

88-49-105

Third annual bilingual conference held in Anchorage, Alaska in 1977

Moses Wassillie, interviewer

Series: Potlatch series

Moses Wassillie said Catherine Hurley talked about pride, individuality and cooperation in bilingual education. Catherine Hurley said the exciting results of bilingual-bicultural education has been the involvement of parents, the community and the development of the curriculum and the use of qualified experts to teach. There is the result which all can share of the preservation of many cultures which are a part of their heritage through art, music, dance, writing and oral history. They need the fullest cooperation to make bilingual bicultural education succeed. She said don't be concerned with who is running the program but that the program exists. She said they should do what is best for the children. She was born in Alaska and has raised her children in Alaska. She wants everyone to have the feeling of pride that she has in being an Alaskan. She wants to encourage any program that will promote pride for every child.

Moses Wassillie said retired Judge Nora Guinn from Bethel talked about the role she played in bilingual education and the importance of keeping the lines of communication open between Alaskans. Nora Guinn said she is assuming that everyone is doing their part in education for their children and themselves. Whether formal or informal education never quits. She said it is important to begin to communicate. She would like to see people recognizing each other. She talked about her part in the bilingual program through the court system. She was the first and only lady judge. Her part in the program has been hard. She said they have no words in the Native language that is just one word for justice, guilty or not guilty. They use other words. She has held courses in small villages in her own language. She wanted to encourage everyone to learn their language and learn the English language. She said it doesn't matter how old you are, you can learn and communicate.

Moses Wassillie said William Lee, a lawyer from the lower forty-eight and has worked with Indian tribes, spoke about the impact of Alaska's efforts in bilingual education and what some tribes are doing in determining their own programs. William Lee said a tribe has been studied about fifty or sixty years. They finally have an alphabet to write their own language. It took people from the tribe to go to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for technical support. He said some people in Alaska are very lucky in terms of linguistic support that they are receiving. Communities that didn't receive support before are getting it now. In Montana there is legislation that teachers must prove they know something about Indians before working in an Indian school. New Mexico is setting up a Department of Indian Education. The BIA is implementing direct funding into BIA schools. They will implement bilingual education in schools where appropriate. When the Alaska Native Language Center was formed it had national impact which was funded by state money. Alaska has become a test case for a lot of issues in program development for Indian and Native people. The training that bilingual school programs give to community members is not only linguistic and cultural training it is also political training. That political

training has tremendous of impact in the long run for Indian affairs and Native affairs in this country.

Song by Stephen Stills

Moses Wassillie said Dr. Walter Soboleff talked about how his mother taught her brothers to read and write English. Dr. Soboleff said education in the early day was not the pattern for his people. They were hunters and fishermen. They didn't have to go to a store for food and clothing. The learned part of the U.S. was already going strong and they were just beginning. He said he will talk about different types of education. He said there is a customary way of doing things in your particular culture. They learned from their parents, uncles and relatives. They would listen and do things the way they did it. Parents shared a great deal of this learning through oral tradition. The parents are the first teachers. He talked about formal education. He said his uncle was very good at playing hookie. His mother remembered her three years of schooling. She taught her brothers how to spell, write and read. His uncle started buying books about mechanical engineering and was one of the first Tlingit Indians to operate diesel engineering.

Moses Wassillie said the Dr. Soboleff continued on to describe how the Native groups accepted the education system and the revitalization of Native culture. Dr. Soboleff said throughout history when a society is threatened with destruction of its way of life then revitalization movements come alive. He said it is happening in Alaska. They accepted the American way of life initially through the school system. The new concept of education was superimposed over the Native culture. The Native Alaskan was always known for their accommodation. Church missionaries were advising Natives about the benefit of education. When he attended college his own people wanted him to stay at home and marry.

Song by Buffy Sainte-Marie

Moses Wassillie said Dr. Soboleff talked about the need to provide first rate facilities for the Native student and the efforts of the church and school in assimilative acculturation. Dr. Soboleff said as they have been moving from one culture to another some interesting things have happened. In some parts the church and school were determined to have people walk away from their traditional way of life. They were trying to make them regular American type people, leaving their language and culture. All at once their people woke up. He remembers Jack Gamble who had trunks full of ceremonial dance blankets. They had been packed away for decades. The culture started to come out. They started to sing and dance. There is a word for that in Tlingit that meant a new breath. He said the revival was not received well by educators and church leaders. He said if the Native culture was so inferior then they would not have survived for 25,000 years. He said it has been hard for many people to make a change to the new way of life. He talked about the Native culture accepting third and fourth-class facilities and now needing top rate local programs.