

In establishing an education system in Canada's Northland, geographic and demographic elements are powerful factors that are helping to shape the changing educational structures. Some of these elements are: the Yukon and Northwest Territories area is massive and austere but fascinating, covering 1.5 million square miles (or 40 per cent of Canada's total land area); a sparse and scattered population (35,000 in the Northwest Territories and 17,000 in the Yukon) inhabited this vast land as of December 1970; from 1961 to 1970, the population increase in this largely unpeopled land was 39 per cent (slightly more than the 31 percent increase experienced by British Columbia); the Eskimos, Indians and Métis living in this land are not cultural minorities, as they are in the provinces, but constitute the majority. (The 35,000 in the Northwest Territories is broken down as follows: 13,000 Eskimos in varying stages of acculturation, living in small, scattered groups and speaking 20 dialects; almost 7,000 Indians in far-flung settlements, belonging to nine tribes; 5,000 Métis; and 10,000 "others".)

Such combined geographic and demographic characteristics have led to questions about school residences, transportation, language of instruction, relevant curriculum and school location. These characteristics explain the establishment of a school in so northerly a site as Grise Fiord, which is twice as close to the North Pole as it is to Ottawa (1,800 miles away) and closer to the U.S.S.R. than to Ottawa.

However, perhaps the chief determinant of change in the educational and social structures has been the political dimension: the direct administration of most Northwest Territories affairs was moved from Ottawa to Yellowknife in 1967; during 1969, the responsibility for education in the Mackenzie District was transferred to the new territorial government; the Eastern Arctic take-over occurred in 1970, the centennial year for the N.W.T. Of considerable significance to the education domain was the establishment in 1969 of a Northwest Territories Department of Education to ensure stability and continuity in education previously developed by the Northern Administration Branch of the former Indian Affairs and Northern Development Department. The end of the decade saw the growth of a modern school system that, spatially, must be one of the largest systems on the globe. This solidly-based system, as modern as those in Southern Canada, has rapidly begun building new schools at Edzo, Frobisher Bay, Baker Lake, Cape Dorset, Coral Harbour and Clyde River, and developing innovative curricular materials.