

Traditional Game Documentation as a Socio-Cultural Development: The Elders' Cultural Workshop as A Community Cultural Self-Discovery and Celebration

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There is a great deal of truth to one of the “in-jokes” in the Canadian North which paraphrases the Hollywood quip, “Who’s your psychiatrist?” In the North it’s “Who’s your anthropologist?” Actually, settlements have been frequently visited by scientists of all types, by oil development public relations and information gathering crews, by royal commissions “trying to find out what the people want.” Resistance and resentment toward southern researchers has reached an all-time high and it was considered a stroke of good fortune when the chief investigator, Dr. Scott, was invited by the Northern Games Association and the Committee for Original People’s Entitlement (COPE) to function in a community development role in order to create workshops that would bring together the elders of the Loucheux (Kutchin), the Hare, and Bear people. Four workshops were created (Fort McPherson, Fort Franklin, Baker Lake, and Inuvik) which ranged in duration from two to ten days.

The key concept was that the researcher work “behind the scenes” as much as possible so that “the people” would feel as much in control of the situation as possible. Where guidance or assistance was requested, it was given.

Under the financial sponsorship of New Horizons, a program of the Federal Department of National Health and Welfare, COPE, the Department of Education (N.W.T.) and the Department of Recreation (N.W.T.), elders from areas surrounding the workshop locale were flown in, housed and provided with all of the necessary materials for the creation of games, survival equipment, drums, and so forth. These groups also supplied films, video-tapes, recorders and technical assistance.

The actual workshop was a period of REMEMBERINGS! The participants recalled what they did during that period of their life before the massive infusion of southern white culture and technology. Individuals remembered games, dances, songs, legends, myths, hunting and trapping techniques that predated the steel trap - and they taught them to others; young and old alike. They shared church services in their own language for religion is very important to these people. In the evening they danced to the drum or participated in the timeless stick gambling. Mornings were given over to personal visiting for the blood ties were strong among the participants although they might not have seen each other for many years.

In the end an attempt was made to leave an on-going organization that would continue to generate a sharing of ideas, history, future problem solutions. One elder and one youth from each village was named to be the contact unit and to facilitate the creation of small workshops of the type they had experienced.

Were the workshops successful? Success has many yardsticks. For the people, the immediate participation was of immeasurable value: elders were able to talk with the youth in an environment of understanding and application; old friends were re-united; a significant part of the culture of these groups was captured on film and tape. On the other hand, nothing like this may occur again and if one of the aims was to generate an on-going program, perhaps this wasn't achieved. But it was a "Remembering" and a highly successful one. Sport historians are reminded that they can have a significant role in facilitating oral histories which have a very important impact on the people involved.