Indian and Eskimo Affairs Program
Education and Cultural Development

Opikawak

They Grow Up

Programs for Indian
Elementary School Students
in Canada

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reface

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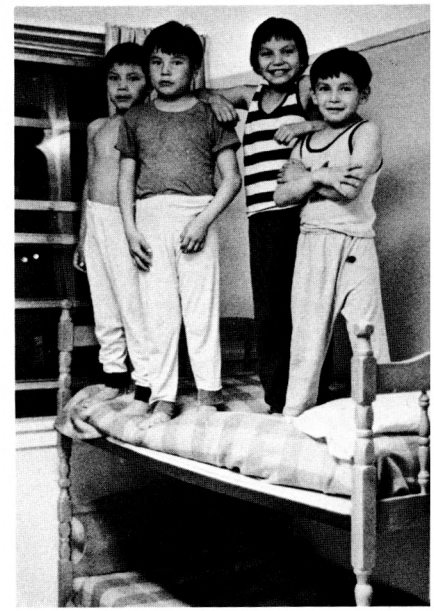
The material for this book was gathered by Esther Hoiland and Millie Hubbert, Classroom Consultants for DINA, and by Magda Seydegart, Curriculum Specialist, Toronto. The photographs are by Frederik Stevenson, free lance photographer, Ottawa, and were taken in schools attended by Indian children in Canada. We would like to thank the students and staff of the various schools, both Provincial and Federal, who cooperated so enthusiastically in the development of this booklet.

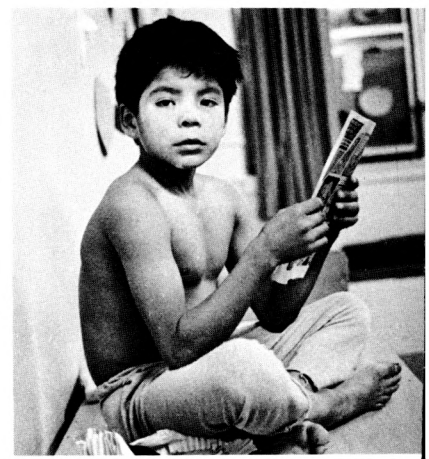
Background

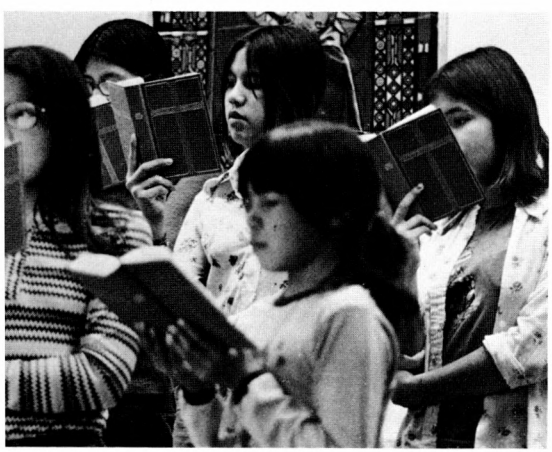
The first schools to be established in what is now Canada were at Trois-Rivières in 1616 and Tadoussac, 1618. They were for Indian children. It was not until 1620 that the first school for white children was opened in Quebec City.

From these earliest days to the advent of Confederation, the education of Indian children was primarily the responsibility of church —or church-sponsored organizations, with a gradual involvement by civic and later governmental (Upper and Lower Canada) authorities. Much of it was on an "integrated" (Indian and white children being taught together) basis.

Following Confederation in 1867, the British North America Act was interpreted to mean that the education of the native people of Canada was the responsibility of the federal government. Along with the establishment of the first Indian Affairs Branch in 1873, the passing of the Indian Act in 1876 and the cycle of treaty negotiations between 1871-1921, the federal government assumed financial responsibility for the costs of educating "status" or registered Indian children. However, the educational program followed by the children up until the 1950's was largely determined by the various religious organizations who operated the schools under contract with the government. These were, for the most part, residential schools, although a few Indian Day Schools were established on the reserves.







Some residential schools formerly operated by the various religious organizations under contract with the federal government, have been transformed into student residences. MacKay Residence in Dauphin, Manitoba provides a home for students from primary to high school. Because the residence has no schooling facilities, the students attend the four provincially-operated schools in the town.

Federal Schools

During the 1940s' the Government embarked on a building program and by the late 1950's almost all of the Indian reserves in Canada had a Federal Day School in operation for students enrolled in the primary and elementary grades.

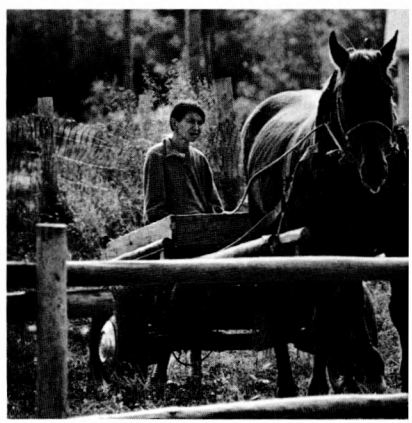
Because of the migrant nature of many Indian bands, however, a day school on the reserve was not always an effective answer to educational problems.

When dog teams were used for transportation, it was necessary for families to spend most of the winter in the bush hunting and trapping. The wife had an important role to play, particularly in the cleaning and dressing of the furs, and it was therefore necessary for her to accompany her husband on the trapline. To serve these families, the churches had very early established residential schools where Indian children could live and be educated while their parents were away. A few of these still exist and for the most part are operated by the federal government in cooperation with Indian Bands.

In areas where the people gathered in large numbers during the summer, seasonal schools operated from approximately late May until the end of September while the children were available.

With the almost universal use of the snowmobile, the traditional pattern has changed. Now a family can remain in the settlement throughout the year while the father makes periodic trips out to visit the trapline, covering as much ground with the snowmobile in a few days as would have taken weeks or months with a dog team. Furs can be brought back to be cleaned and dressed at home, and children can remain in the settlement to attend school. In this way day schools are now possible in greatly increased numbers in even the most remote settlements.

With the movement away from residential schools and the lessening of Church involvement in educational programs, Indian children are now offered the same basic curriculum in their reserve schools that all other Canadian children receive. Each school attended by Indian children follows the main outline of the curriculum of the province in which the school is situated, whether it is a Federal, Provincial or parochial school.



Getting there: Although federal school children are offered the same basic curri ulum as their provincial counterparts, oftentimes getting there is somewhat uni

The methods seen here vary from traditi bus or foot in Standoff and Coté, to hors drawn cart, and train in Montreal Lake a Moosonee, and finally to a daily boat tri for students at Island Lake, Manitoba.

Joint Schools

Confederation established the education of non-Indian children as the responsibility of the provinces. As families moved farther west and north, the provinces followed their progress with schools, sometimes built in close proximity to the federal schools for Indian children. With the improvement of roads and transportation, some Indian bands requested that their reserve school be closed, and that their children be admitted to the nearest provincial school. Accordingly, the federal government then entered into joint school agreements for the admittance of Indian children into provincial institutions, agreeing to pay the required fees and certain capital costs if additional rooms were required in the provincial schools.

This gradual transfer of Indian children from federal reserve schools was a continuous process for many years, as Indian parents made their wishes known. In keeping with the diversity of the country, a wide variety of situations exists. Some reserves have requested the transfer of senior grades only into the provincial system, leaving the primary and intermediate classes on the reserve. Some have begun with the senior grades and later requested that both intermediate and primary children be admitted. With the establishment of Nursery and Kindergarten classes on reserves, some bands have agreed to the busing of all except these beginning groups into the provincial system.

At the same time, other Bands have decided to retain all their children in the federal system until they reach the high school level. Some are located too far from provincial facilities to make commuting feasible. Others, such as the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, prefer to maintain their own complete elementary system on the reserve, even though provincial schools are within easy reach. Often these reserves are ones in which the Native parents are active in the educational process, and where many of the teachers are of Native origin. With increasing guidance from the Band, the federal government builds the schools, hires the teachers, supervises instruction, and provides all books, materials and supplies directly.

Federal reserve schools are separate entities, but they have a close affiliation with the provincial system for obvious reasons. When the Indian child leaves the reserve school he usually enters a provincial educational institution. In addition, federal teachers, both Indian and non-Indian, are provincially trained and certified. While they have their own professional development programs, they often take part in the in-service sessions and other gatherings organized for provincial people.

Federal teachers are encouraged to take specialized courses in Native studies with the fees paid by federal authorities and as specialists in Indian education and Native studies they are frequently called upon to assist in provincially operated schools, especially those where Indian children are enrolled.

Oneida reserve near London, Ontario is one of the reserves which has transferred the senior grades into the provincial system, and maintained primary and intermediate classes on the reserve. People from the community take an active role in the day-to-day operation of the school and the education of the children.

One such active role is the recruitment of mothers and aunts and grandmothers to organize a class at a nearby re-constructed Iroquois village, where the children can hear stories and legends.

Such expeditions contribute to lively post-outing discussion on the relative merits of the past and present.

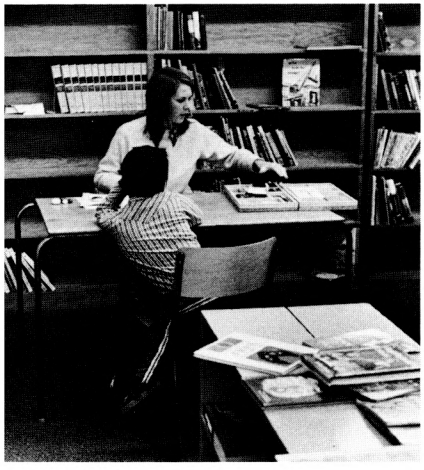
Buildings

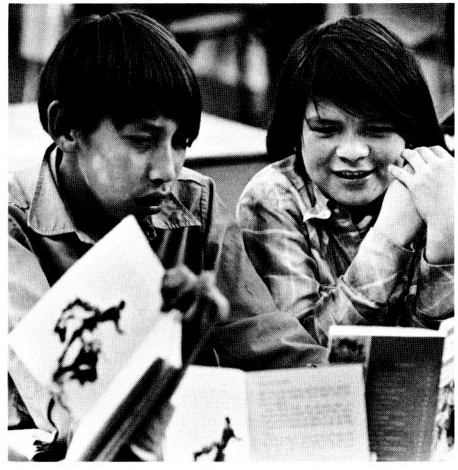
In remote areas, small one-room schools still exist. These are rapidly being replaced by modern buildings in accordance with the most recent research and design. To accommodate changing conditions, wall arrangements tend to be flexible and adaptable to a wide variety of situations; furniture is bright and attractive. All new schools have running water and electricity; some have auditoriums and gymnasiums. More and more frequently, the community uses the facilities of the school for adult education, Band training and other activities.

Supplies

While at one time a single text book was purchased for each subject, now most schools operate a central library and stock it with a wide variety of books, magazines, and audio visual materials for study, research and recreation. Particular attention is paid to materials for Native studies, much of it of recent origin and written and produced by Indian people themselves. Where a local community is fortunate enough to have a member with a particular artistic talent, he may be engaged to provide murals and other visual representation of the Native background in the schools. In this way legendary animals, birds and figures brighten the walls of such schools as Sandy Lake in Northern Ontario and Pontiac School on Manitoulin Island.

As in provincial schools, where once a book and a pencil were considered ample scholastic equipment, Indian schools are now enriched by tape recorders, typewriters, slide projectors, record players, and television sets where they are within reach of programs. Where the schools are too remote for video reception, they may have portable players that can replay programs obtained on tape, and many have video cameras for producing their own programs. With the cooperation of the National Film Board and provincial Departments of Education, movies have long been common teaching aids in federal and other remote schools.





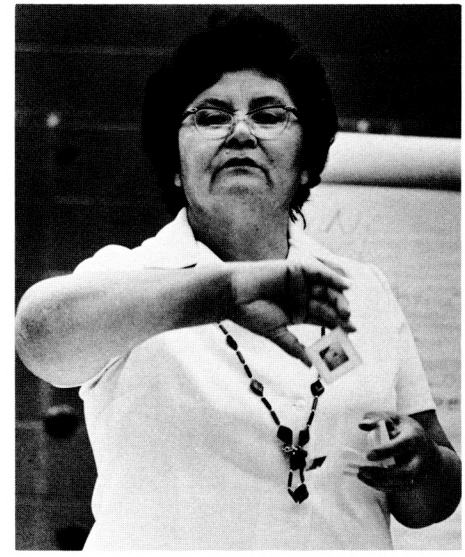
Although the one-room school house is disappearing and replaced by modern buildings, it lives on in spirit in these open areas in Standoff and Morley. A central, large open area library in the basement at Morley provides space for gathering large groups, but there are still corners for personal and intensive attention, and group reading sessions. The new school in Standoff has moveable walls, which allow for either open or closed classroom sessions, as the situation warrants.

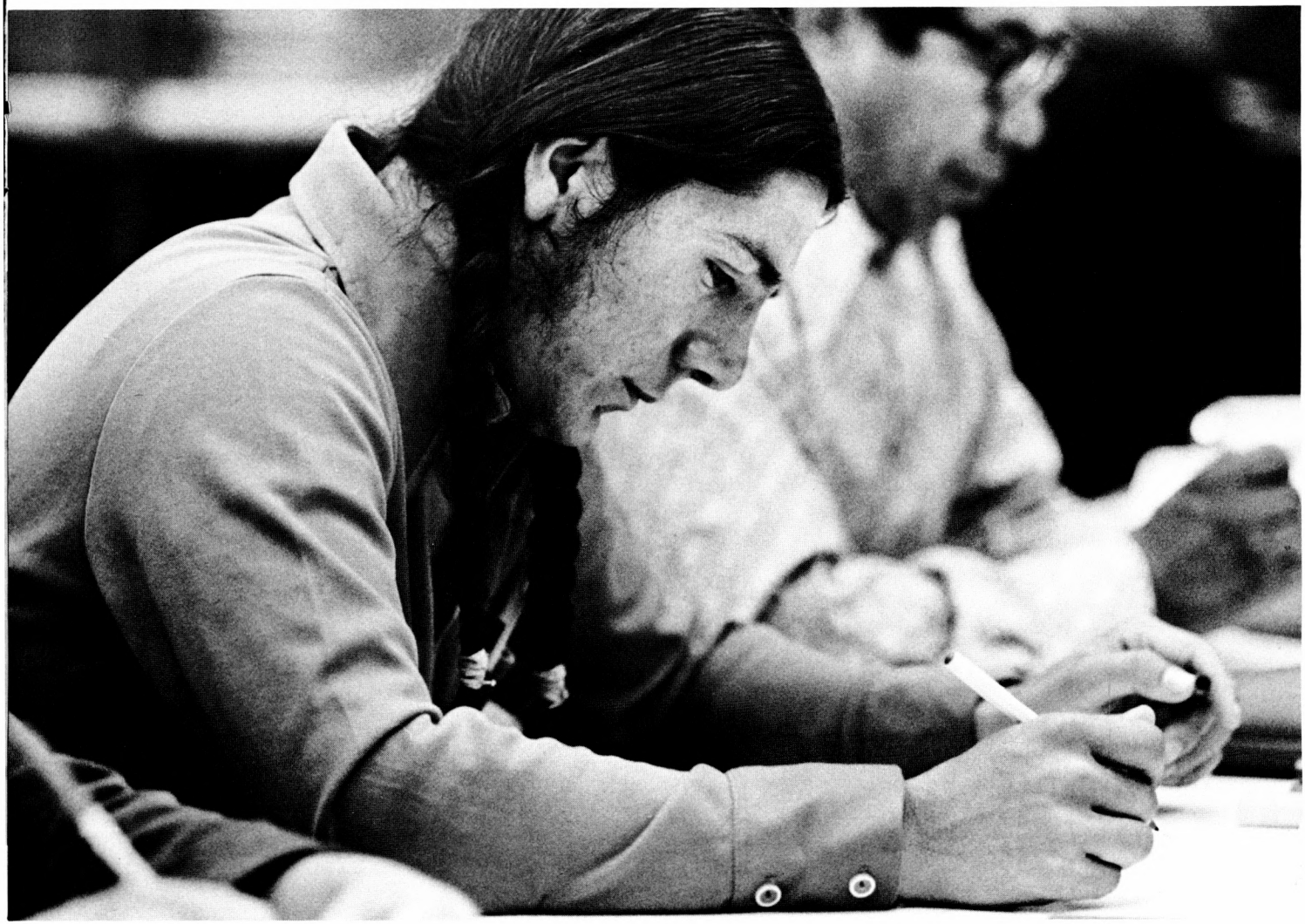
Curricula

Both federal and provincial schools acknowledge and appreciate the divergent backgrounds of their students, and recognize the contribution each has made to the Canadian spectrum. Because of this perceptive attitude, the curriculum is enriched and diversified to increase its relevancy to the Indian child and thus Indian children can now both retain and realize their cultural identity while learning about the mainstream Canadian.

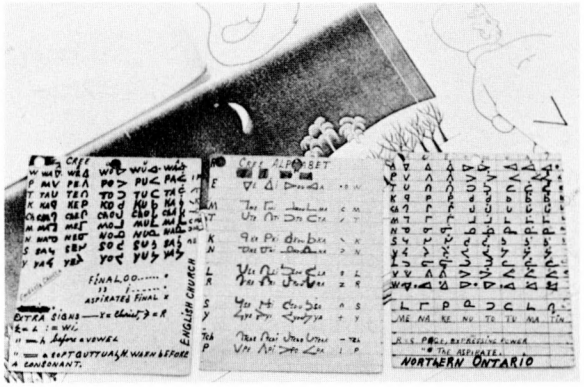
Instead of a single series of readers featuring stereotyped characters, a wide variety of reading material is offered. Stories are often painted, written or dictated by the children themselves about their own experiences and interests. These in turn may be reproduced locally or in a central office and returned to the schools as supplementary reading materials.

Although early attempts were made to design readers specifically for Indian children, none could fully represent the divergent groups across Canada. Some Indian people live in remote villages sustained by a traditional hunting and fishing society. Others live in rural communities, and still others who live in close proximity to cities, enjoy all the advantages of an urban environment. No single text book could be representative and therefore no attempt is made to standardize the language arts program. A variety of programs are available, as well as a variety of teaching aids, language experience charts etc. to accompany them.





From a native language teacher training course at the University of Saskatchewan, language arts programs are continually being evolved.



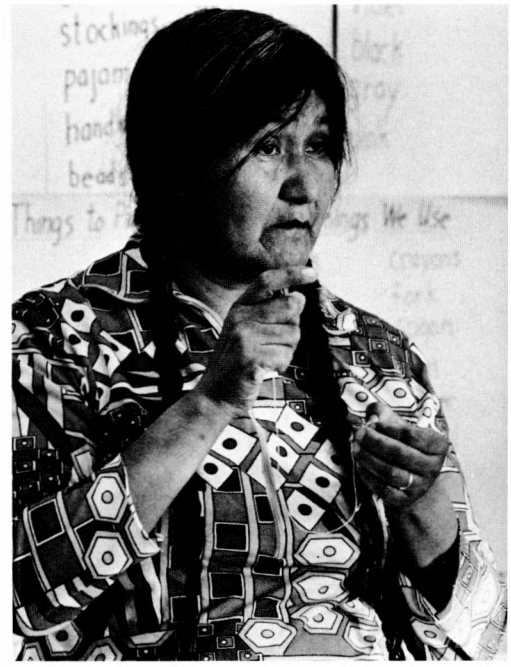
These programs include the development of a variety of teaching aids, such as the creation of games based on legends, the translation of primary readers into native languages, and the re-generation of story-songs.

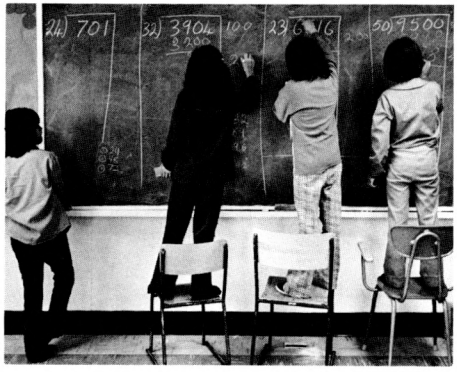
Science and Social Studies classes usually deal with the local situation first, recognizing the Indian child, his family, his reserve and community, and then the wider society beyond. The growth of relevant materials has facilitated extensive study of the Native people of Canada and North America, and has been a particularly popular topic, not only for Indian children, but for non-Indian children as well. An important part of the program is the contribution Native people have made to the general life of Canada in both the historical and contemporary sense. Wherever possible, outstanding Native people are encouraged to visit the schools, both federal and provincial, where Indian children are in attendance. They have been received with enthusiasm and appreciation in both areas.

Indian arts and crafts have received particular attention, not only in the schools but in the society at large. Indian artists and craftsmen have been encouraged to take part in the training of Indian children, and to pass on their own skills to the children in the classroom. In health classes note has been taken of Indian medicine and the use of natural herbs and remedies; home economics courses often include the preparation of Native foods, and the compilation of local cook books with the help of the women of the settlement. The physical education program in many areas includes Indian games of skill and endurance, while survival techniques have long been part of outdoor education.

Mathematics books have been devised and illustrated with objects familiar to northern children – airplanes, woodland animals, fish and birds.

All these developments have required the assistance of the Indian community and have helped to emphasize the need for a close liaison between the Indian home and the school. Frequently Native personnel have extended their assistance to provincial schools where their reception by the non-Indian as well as the Indian, children has been most enthusiastic.





In Driftpile, Alberta, beading is approached with a diligence and concentration not unlike that accorded to mathematics.

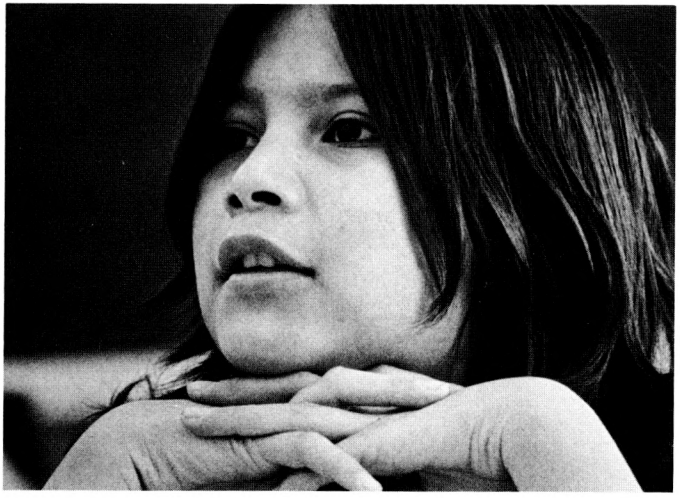
Language Development

While the schools continue to encourage the Indian child's growth in the English or French language of the majority culture, a rapidly growing interest has been exhibited in the status of the Native languages. Across Canada a wide variety of situations exist. In southern areas where the Indian communities have had extensive contact with the non-Indian society, and where almost every home has a television set, most Indian children begin school speaking English or French as their first language. Some understand the Native tongue but do not speak it. For many it may be the language of their parents or grandparents, but may be lost to the new generation in the south.

A renewed interest in reviving the Native language has led to the establishment of Native language programs in both federal and provincial schools where Indian parents have made this request and where suitable teachers can be found. Sometimes the non-Indian students have also been included in these programs at their own request.

In northern and remote areas, the Indian children still begin school speaking this Native language with little or no knowledge of English or French. Special programs have been developed by both federal and provincial authorities to assist in the learning of the second language, and these have sometimes extended into the adult education programs for the community. Along with the second language, the Native language is still encouraged, and extended into the areas of reading and writing.

At the same time, not all Native people are in favour of Native language instruction in the schools, and such programs are only instituted with their approval and support.

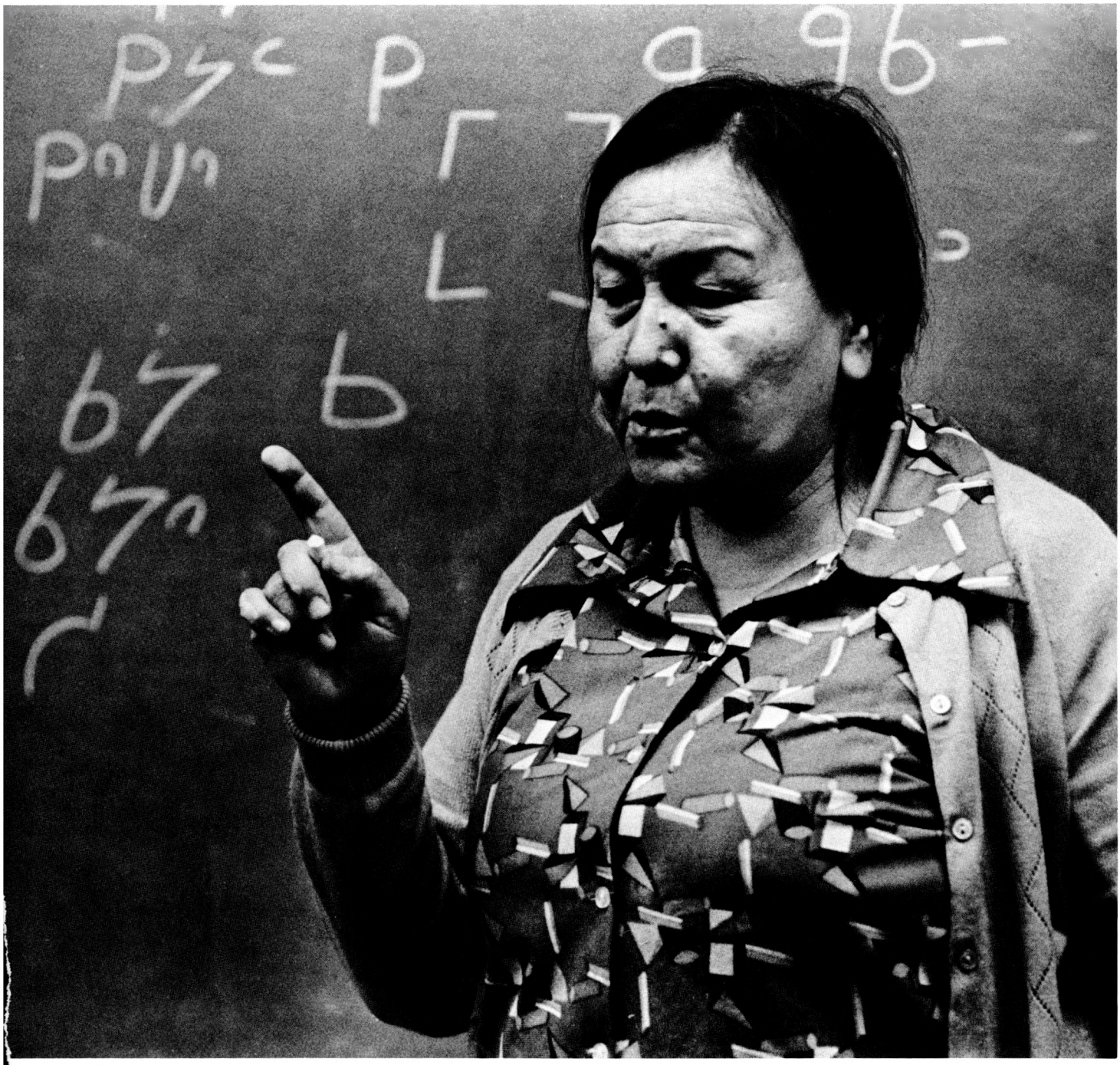


French drill at Maliotenam near Sept Îles, Quebec, commands rapt attention.

No longer an oral tradition, the native language is taught in Saddle Lake using the one-hundred-year-old-plus syllabic characters.

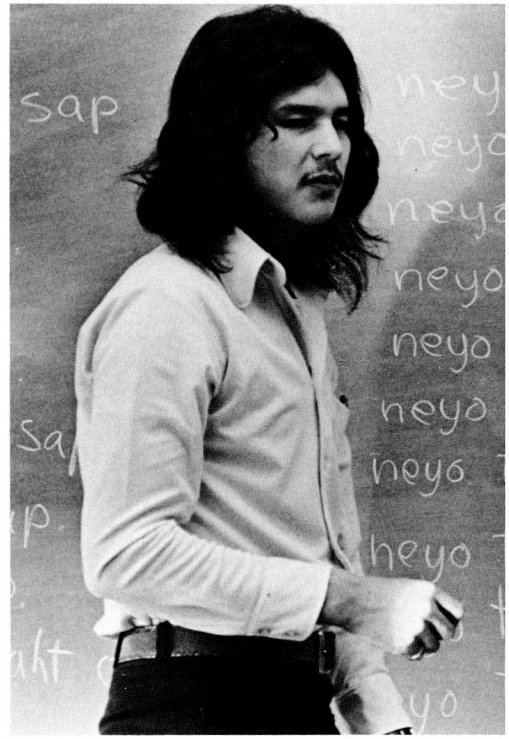
At one time the Indian languages of Canada were almost entirely in the oral tradition. In 1841, a young Methodist missionary called James Evans, working at Norway House in Manitoba, devised a set of syllabic characters which greatly accelerated the transcription of Native languages. The system spread over the entire country to both Indian and Inuit tongues, and is still used in many northern areas today. A number of attempts have been made to abandon the syllabics in favour of the Roman alphabet, but they have not proved successful, and the syllabic system has persisted and flourished.

Since its inception and acceptance, many Indian parents have taught their children how to read and write the syllabics in the home, and thus Indian children of the north may arrive at school completely competent in this skill. In recent years it has been given formal recognition, and many northern schools now incorporate literacy programs in syllabics into their Native studies courses. For years, most of the syllabic literature was of a religious nature—hymn books, catechisms and prayers books. New programs have been instituted to produce readers and story books in syllabics that will be of interest to younger children. Syllabic typewriters are now available, and Native people are being trained in their use.



Considerable attention has been given to the best method of preserving the Native language and at the same time increasing fluency in English or French. Experiments have been made in starting Native children in their own language through the first two or three grades, gradually introducing the second language as they gain security. Through the Classroom Assistant program, later described, most federal schools are able to receive young children into school by one of their own people who can communicate with them in their own language, while the English- or French-speaking teacher communicates in the second language. In this way the children are exposed to both languages at an early age.

Many schools offer the Native language to older students as part of the Native studies program. Since the course is of fairly recent origin, teachers have generally had to devise their own materials, books and methods. But with the extension of Native language work shops, more effective programs are being devised, and methods and ideas exchanged. The various Native language development programs are now under study to ascertain the effect they may have on the Indian child. While language fluency is an important factor, equally vital is the effect the courses may have on the self concept acquired by the Indian child, and his pride in, and understanding of, his racial identity.



A few miles away in Faust, the language is taught using the familiar Roman alphabet and phonetic orthography. Here it seems to prove more sustaining than the nap-inducing comic book.

Parental Involvement

Emphasis on Native studies has meant increased participation in the educational program by Indian parents and elders of the reserve. Nearly every federal school now employs one or more Classroom Assistants. These are usually Native people from the community who are fluent in the Native language. The assistants, male or female, are often young adults, but many are older people who make a particularly valuable contribution in the traditional sense to the Indian child. Besides providing a sense of security and understanding between a non-Native teacher and the child, the Classroom Assistant may assist with the Native studies programs in the older grades, act as an intermediary between the home and the school where parents do not speak the language of the school, translate report cards and other communications to the parents, and bring to the teachers' attention matters that concern the parents. In the senior grades they may provide more formal lessons in Native language, history and arts and crafts. At the same time they are helpful to the teachers when they have questions in regard to the Native community.

In recent years, training courses for Classroom Assistants, teacher aides and Native teachers have been instituted, usually as a summer program followed by classroom experience during the winter. These courses may extend, in some cases, into full time teacher training. For mature students who may not have completed senior matriculation, upgrading courses are included to suit their needs. Outstanding examples of these programs which have been in operation for several years, are found at Brandon University, Manitoba, the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi, Quebec, and the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon.

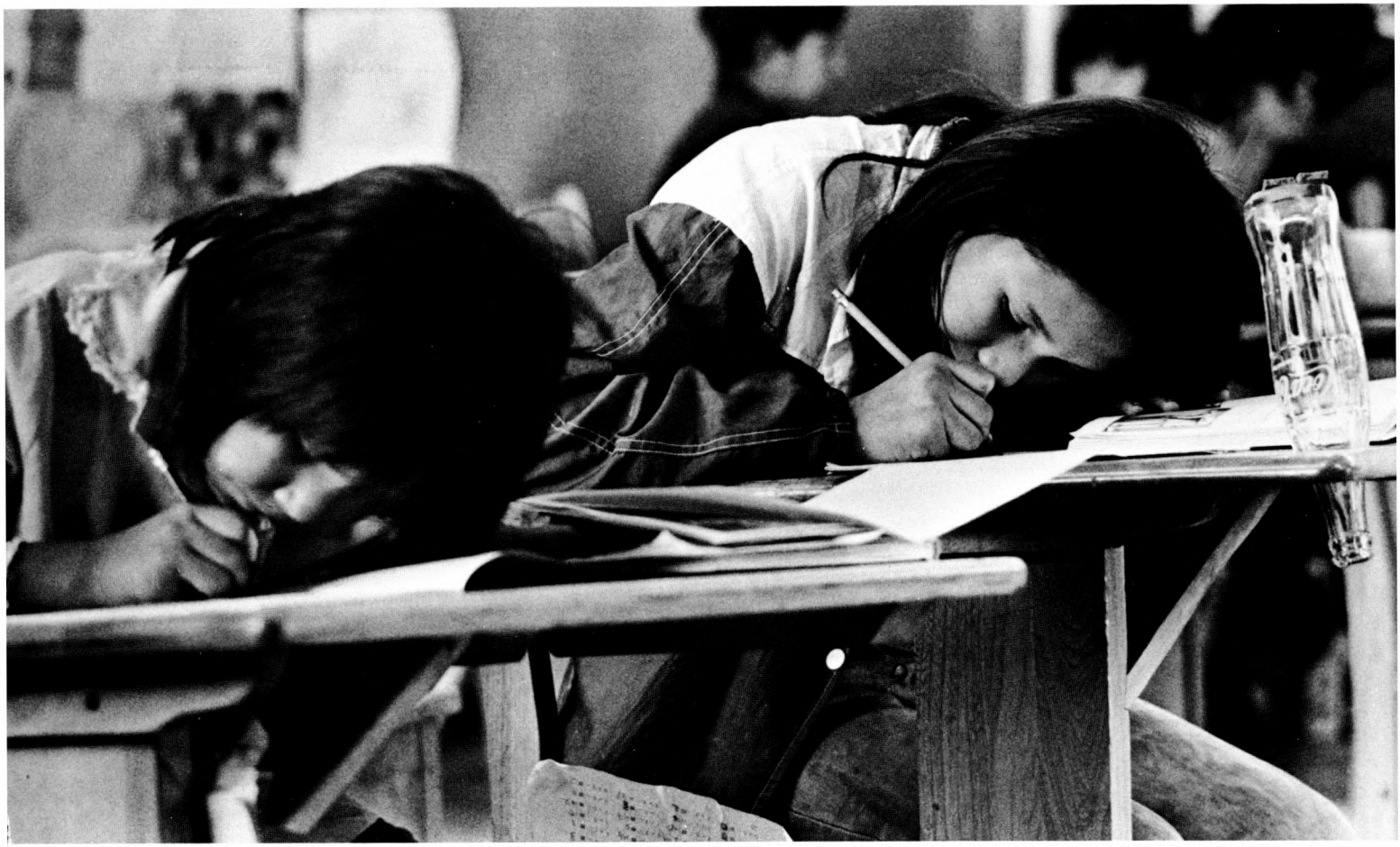
As a result of these programs, about 30% of the qualified teachers in federal schools are now Native people and their numbers are increasing each year. Many native teachers also serve in provincial schools at both the elementary and secondary levels.

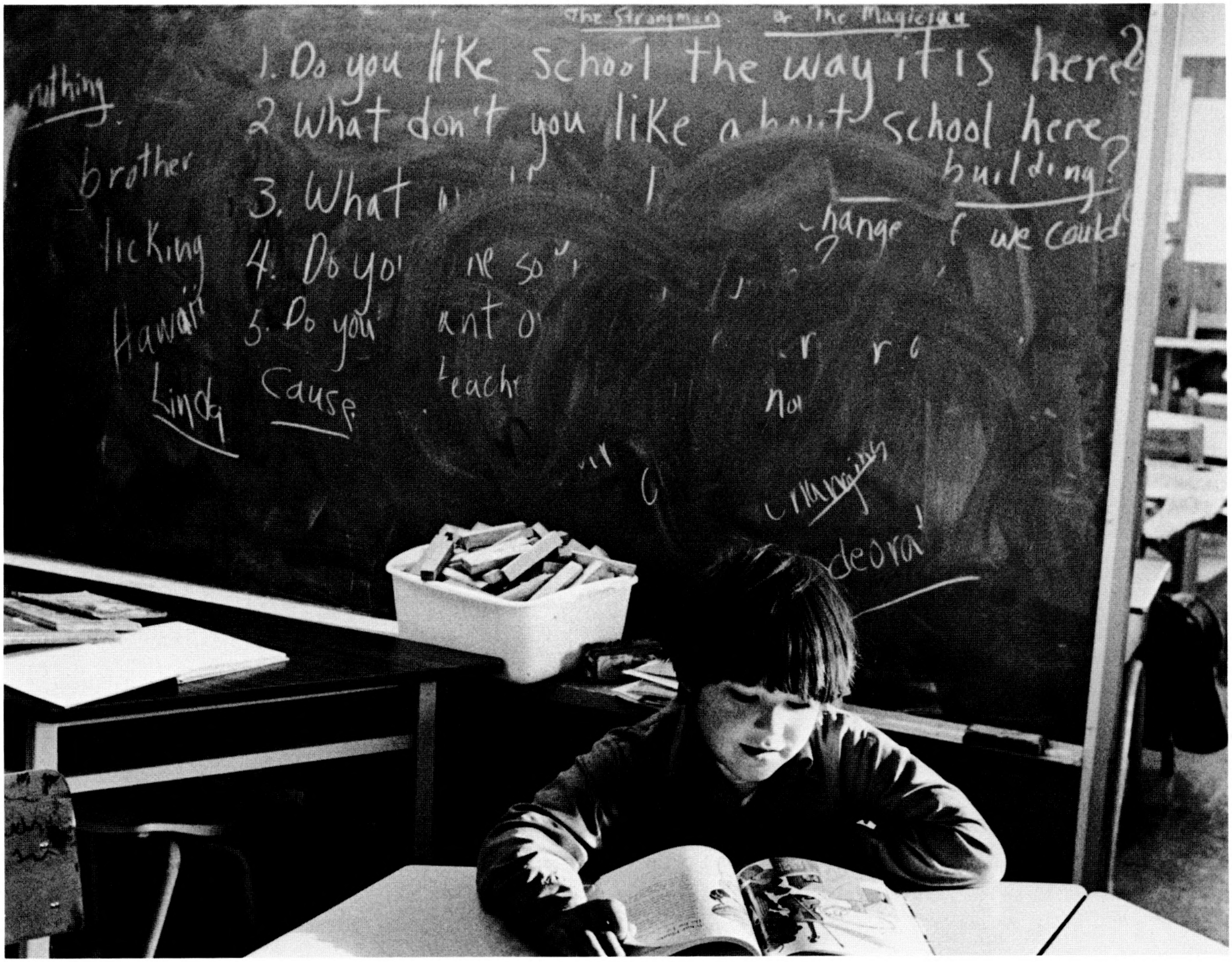
Besides the teachers and Classroom Assistants, Native people act as consultants, educational counsellors, social counsellors and as part-time instructors as previously described. Social counsellors are Native people who provide special services to the students, parents, education committees and band councils. Additional training is offered to graduates of the social counsellor course who wish to become specialists in early childhood education.

Other community members have shared their skills with the schools. Native artists and craftsmen have operated workshops in Native arts and crafts in the schools. Some senior grades have benefitted from hunting and trapping programs that Native people have introduced. Native singers and dancers have trained groups of school children for performances in Native and national festivals.

It has not been the federal schools alone that have requested and received this assistance from the Native community. Provincial schools, especially where Indian children attend in considerable numbers, have obtained the services of Native Classroom Assistants in either the beginning grades or for more formal lessons with the seniors. The same craftsmen have visited provincial schools where they have been received with enthusiasm.

After trying a system of busing to provincial schools, the James Smith band felt that the community could best be served by giving students the option of receiving their education at the reserve school.




1. Do you like school the way it is here?
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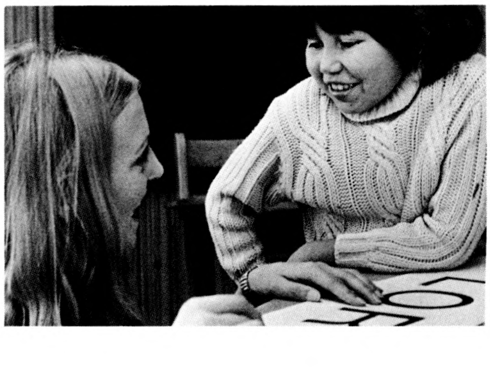
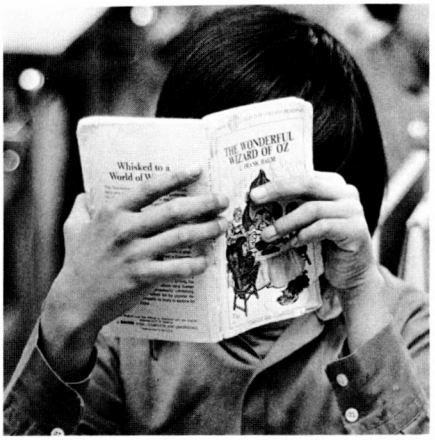


Provincial Programs

With the realization of the need for more study materials for their Native programs, many provincial schools have made a special effort to enlarge and expand their library facilities with printed and audio-visual material of interest to Native students. They have also been receptive to the recognition of Indian arts and crafts and have given it a special place in their schools. Visits to reserves have been exchanged with Indian students who have returned as guests to the larger centers. Many schools also offer native language instruction and native history and heritage with emphasis on the contributions of Native people to Canadian society, past and present.



Diverse study in Lytton, B.C.

Indian Control

One of the most significant trends in recent years has been the importance given to transferring control of Indian education to Indian people. Proposed by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972, the policy has been received with approval by both Indian people generally and by federal authorities.

Again, because of the wide variety of situations existing across Canada, no sudden change in administration has followed. However, as Indian parents indicate their willingness to assume this responsibility, training programs are instituted and the opportunity is available for Indian parents to participate fully in the education of their children.

An Education authority has been formed on some reserves to facilitate the transfer of programs to bands. Its activities vary in accordance with the local situation, but most meet with principals and teachers, and with visiting superintendents, to discuss educational problems and to give focus and direction to the school. They may make recommendations regarding the cultural content of the curriculum, assist staff in identifying community resources, request explanation of some aspect of the school program, or make other suggestions regarding the education of the children. They also act as a support to the teachers when they have questions or problems in regard to the community.

When the situation permits, the Education Authority may assist with the selection of staff, Classroom assistants, Native language instructors, counsellor technicians and caretakers. Some oversee care and maintenance of the school buildings, busing services, and after-school activities.

While some Bands are actively involved with the educational process, others, particularly in remote areas, have not yet indicated this interest and for the present prefer to continue using Departmental Education Services for the operation and supervision of their schools.

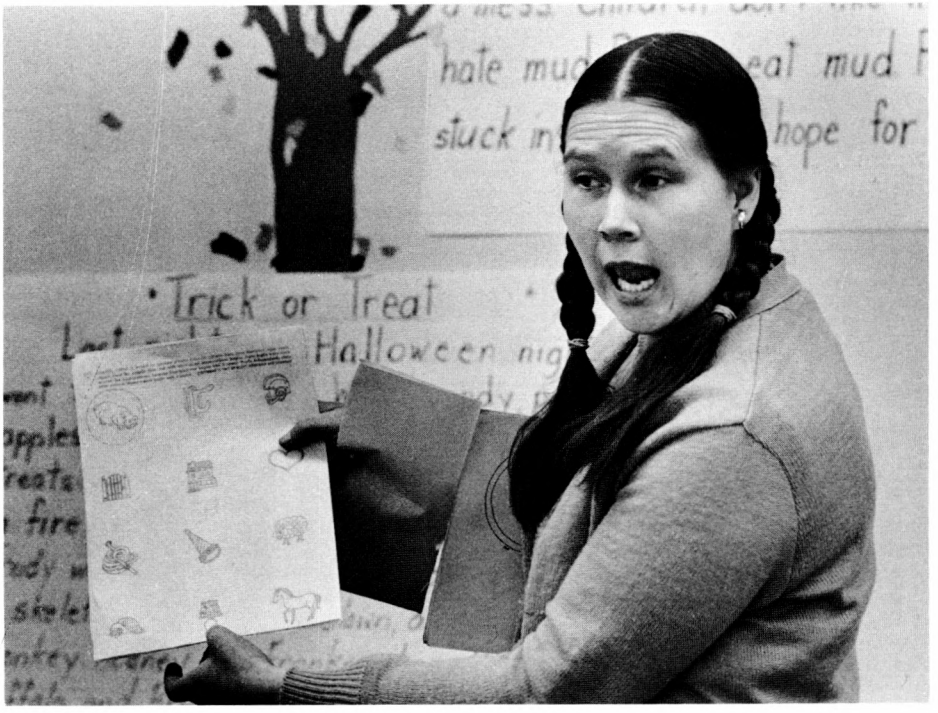
Native people are also becoming more active in provincial schools. A number of the provinces have now passed legislation which enables Indian representation on provincial or parochial school boards, with full or partial voting privileges. More than 60 such appointments have been made to date, with an increase in this number likely in the years ahead.

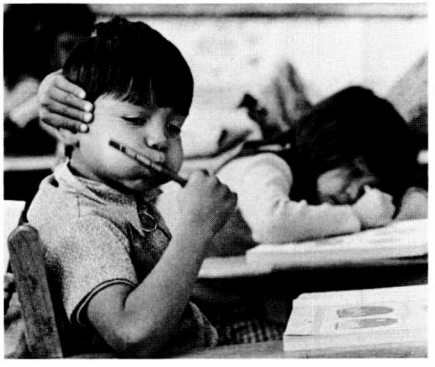
Study gives way to the purer pleasures of youth, socializing, dancing, sport, singing and fantasy.

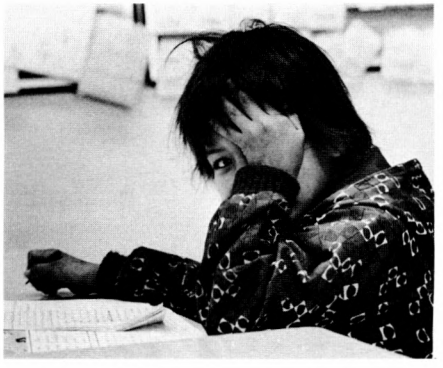
Conclusion

From the comfort and sophistication of the twentieth century, it is an easy matter to criticize the early attempts of both the church and the government to educate Indian children. Conditions for students were often difficult in both provincial and federal schools, but they were equally so for teachers and others in charge. Long months of isolation and hardship were common, while salaries were minimal or non-existent. Although philosophies were at odds with present educational trends, they were in keeping with the thinking of the times. In spite of the very real difficulties, a host of dedicated people gave their lives to this service and saw many Indian people emerge to become leaders of their people today.

From somewhat austere beginnings, the present educational system has evolved. Today it continues to develop with the valuable assistance and leadership of the Indian people. Its future path will be largely a reflection of their wisdom and their wishes.







Indian children across the country share in an exciting, new concept "Indian control of Indian Education".