Bilingual Meet Aims 'Natural Resource'

Spanish in Texas and French in Louisiana are becoming recognized as a vast new “natural resource” to be capitalized on and nurtured just as jealously as oil and sulphur resources. Participants in a French-Acadian Conference held Saturday at La Maison Acadienne Francaise on the USL campus were told by Dr. Edwin Hindman of Austin, Tex., executive director, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

The conference, sponsored by the Louisiana State Department of Education in conjunction with USL and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, was presided over by Miss Audrey Babinewa, Baton Rouge, Foreign Language Division, State Department of Education.

On a theme of “Bilingualism: The Key to Inter-Cultural Understanding,” the conference met with enthusiastic response from more than 150 area teachers and administrators and guest speakers from Texas attended. Dr. Clyde L. Rouge, USL president, emphasized the tremendous influence of USL faculty and educational development, in preserving the French language in this area, in having made the French House possible in developing the Louisiana Colonial Records Project, in providing an NDEA Summer Institute in French to prepare teachers of the area to teach French in the elementary grades, and in working towards a French Institute at USL.

"In Hearts and Minds" Dr. T. J. Arceneaux, dean, College of Agriculture, added that the College of Agriculture was consistently being asked upon by the government to supply personnel who knew agriculture and who could also speak French.

Dr. Joel L. Fletcher, retired USL president and currently director of International Education, State Department of Education, represented State Supt. William S. Dodd at the conference.

"I would like to see USL recognized, as it has long been, as the outstanding undergraduate school in French instruction in this Nation," Fletcher said. He assured the participants that Supt. Dodd would do all that was in his power to see that the bilingual program receives full support.

"Mr. Dodd's interest in such a program was the main reason why Louisiana was one of the four states included in the Gulf Regional Project for International Education, when it was organized under the auspices of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools," Fletcher said.

Texas, Alabama and Tennessee are the other states in the project. The Gulf Regional Project for International Education, Fletcher said, "is an outgrowth of the work of the Latin American Committee of the Southern Association which has served as the accrediting agency for the American or Bilingual Schools in Latin America since 1928.

"Strengthening Ties" He said the project has as its objective the strengthening of ties made by the Southern Association through the years with Latin American countries.

Funds are made available to develop state leaders for establishing special services which are working towards making contributions to state educational agencies.

The Texas State Department Education has a project, Fletcher said, aimed at creating interest and understanding of the cultures and languages of the people of the Latin American countries. He pointed out that there are also Louisiana pilot programs at Tech, in Canada. This, he said, is an educational program in which the children are not only being taught language but also substantive material in mathematics, social studies and science.

"This substantive approach to teaching boys and girls whose second language is English is enjoying such success in our program," Hindman said. "I think the question is who will be disadvantaged in ten years?" He predicted that bilingual children will have the advantage over those knowing only one language.

Dr. Elizabeth Ott, director of International Education, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, gave a lecture-demonstration of processes, techniques and methods being used in the Texas program.

Dr. Ott served also as moderator of the panel "Implications for Louisiana's Educational and Cultural Programs" and stated that the state project is one which is of importance and that his language must not be denied general acceptance.

Other Panelists

Other panelists included Dr. Raymond Rodgers, USL associate professor of political science, who pointed out the close relationship between Canada and Louisiana and the interest of certain state agencies in Louisiana with their counterparts in Canada.

Anthony Mayeur, Lake Charles, French professor McNeese College, was a panelist and Alan Babinewa, chairman, Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Acadian Heritage, detailed the work of this committee.

Also speaking on the support role of their institutions were Gillia Ledet, Baton Rouge, State Department of Education; Miss Aurelia Babinewa, Baton Rouge, State Department of Education; Foreign Languages; Dr. Edwin Hindman, Austin, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Miss Virginia Koening, USL assistant professor of French and director of the 1968 summer NDEA Institute in French.

Miss Koening said that the USL French Institute this summer would allow for 45 participants and would be aimed at preparing teachers to teach French on the elementary school level.

Another feature of the conference was a demonstration by Miss Babinewa of a lesson conducted in French and English using third-grade students of the Cankton Elementary School who have never had formal training in French. The students answered questions put to them in French or English.

They also demonstrated their bilingual ability by singing folk songs in French.