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TRENDS IN INDIAN EDUCATION

An address by Mrs. Ellen Fairclough, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, to the Canadian Association of School Superintendents and Inspectors on September 15, 1959, at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

May I say what a pleasure it is to be with you and to be able to express my appreciation to those of you who visit our Indian schools as part of your work. You fulfill a most important function in Indian education. If we are to build up and maintain high standards we must remain in close contact with the provincial school systems. The Indian Affairs Branch also finds it helpful when outside people make fresh appraisals and suggestions for the improvement of Indian school programmes.

Before going into details on the more important aspects of Indian education, let me re-state that the fundamental aim of the Government's policy towards Indians is the gradual integration of our country's fastest-growing ethnic group into the Canadian community.

The administration of Indian Affairs tends to help the Indians to become self-supporting and responsible members of Canadian society. Obviously, this is a long-term objective. But year by year it is encouraging to observe that the Indians are making forward strides. I was deeply impressed in the course of my recent visit to Indian reserves in Western Canada with measures that are being taken to improve housing, schools, farms, roads, sanitation and employment opportunities. No longer is the Indian to be considered a depressed and helpless Canadian. He has indeed much to offer to our society through his intelligence, his knowledge and love of nature, his quiet humour, his kindness, his tolerance and patience.

The Government is stepping up its efforts to help the Indian change his employment habits from seasonal occupations to steady, year-round work which can ensure a more stable family economy. Our placement programme helps young people from the reserves to obtain urban jobs. An increasing number have the educational and trade qualifications to meet the demands of employers in business and industry.

Education is the key to a promising future for the Indians. Our great hope lies in the young people now at school and in those yet unborn who will be entering a steadily improving school system in the next generation. A sound educational system is the most effective contribution that Canadians can make to the progress of the Indians. Through education the Indian can hope to compete for stable jobs in the highly competitive labour market. As educationists you know only too well that today's employers insist that their employees should have completed at least Grade 10. Many insist on Grade 12 education and some on even higher academic grades. Good schooling is essential, therefore, if the Indian wants to move off the reserve into a society where he must adapt himself to a different and more competitive set of values. Education helps him too, to find assurance in the non-Indian culture which is often rather strange, and perhaps a little frightening, to him. The Indian Affairs Branch instituted its placement programme in 1957 and quickly realized that the change from the reserve to urban life is a highly challenging and often disturbing emotional experience for young Indians. A few cannot take the transition and return to their reserves. The majority stay. Education has given them enough self-confidence and assurance to make the transition successfully.

Education also prepares the Indian to assume more responsibility in the management of his own affairs on the reserve. Band councils are administering their communities in much the same manner as the councils of rural municipalities. Of the 571 bands in Canada, 188 draw up their own spending budgets. They make by-laws to regulate such matters as sanitation, road construction, housing and welfare.

There has been a slow but steady growth in the number of school committees. The aim of these committees is to foster gradually a greater measure of responsibility on the part of the Indian community for the management of local educational affairs, the development of educational facilities and the proper use of government and band funds for educational purposes. These committees assume direct responsibility for action or recommendation with regard to school attendance, truancy, care of school property, attendance at non-Indian schools, P.T.A., and Home and School associations, special disciplinary problems, band fund appropriations for school activities and scholarships from Band funds. In addition they act in an advisory capacity in respect of school accommodation, annual school maintenance and repairs, recommendations for tuition grants, joint agreements with non-Indian schools, extra-curricular activities, more particularly sports, special holidays, reserve roads in relation to school bus routes, as well as other related matters.

Now let me outline what the Indian Affairs Branch is doing in the field of Indian education. I venture to say that few school systems have accomplished as much as the Branch has undertaken in the last 10 years.

Policy

Our policy is to make school facilities available to every Indian child. This is not as simple as some may think in remote areas and in view of the migratory habits of some of the northern bands. Officials of the Branch consistently encourage parents to send their children to school when they reach six years of age. Too often in the past, parents in some areas waited until their children were quite a bit older before sending them to school. Children are also encouraged to stay at school as long as possible and to go on to high school if they show aptitude and application in their studies.

Statistics show that this policy is bearing fruit. In the school year 1948-1949, 23,285 Indians attended school; during this past year there were 38,836. The increase has been steady and one of the highest of any school system in Canada. In the same period, the number of Indian students attending high school classes more than trebled, from 611 in 1948-49 to 2,100 in the last year.

Integrated Schooling

While our policy is to foster Indian education we endeavour, at the same time, to build as few new Indian schools as possible. In this apparent paradox lies the real progress of Indian education in the last decade - the growth of integrated schooling. The Indian Affairs Branch encourages integrated education in full realization of the benefits the Indian child gains by close association at an impressionable age with non-Indian children. Ten years ago only 1,406 Indian children attended provincial public or private schools. By the last school year this number had soared to 8,186 and continues to grow. Integrated schooling is most advanced where Indian children live close to municipal schools, for example, at Parry Island in Ontario, where it has been possible to close the school on the reserve. Children from this reserve attend schools in the town of Parry Sound. In the same agency the Gibson reserve school has also been closed as the Indian children attend classes in Bala. This pattern is beginning to emerge everywhere in Canada. In Nova Scotia, the Millbrook reserve school was shut down and children now attend Truro schools. In New Brunswick the Eel River reserve school was closed and the pupils entered Dalhousie schools. The St. Clair Indian school in Sarnia was closed also, as was the Protestant Indian school at Whitehorse when the children were enrolled in public schools. In Dawson City we were able to close the doors of the Moose Hide School. At Hazelton in British Columbia three successive agreements were negotiated with the Hazelton Public School Board to allow the entry of Indian children. These are just a few examples. For many years, in remote parts of northern Ontario, the children had been attending classes and boarding at the Shingwauk Residential School at Sault Ste. Marie. Three years ago an agreement was signed with the Public School

Board to transfer Grades 7 and 8 students to the city schools. The following year Grades 5 and 6 were transferred and, later Grade 4. The children continue to board at the Shingwauk school and it is planned to discontinue all classes at that point in the next two years. Pupils of Grades 4 and higher living at the Edmonton Residential School now go to Jasper Place public schools. Jasper Place separate schools take all but Grades 1 and 2 pupils from the Stony Plain Reserve. At Port Alberni in British Columbia children at the residential school are gradually being absorbed into the town schools. Within a short time some 300 Indian youngsters will be taking lessons with non-Indian students at Port Alberni.

I know that occasionally the fear is expressed that the Government may be going too fast in this direction. I sincerely believe that there is no cause for anxiety on that score.

Integrated education is carried out in two ways. First, there is the formal agreement between the Indian Affairs Branch and the local school board for the operation of so-called "joint schools". Such agreements are negotiated when the school board must expand its facilities to accommodate Indian children. The Federal Government not only pays its share of construction costs, but also the regular tuition costs for each Indian child. There are now 57 joint schools covered by 76 agreements: 22 in British Columbia and the Yukon; 12 in Ontario; 8 in Quebec; 6 in Manitoba; 5 in Saskatchewan and 2 each in Alberta and the Maritimes.

In other cases the Indian Affairs Branch pays straight tuition costs for Indian pupils. This is usually the case in places where the local board has room for additional children or where there are only a few Indian pupils.

The Indian Affairs Branch has at times met opposition in the field of integrated education. It has come in part from the Indian parents themselves who do not fully understand the objective of integrated schooling. It must be made clear that no Indian child is forced to attend an integrated school if his parents object. Sometimes the opposition has stemmed from local school boards, usually pressure has come from non-Indian parents. On the whole, the opposition to joint schooling flows from lack of understanding. Some non-Indian parents, for example, are frightened that their children may contract tuberculosis by sitting with Indian children. Obviously, they are unaware of the great advances which have been made in the field of Indian health and the virtual eradication of TB among children. Some believe that because the Indian comes from a different cultural background, he may become a drag on the progress of the rest of the class. Such misapprehension ignores the advancement of the Indian in the past few years, his improved social conditions and his broadening horizons through newspapers, radio and television.

As school inspectors, you can effectively dispel such prejudice. You can also assist by drawing to the attention of our regional teaching staff the possibilities of extending integrated schooling in your respective areas. The official approach to the local school board, naturally, must come from the Indian Affairs Branch after consultation of the Indian parents. At the time of negotiation the value of your judgement based on actual experience can be decisive.

Other Types of Schools

I have dwelled on integrated schooling at some length because I am convinced of its importance to the Indians of Canada. I should like to refer briefly now to other aspects of Indian education which come directly under the administration of the Indian Affairs Branch.

First are the 375 Indian day schools operated by the Branch on the reserves, where enrolment has increased in the last decade from 12,511 to 18,076.

These schools are operated in the same way as provincial non-Indian schools. They follow the same curriculum and are visited by provincial inspectors. Where it is not possible to send Indian pupils to schools outside the reserves, day schools are provided in order that Indian children may be brought up in a normal home atmosphere with the love and care that only parents can give.

Next are the residential schools, operated for the Branch by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United and Presbyterian churches. These are boarding schools for children who must follow their studies away from the home environment. Some are the children of parents who are away on the trapline and want them to have year-round schooling; others are orphans or children who come from broken homes or children whose parents are ill.

A number of these children are from sparsely-populated areas where it is not feasible to build even a one-room day school. Some residential schools also offer high school courses but usually serve as hostels for Indian students attending nearby non-Indian high schools. The conditions which led to the establishment of residential schools are still prevalent but the need for such schools is much less pressing than it was a quarter of a century ago. Enrolment in these schools has been going up but not at the same rate as the enrolment in day schools. In 1948, 9,368 children were attending residential schools; according to the latest report there were 11,109.

Then there are the seasonal schools which are set up in remote areas for children whose parents still follow a nomadic way of life, hunting, trapping and fishing. Often these bands congregate for a few months at one location and it is possible to open a temporary school for the period of their stay.

In 1959, 893 children attended lessons at seasonal schools. Obviously, these schools are only a second-best substitute for regular classes. Nevertheless, remembering that many children will continue to live in the north, it is perhaps wise that they should not lose contact with the mode of life pursued by their parents.

Fourth are the hospital-schools established at sanatoria. Because of the lengthy treatment required for tuberculosis every effort is made to prevent students from falling too far behind in their school work. In the past year there were 572 students attending hospital classes.

It is the policy of the Department to direct Indian children to secondary and vocational schools operated by the provincial authorities. As I mentioned, enrolment in high schools has more than trebled in the last decade. There is no doubt that the Indian Affairs Branch has succeeded in convincing the young Indians and their parents of the value of high school training. Fundamentally, it is a matter of economic necessity: if you do not have sufficient education you cannot choose your job - no matter whether you are Indian or not.

My Department is fully conscious of the need for more and better counselling of Indian students at the Grade 8 level. We have increased the regional educational staff in British Columbia and stationed officers throughout the province. The results of their guidance work is beginning to show in the increased interest and enrolment of Indians in provincial high schools. The Indian Affairs Branch is planning to extend this de-centralization of its education staff to all provinces within the next four years.

I firmly believe the Indian child has a bright future. No Indian need be deprived of an education and he can go just as far as he wishes or as his talent will allow him to go. The Federal Government pays tuition costs and, if necessary, a living allowance for Indians attending high school, vocational school, business college, teachers' college, university and nurses' training school. Naturally, the parents are expected to contribute as much as they can. Some do not need any assistance. But certainly no Indian is deprived of education because he cannot afford to continue his training. I was especially interested to learn recently of a young Indian girl from British Columbia who graduated in anthropology and is now the only woman counsellor for the John Howard-Society. Another Indian girl, a Mohawk from near Belleville (in Ontario), has just completed her M.A. in social work from the University of Toronto and is working with the Belleville Children's Aid Society.

Teachers

Those of you who inspect Indian schools know that both the number and professional qualifications of our teachers is improving year by year. In the last decade the number of teachers

has increased from 383 to 1,221. It is significant that the Indian Affairs Branch engaged 19 Indians as teachers last year, bringing to 110, or eight per cent of the teaching staff, those of Indian ethnic origin. Salaries have also improved. In 1948, for example, the salary range of teachers was from \$1,440 to \$2,520. Today the teacher starts at \$2,700 and can go up to \$6,300. If he or she performs special duties and becomes a "community teacher", the maximum salary reaches \$7,560. Community principals may earn a maximum salary of \$8,960.

The number of fully qualified teachers increases each year. A quarter of a century ago less than half the Indian teachers were qualified. Today 90.5 per cent of the day school and 83.5 per cent of the residential school staff hold the required certificates.

Building Programme

To keep pace with the amazing growth in Indian pupil enrolment, the Federal Government, in spite of its efforts to channel Indian students into integrated schools, has had to undertake a major building programme. The number of classrooms in day and residential schools has risen from just under 700 in 1948 to 1,200 today. These new rooms are in addition to the replacement of many obsolescent and very inadequate schools.

Education costs have risen from \$5,400,000 in 1948 to almost \$22,000,000 in the last school year. This year the Indian Affairs Branch has earmarked \$25,097,350 for Indian education. Of this, nearly \$18,000,000 is for operation and \$7,362,500 for capital expenditures.

As more Indian children go to school and stay there longer, provision must be made to meet a yearly influx which varies in number from place to place. The Indian Affairs Branch has drawn up a programme covering the next five years, based on the number of children from one to five years of age who will soon reach school age. Enrolment is now almost 39,000. The forecast is that by 1964 between 48,000 and 50,000 Indian children will require education, an increase of roughly 25 per cent over the present number. Taking into account the fact that in many remote areas classes are smaller than provincial averages, it is estimated that the equivalent of just over 400 new classrooms will have to be provided.

This construction programme envisages a capital expenditure of nearly \$30,000,000 over the next five years, to accomplish this task. Let me make on point clear: not all the 400 classrooms will be built by the Indian Affairs Branch. If that was to be the case it would be comparatively simple to plan a building programme. The unknown factor is, of course, the degree of integration which will take place in the next few years. New classrooms will be built only when it cannot be arranged for Indian children to attend non-Indian classes.

In planning we must, therefore, leave the cold logic of facts and figures and base our estimates largely on assumption.

It is to be remembered that, however great the importance of integrated schooling to the Indian child as an individual and to the Indian group as a whole, the degree of integration is determined by the consent of both the parents and the local school boards.

The Indian who has taken tremendous strides forward in the last 10 years will play an increasingly important part in Canadian affairs as time goes on. His contribution to Canadian life has too long been misunderstood and insufficiently appreciated. Education will help him take his rightful place in Canadian society.

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