



The classroom in the Moose Factory, Ontario, school. General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, P7538-970.

The school experience

Education: “The children’s work was merely memory work.”

As educational institutions, the residential schools were failures, and regularly judged as such. In 1923, former Regina industrial school principal R. B. Heron delivered a paper to a meeting of the Regina Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church that was highly critical of the residential school system. He said that parents generally were anxious to have their children educated, but they complained that their children “are not kept regularly in the class-room; that they are kept out at work that produces revenue for the School; that when they return to the Reserves they have not enough education to enable them to transact ordinary business—scarcely enough to enable them to write a legible letter.”¹⁹² The schools’ success rate did not improve. From 1940–41 to 1959–60, 41.3% of each year’s residential school Grade One enrolment was not promoted to Grade Two.¹⁹³ Just over half of those who were in Grade Two would get to Grade Six.¹⁹⁴

Many principals and teachers had low expectations of their students. Wikwemikong, Ontario, principal R. Baudin wrote in 1883, “What we may reasonably expect from the