

Karen Clark Teacher of Year--

Two Rivers Teacher Educates Indian Children

Karen Clark, head teacher at the Two Rivers Elementary School in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, has been selected as Alaska's 1973 Teacher of the Year, Commissioner of Education Marshall L. Lind announced.

For eight and one-half years Mrs. Clark has been teaching

youngsters living in the rural areas of Canada and Alaska, and has taught at the Two Rivers School, some 18 and one-half miles from Fairbanks on the Chena Hot Springs Road, since 1970.

Mrs. Clark's preference for rural teaching assignments may stem from her childhood in

Oregon and South Dakota where she attended small country schools until she graduated from high school in 1958.

Her keen desire at that time to learn more about the Indian people led her to the University of Oregon to study anthropology; she received her degree in that subject in 1963, and took her first teaching assignment at Lower Post, British Columbia, in an Indian Residential School.

Prior to coming to Alaska, she also taught elementary grades in Pelly Crossing, Yukon Territory. During these years, she took post graduate work at Southern Oregon College and attended summer school at the University of British Columbia.

After teaching five and one-half years in small Canadian "bush" schools, Karen came to Fairbanks and began taking classes at the University of Alaska which would lead to the awarding of her Master of Arts

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Teacher of the Year . . .

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in Teaching in the Spring of 1972. In 1970 she began teaching for the Fairbanks North Star Borough at the then one-room Two Rivers Elementary School.

Throughout her teaching years, Mrs. Clark has been active in various Canadian teachers groups, and the National, State and Fairbanks Education Association, and the Two Rivers PTA.

The 1973 Alaska Teacher of the Year was becoming an expert in cross-cultural education long before the term was coined. "In 1964," she reports, "there wasn't much being done in Indian Education."

She began her first teaching assignment by writing her own texts and taping the children's legends and stories. In 1965 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation came from Toronto to televise her students doing Indian dances they had learned at home and brought to school.

While in the Yukon Territory, she developed a pre-school readiness program and was assisted by volunteer parents, grandmothers and grandfathers.

"This program was successful," Mrs. Clark surmised, "because it did not create a boundary between new learning experiences and the children's own heritage." During the same year, she formed a drama club with native children. The children collected legends and myths from the old people and then dramatized them for the community.

Until she left Canada to come to Alaska, Mrs. Clark served as a consultant for two years at the Yukon Territory Institute-Conventions. At these and other Canadian education conventions, she spoke on cross-cultural education and special methods used in teaching language arts to Indian children.

Through correspondence, Mrs. Clark consulted with the British Columbia Department of Education's curriculum development committee. The many books, workbooks, charts and other supplementary materials which she created are still in use. Primary reading texts authored by Mrs. Clark have also been studied in anthropology classes

at the University of British Columbia.

Early in 1971, she began constructing a third grade social studies program on Alaska for use in the Fairbanks School District. Now completed, her unit is used in elementary schools throughout the borough.

Speaking of her experience in Indian villages, the Alaska Teacher of the Year stated, "It has been my pleasure to absorb the traditions and values of the community I taught in . . . I try to break the boundaries that exist between school and society. The school is just one more means of transmitting that community's way of life to their children."

"I don't believe there are culturally deficient or culturally deprived people," Mrs. Clark stated. "These labels indicate some inherent weakness. In my classroom, regardless of the child's background, I want him to have a good self-concept. I want him to feel clever and a bit proud of himself."

When asked to describe the type of classroom atmosphere she wanted to create, Mrs. Clark said, "The six and one-half hours a day my students spend in school should be time spent in a happy, kind, interesting place. School should create life, not frustration. I judge my success by the response of my students. Constantly I must remind myself not to equate success with conformity and docility."

This outstanding teacher was chosen as a representative of good teaching in the State of Alaska through the Teacher of the Year program sponsored jointly by the State Department of Education and the NEA/Alaska.

Karen Clark, Alaska's Teacher of the Year, along with the representatives of the other 49 states, will be considered for the National Teacher of the Year award.

This program, sponsored by the National Council of Chief State School Officers, emphasizes teaching excellence as both an achievement and an inspiration to young people interested in joining the profession.