Caucasian culture. Standardized Aptitude Tests are used in charting students' progress.

The narrator explains the structure of the radio program: An old villager will describe the difficulties he had in getting an education and after that, the acting principal explains the school, after which the junior high students talk about their classes.

3:12 The old villager tells that when he was a little boy, he went to school "the few" [for not many years?] because his adopted parents took him away from

school. He didn't learn very well. They have lots of teachers right now, possibly over 30 [?].

Jim Hughes introduces himself and says he's an acting principal in Barrow and he has been here since 1966. Later he became the elementary [school] supervisor and since the death of their former supervisor in December, he's been the acting principal. They have grades from kindergarten to 9th and 700 students of which 20 are non-Native. Their school is divided into 3 or 4 sections: kindergarten, the old school with grades 3-5, a primary school with grades 1 and 2, and a junior-high with grades 6-9.

At 5:07 Patsy Neakok who's a 9th grader. He's taking PE and is on the tumbling team, junior basketball league, and senior league. Earl Kanayurak is a 9th grader too. He's taking Inupiat, drafting, math and so on.

The narrator says that Barrow people are taking an active role in education today. The school board is predominantly Native and the community people participate in a Cultural Enrichment class. Teaching aides from villages work with teachers in the classroom.

Joe Upicksoun, the president of the Arctic Slope Native Association, expresses his ideas in education: He says that the Eskimo would like to have education to assume roles of leadership and become attorneys for their own people. The only way to have a melting pot is to have lots of Native people in College so they can mix with Caucasians and start understanding and respecting each other's cultures. There must be mutual understanding and respect and that's the only way to get along.

Another man's voice says he'd like to see more of their own people involved in teaching and education. To be good at helping the people one wants to help, one has to know them intimately and there is no better person to know their people [the Inupiat] than another one of their people. They'd go forward in helping their people if they had more Native teachers.

8:17 Edward Hopson introduces himself and says that he's been encouraged by almost all the principals "to get on board" since the school was built. He sometimes explains things in Inupiat and also uses English, about 50-50. The

children seem to be at ease when Edward speaks to them in Eskimo, explaining how to use tools and do things.

Frederic James Goo [sp? Maybe Gau?] is the reading consultant and 89-10 program director for Barrow. Most of their aides are Inupiat speakers, with 2 that are not. One of the great things [about having an aide] is that after the teacher explains the lesson, a number of students understand and the aides help the students who don't get it by explaining it in Inupiat. This has a two-fold purpose: It helps the learner to understand in their own language what the teacher is trying to get across and it teaches the concept to the aides who have to translate it. In many cases the aides who are high schoolers have gotten excited about education.

10:55 The interviewer [Roger McPherson] is talking with two high school persons who begin by telling that Inupiat is the study of Eskimo languages. The speaker says he speaks Inupiat already, but he doesn't know all the Eskimo words. They learn to spell and write in the class. Roger McPherson asks if the young 7th or 8th-graders have the same class and the speaker says he thinks so.

David Fausky [sp?] is a teacher in Barrow Junior High School and says that they are involved in an informal and modest program of Eskimo literacy. What they have done the previous year in 9th grade is learning the alphabet, learning how to spell, read and write. If they continue the program, they will need people who are verbally fluent and literate in the language to make the class into a success. Things are happening fast in Barrow and it's difficult for parents and the school board to make decisions like that. On one hand, they have an honest desire to protect their culture, but on the other, they have a desire to identify with dominant culture and to get skills that make a person successful in it. People are afraid that if they spend time with Eskimo [language], English will suffer and it's difficult to convey that usually the opposite is true.

13:28 A man's voice says that the schools are getting too soft with the kids. It wasn't that soft when he went to school and he wasn't even allowed to speak any Eskimo during school. Nowadays they are even teaching Eskimo.

The narrator's voice says that new programs in bilingual education and classes on Eskimo culture, as well as increased youth of Inupiat in the classrooms, indicate the new direction the Barrow schools are taking. Improvements in the regular

curriculum are slow but initiatives such as the Alaska Reader have been developed. Need for English fluency still remains as chief importance. Education in Barrow doesn't deny the need for Native cultures in education and the coexistence of the two cultures is bringing new relevance to the classrooms.

Music. An announcer says that the program was one of the two programs about education in Barrow and of coexistence of two cultures. Produced by Roger and Karen McPherson with the support of Alaska Rural School Project, Department of Education and KUAC of University of Alaska. The voices heard were the ones of Harold Kavelook; Jim Hughes, Students, Joe Upicksoun, Edward Hopson, Frederic Goo [sp? Maybe Soo?], David Falsky [sp?] and Nelson Ahvakana. The music was performed by Pete Sovalik's Dance Group.

Announcer is Jeff Kennedy. [Break in the recording.]

At 15:31 another program of Barrow Today begins with the theme music. This episode's name is Barrow Today: Secondary Education – Crying All the Time. Barrow parents feel that a regional high school is needed so that their children don't have to go into boarding schools or homes in Alaska and Oklahoma. The students are away for 9 months a year which causes emotional problems. Many students see high school as an escape from small-town life, but many drop out to return home to Barrow.

A student describes his situation: He has been away from home for 9 months but now he really likes to spend time with his parents because he hasn't had time to do so except for in summer.

A parent offers a solution: He says local, regional high school might not be better education but it would be better for most families if they could stay together. He had to send 6 of his kids to high school and now they have all graduated from different places. They didn't want to do it and most locals would like to have a regional high school. There's lots of homesickness, but they don't have an alternative if they want their children to have an education.

At 18:52 Roger McPherson, the interviewer, asks someone what made him to go into high school in Anchorage. He says he had some friends there and he wanted to

stay with them and to learn to know them a little bit better. He had some problems with his education there, especially with English. He wasn't very good at it so he went to remedial meetings and caught up. Remedial meetings helped him a lot. The interviewer asks how long he was in Anchorage and he tells he was there for 9 months. Last fall he was going back there, but they [it is unclear who he is talking about] couldn't find a home for him so he was sent back to Barrow.

The interviewer asks if he likes to be back to Barrow again. He says he doesn't really because it's so dead at night. Every time he goes out he sees the same faces again. He doesn't like it, but he likes his job and enjoys doing it.

Roger McPherson talks with a couple of boys: Another one of them says he'll be going to school to [Unclear] if there is enough room. The interviewer asks if he is smart enough and he says he's not quite. He's going to come back to Barrow after that. Another boy says he's coming back as well.

Roger asks someone what he is going to major in and he says swimming because he likes swimming and being in water.

21:02 The problems of the present boarding school system are many: loss of contact with family and village, emotional stresses, mismanaged boarding homes and out-of-date boarding schools. An interviewee says that it's not good for the children to be sent away like that. One loses contact with the children who spend 4 years in high school and are pretty big when they come home. It's not good.

Another man says they could set up a student exchange program for seniors and even get children from the Lower-48 to come to Barrow. Transportation is difficult and even going to Fairbanks costs a lot. Now they have close to 200 students away from Barrow.

Yet another man tells that Barrow doesn't have a high school and that once the students are high school age they can choose between attending a boarding home program or go to one of the boarding schools. In the past, most of the students went outside of Alaska to Chemawa, Oregon and Chilocco, Oklahoma. Last year they ran into a problem of having no space which meant that a large number of Alaska Native students had no choice but to attend a school at Mount Edgecombe. This year they hope to alleviate the problem by getting their applications in much

sooner than has been done in the past. This year students can either attend to Mount Edgecombe or a boarding home program.

At 24:25 John Nusunginga says he enjoyed his school in Barrow so much that he wanted to go back while he was going to school in Anchorage.

The narrator says that Barrow envisions a high school that is located on the lagoon near town. Such a high school is placed first in village priorities, but BIA hasn't provided plans yet.

The narrator says that Jack Chenowith, Barrow City Manager, will describe the kind of a high school Barrow people would like to have. Jack says that BIA is responsible for education in the community. The old school houses were meant to house 450 students but presently the enrollment is 750 and the classrooms have spilled over into one old building that has been condemned by State and into a church hall that is provided by Presbyterian Church for the kindergarten. Certain numbers of classrooms are "tacked onto the existing facility." What the community wants is to have a full high school, taking into account grades from 9-12. That would alleviate the crowdedness of the present facility and provide education in Barrow for those students who want to go into 12th grade while staying with their families and friends.

Such a high school needs same features than high schools in any other community: laboratories, secretarial and vocational equipment for training in those fields, swimming pool and recreation facilities for the community and class rooms. The city has provided some 50 acres for the future school.

27:10 the interviewer asks a person if he is going to go to Mount Edgecombe next year to become a welder. He says he will, and when asked, he says he'll maybe be homesick. Another boy says he will be crying all the time.

[Theme music.] Barrow Today was written and produced by Roger and Karen McPherson with the support of Alaska Rural School's project, Department of Education and KUAC of the University of Alaska. Voices in the recording were Bart Asogeak, Edward Hopson, Johnny Nusunginga, teenagers, Jim Hughes and Jack Chenowith. Music was by Pete Sovalik's dance group.

[End of the recording.]