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Inuvik, N.W.T.

NEIGHBOURHOOD KINDERGARTEN

West Inuvik, N.W.T.

An experimental kindergarten for the children of West Inuvik opened in October, 1965, and classes were held twice a week in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas W. Barry, West Inuvik, until Christmas holiday. Classes resumed in mid-March and continued until mid-May.

Regular pupils were 4, 5 and 6 years old, plus one older handicapped boy of about 15. In all 17 children, including one other older handicapped boy, attended at least one or twice. Many others were eligible who did not attend.

The children were those who would not ordinarily have attended existing kindergartens. To avoid conflict, they were invited after the Inuvik Pre-School Association recruited paying pupils for kindergartens elsewhere in town. No fee was charged for the experiment, although in the spring children were asked to bring 10 cents each time for a Taxi Bank. This financed a trip to the river at breakup. The children decided to use the left-over money to buy two toys for the kindergarten room. The toys are used often by visiting children, and they will be turned over to any kindergarten established in West Inuvik, along with other equipment and supplies that may not be used up by then.

The kindergarten was conducted and financed by Mr. and Mrs. Barry, with contributions of supplies etc. by some interested persons. Cost to the experimenters was about \$400, not counting the teacher's own time. Total expense was around \$500, but a proper kindergarten would cost more. We did the best we could with what was available and what we could afford.

A detailed account of facilities, equipment, methods and observations is contained in a longer report available to those interested. This report is for the parents.

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NEED FOR KINDERGARTEN

The children of West Inuvik need kindergarten because:

1. They are very intelligent children with many abilities and talents which can be developed with suitable education. The handicapped boy attending also revealed abilities of his own, especially in music. (Every child attending had already been given considerable help and training at home by parents, grandparents and older children. Many knew their letters and could count. Others were clever with puzzles, games, art & craft. Some had advanced appreciation of music, poetry, stories & drama.)
2. Sir Alexander Mackenzie School, although it has a fine building and highly trained teachers, is crowded and rushed. Most of the pupils do not have their real homes in Inuvik or else live here only a short time. But most West Inuvik children are fairly permanent, at least within the Delta district. There is much competition between the three groups of pupils who are further divided on the basis of religion.
3. Our children from West Inuvik need much self-confidence before facing the stiff competition from other pupils. Kindergarten gives them confidence, according to numerous experts.

4. The Edmonton Journal reports that only one-fourth of the first graders at SAMS pass into grade two. Most of the kids who do pass have been to kindergarten at some time.
5. E.A. Cote, Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs, told members of Parliament in June: "We are starting to put an accent on kindergartens. I think kindergartens are probably more essential to the indigenous people of the North, than they are even in some areas of the south."

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WEST INUVIK NEEDS ITS OWN KINDERGARTEN

The children of West Inuvik need their own kindergarten -- one that is close to their homes. Some of the reasons are:

1. Little children feel safer and easier if they don't have so far to go to school. Also, if they feel cranky, tired, or noisy, they can run out for a while or go home until they feel better -- and no harm is done. Gradually they learn to settle down so they can take a whole school day with suitable breaks for exercise and play.
2. Children work well with a person who is their friend and neighbour. The teacher knows the children's personalities, and the personalities of their parents, so she can find the right way to teach each child. A teacher who is the children's personal friend is able to abandon rigid rules and planning and so make the most of the child's abilities and the learning events at hand.
3. Children are rarely really naughty when the teacher is a friend and neighbour of the parents. If she wants to check wrong behaviour she can always say "Do you think your dad or mother would like you to do that?" At the same time she can gain the confidence of the child by not tattling on him.
4. Once a child understands that the parents and the teacher believe the same things, and that the teacher respects the child and his home, the youngster is no serious trouble. There is no reason to use hard punishment, or even threats. But this understanding has to begin at kindergarten age, and be continued. And it works best if the school is close to the home.
5. Kindergarten is the earliest place to start co-operation between parents and teacher. The school's respect for parents begins at this stage, and so does the child's respect for learning as a pleasurable and useful way of life.

AN IDEAL KINDERGARTEN FOR WEST INUVIK

The perfect kindergarten for the children of West Inuvik might be something like this:

1. A simple but attractive building especially set aside for educational purposes. The furnishings can be plain benches and tables made locally. The children and neighbours will supply the bright effects for a happy atmosphere.
2. Stove for heating and cooking should be the same or similar to those used in the homes -- oil or wood. Water supply should be the same, and so should the toilet and washing facilities.

A simple climbing apparatus should be in the outdoor playground -- for instance, a high stage with empty windows, or a disused boat with cabin, etc., with ropes and safe ladders. Whatever it is should be usable year around, of no problem or danger in whatever weather.

3. The teacher should live in the neighbourhood and visit the neighbours frequently and welcome them as neighbours in the home.
4. Besides kindergarten she might also conduct recreation and hobby times for the younger children of the neighbourhood. In return, these children could help her keep the kindergarten tidy -- much as the Dillon and Moore children and their friends helped us. (They helped on a voluntary basis; and there was always plenty of help.)
5. The teacher could also conduct for adults, as needed, reading and arithmetic classes, either in the building or privately in the homes. The building would also be a place for a small lending library of primary books and magazines.

In effect, the teacher would be a true community teacher -- not just in name only. And the kindergarten would be a starting point for neighbourhood education, developing as needed by the neighbours. The teacher would not be a community organizer; we've had enough organization.

6. Special furnishings should include a piano and a stock of musical instruments, including tamborines, mouth organs, drums, guitars, bells, ukelales, etc. Also easels and paint; clay for modelling; record player and records, construction toys; housekeeping toys; cast-off clothing for costumes; blackboard, and a very large bulletin board.
7. If the teacher can't speak the familiar languages of the neighbours, she should have paid instructors to teach both her and the kindergarten children. In West Inuvik it would be necessary to have two part-time instructors: one to teach Indian languages and another to teach Eskimo. The preference would be for older men and women to do this; they would have much else to teach the teacher and the children besides languages. Their presence and their activities would increase the respect of the children for the knowledge and experience of our older neighbours.
8. The teacher should have the paid services of one or two teen-agers interested in becoming teaching assistants or teachers. They should be hired for their compatibility with the teacher, the children and the neighbourhood.
9. Ideas and needs of the parents and neighbours should be incorporated into the program, which must always remain flexible for that purpose.

MONEY FOR KINDERGARTEN

It's nice to dream, isn't it? We are a long way from the ideal. In fact, we have no kindergarten at all. Such things take money.

There are several sources of money for education. The main ones are:

1. The British North America Act says the Federal Government is responsible for the education of the Indians and Eskimos of Canada.
2. The Government of the Northwest Territories is responsible for the education of "others."

Neither one of these governments have taken their responsibilities for education very seriously until recent years when the native lands became interesting to Outside speculators. That may be why there are so many intelligent and talented Northerners who have not much schooling of whose schooling has not been much help to them.

Even now, in spite of fine buildings and many teachers, the children of the real people of the Territories are falling behind in school. The people who plan education for us are so far away it takes them a long time to find out what is really needed. Besides they have other interests. Meanwhile, the children grow up -- and their chances may be lost.

The kindergarten experiment this past year was an attempt by private residents (taxpayers) to fill that gap -- to find out exactly what is needed, so everybody will know.

The money is there. The need is here. How do we get the two together?

* * *

We have people whose duty it is to speak for us to the governments responsible for education. They are Bud Orange, Member of Parliament and Lyle Trimble, Northwest Territories Councillor.

Our votes gave these men their jobs. Taxes on our paychecks, fuel, liquor, etc. pay their salaries. (We'll also be paying property taxes and school taxes this year.)

When these men come around looking for votes we should remind them of their duty, and that kindergarten is needed here. Maybe we should write to them, and not wait for them to show up.

There will be other people looking for votes, too. Maybe this fall. Next spring for sure.

The Newspaper

Also there is a newspaper in Inuvik. It has a wide circulation all over Canada. Government men read every issue. The editor of the newspaper makes part of his living selling us his "news." Maybe he can think of a way to use his newspaper to help us get the kindergarten the children need.

MONEY FOR KINDERGARTEN

In the meantime, we should look over the neighbourhood and note what there is for a temporary kindergarten. A building is needed, and one of about the right size for the time being is the Pentecostal Church. Is it available? Is Ingamo Hall a good place? Or is it too far away for most small children? Are there any funds anywhere to pay a teacher? Is there a proper teacher available? Miss Audrey Weir is one qualified teacher with much special training and a long-time interest in this country. Maybe she has some ideas. Maybe there are others. Maybe we should advertise.

Could the school furnish supplies as it does for other kindergartens in Inuvik? Is there anyone who could donate fuel? Is there anyone who could make sure the stoves work? Or keep the water barrel filled?

If there is a chance to get a building especially for kindergarten, where should it be? Could we get a good lot -- one close to the most children? What sort of building would be best -- or cheapest -- or the best looking? Or is something else available?

THE WEST INUVIK CHILDREN'S PROJECT

Some people are so interested in a kindergarten for West Inuvik that they have started a special fund to help us. Contributions were made by Mr. Cliff Moore, Miss Jessie Bonnetplume and Mrs. Patricia Barry of Inuvik; Mrs. Zola Steepie, an American school teacher, gave \$150. Mr. Don Hepburn of Red Deer, Alberta, former vice-principal of the Inuvik school, gave \$25.

The West Inuvik Children's Project now has \$229 in the Inuvik bank. This money can be used to buy special equipment for the children. Maybe it can help buy a piano or other musical instruments. Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Margaret Jordan are officers of the fund.

Also, the Canadian Save the Children's Foundation has offered to help us with a donation of kindergarten toys, once a kindergarten is underway here. The IODE has said it is interested in helping some way. Mr. P.B. Stolee, an educator in Edmonton, sent us some special reading books to help people learn to read English. Mrs. B.G. Sivertz gave us some second-hand art prints. The Canadian National Railroad sent us some colouring books. Mr. Larry Eckroyd of the Canadian Tourist Association kindly contributed his old Christmas cards. And Ginn & Company, printers of children's books, sent us a collection of their advertising with a freight bill for \$5.04.

All these things have already been done.

But the cost of paying a teacher and proper language instructors and some young assistants, and of providing a building, heat, supplies and some of the furnishings should be undertaken by the governments responsible by law for the education of children in the N.W.T.

Where do we go from here?

Yours sincerely,

Patricia S. Barry