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Joe Coolidge, John Andrew and Nicholas talk about teaching Native languages to Natives

Steve Jacobsen is interviewed by Ann Nicolai

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

Joe Coolidge said he worked for the Kuskokwim Community College in Bethel. Under the Eskimo Language Workshop he teaches Yupik literacy and Spoken Yupik for non-speakers. In the literacy course he teaches Yupiks how to read and write their own language. They have to learn the symbols to their sounds. Non-speakers have to learn all the sounds of the Yupik language in the classroom. He demonstrates with active words or objects. At the high school he was teaching Yupik writing. The high school students who are speakers have to learn the writing system and read their own language. In the translating course the high school students have to learn the translating techniques. Under the Eskimo Language Workshop he proofreads a lot of the Eskimo or Yupik literacy which were done by various workers at the workshop. He translates some of the English stories into Yupik and translates some of the traditional stories into English. A problem he sees with the non-Natives or non-speakers is having to learn the sounds of the language such as guttural sounds. They learn the terms and vocabulary. He said one of the interesting things he finds at the high school is teaching writing in the different dialects.

Song by a member of a tribe from Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Joe Coolidge was asked if he thinks other Natives should learn their language. Joe Coolidge said he would highly recommend it because the languages and some of the cultural heritage are disappearing. When they learn to write the language with their symbols they will find a lot of the words will come back to them. The children in the bilingual schools were learning more rapidly. Irene Reid and Jim McDermott said the results are in favor of the bilingual schools in the villages. In Bethel they took an examination for two languages. They are learning more about customs and their culture in the bilingual program. They learn the Yupik and the Westerners culture.

Six Eskimo songs from Barrow, Alaska.

John Andrew talked about his work as the production assistant at Kuskokwim Community College. He is Yupik from the Bethel area. He is doing illustrations of stories and printing books for the school at St. Marys. He said a lot of people are losing their culture. They aren't talking their language sometimes because they are used to speaking English.

Jeff Kennedy encouraged people to share Native music with Potlatch.

Nicholas David said he prints material for children in Yupik and some in English. Children can learn to read and write their own language with the new system.

Johnny Bull song by Eskimos from Hudson Bay.

Ann Nicolai asked Steve Jacobsen how he got to learn Yupik. Steve Jacobsen said he was a VISTA volunteer in Marshall and wanted to learn Yupik. He enrolled at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in a Yupik class. He speaks English at home and occasionally speaks in Yupik. Ann asked Steve if he thinks Alaska Natives should speak their Native tongue. Steve said it is a choice of learning only English and learning a Native language and English together. Ann asked if non-Natives should learn a Native language. Steve said yes because there is a large group that speaks Eskimo and you may find only a few white people that speak Eskimo. Ann asked if the Native Language Center will be teaching more languages in the future. Steve said he hoped so but there were no plans at this time. He talked about the classes that are offered presently. Ann said recently the Fairbanks Native Association sued the Fairbanks North Star Borough because they were not offering instruction in their own language and she asked if he could foresee having instruction in their own languages. Steve said maybe not entirely in their own language, but maybe partly. Ann asked about evaluating the state's efforts educating Native children in their own language. Steve said there is a beginning, but they could do a lot better. In some villages there are no bilingual programs and the children come to school only speaking their Native language. He thinks the state could expand their program. He said every Native language now has at least some program in it. He said the state is trying.

Peter LaForge sings "I'm an Indian."