

they raised their daughter to speak English.³⁰¹ When Bruce Dumont was sent to residential school in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan, his mother warned him not to speak Cree.³⁰²

Arranging and blocking marriages

Through the residential schools, Indian Affairs and church officials sought to extend their control into the most intimate aspects of the lives of Aboriginal children. Indian Affairs officials believed that because the department had spent money educating students, it had gained the right to determine whom they married. Government officials feared that if students married someone who had not also been educated at a residential school, they would revert to traditional ‘uncivilized’ ways.³⁰³ The control of marriage was part of the ongoing policy of forced assimilation. In 1890, Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed criticized Qu’Appelle principal Joseph Hugonnard for allowing female students from the Qu’Appelle school to marry boys who had not gone to school, without first getting Indian Affairs’ approval. Reed argued, “The contention that the parents have the sole right to decide such matters cannot for one moment be admitted.”³⁰⁴

The government not only encouraged marriage between students, but it also began to make marriage part of the process of getting out of residential school. In his annual report for 1896, Deputy Minister Hayter Reed wrote, “It is considered advisable, where pupils are advanced in years and considered capable of providing for themselves, to bring about a matrimonial alliance, either at the time of being discharged from the school or as soon after as possible.”³⁰⁵ In other words, the principals were expected to arrange marriages for the older students.

Principals regularly reported and celebrated student marriages, and, indeed, did often arrange them.³⁰⁶ Reverend P. Claessen, principal of the Kuper Island school, reported in 1909 that he had succeeded in “engaging one of our leaving girls with one of our best old boys.”³⁰⁷ Kamloops school principal A. M. Carion reported, “It is gratifying to note again that since my last report, two more couples of ex-pupils have been united in the bonds of holy wedlock. The ex-pupils who marry other ex-pupils are better able to retain the habits of civilized life, which they acquired at the school.”³⁰⁸

Efforts were also made to block marriages deemed to be unsuitable. In 1895, Indian agent Magnus Begg told members of the Blackfoot Reserve that “no young man could marry a girl from an Industrial or board [sic] School without having prepared a house with two rooms, and owning cows, with the necessary stabling, &c.”³⁰⁹ In that same year, principals and Indian agents were instructed to seek departmental permission prior to allowing students to marry.³¹⁰

Principals continued to arrange marriages into the 1930s. In 1936, the principal of the Roman Catholic school at Onion Lake prepared a list of students who had turned sixteen and who, he believed, should not be discharged. He noted that he insisted on keeping