

CANADIAN TEACHER'S FEDERATION  
JULY 8, 2013

Thank you for inviting me to speak today on the situation of the Métis in our schools.

First let me provide you with a snapshot of who we are.

The Métis National Council represents the Métis Nation in our traditional homeland on the prairies and contiguous regions of Ontario and B.C.

The Métis are the children of the fur trade, offspring of French or Scottish fur traders and First Nation women.

After generations of marrying amongst themselves, our ancestors emerged as a new people with a distinct culture, language (Michif), and political consciousness on the plains of western Canada in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

That political consciousness was manifest during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in our struggle for free trade against the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly and the formation of Métis provisional governments led by President Louis Riel to resist the expansionist policies of Sir John A Macdonald.

Riel's first provisional government in the Red River Settlement negotiated the entry of Manitoba into Confederation through the *Manitoba Act* of 1870.

His second provisional government in the Saskatchewan Valley led the Métis resistance of 1885 which culminated in the defeat of the Métis at the battle of Batoche and the trial and execution of Riel on November 16, 1885.

Our defeat was followed by displacement, dispossession and decades of marginalization.

Unlike other Aboriginal peoples, the federal government denied its constitutional responsibility to deal with us and said we were a provincial responsibility.

Métis organizations surfaced on the prairies during the Depression era and pressed the provincial governments to improve the social and economic conditions of the Métis, leading to the establishment of the Métis Settlements in Alberta, the only Métis land base in Canada.

In 1982, the Métis were recognized as one of the three Aboriginal peoples in Canada in the patriated Constitution.

In the *Powley* decision in 2003, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Métis are a full-fledged rights bearing people with constitutionally protected Aboriginal rights.

That Court decision also validated our citizenship code or National Definition of Métis based on Métis descent and historic Métis nationhood by restricting s.35 rights under the Constitution to those who can prove ancestral connection to, and acceptance by, historical Métis communities.

In the *Daniels* decision in January of this year, the federal court ruled that the Métis are within federal jurisdiction and this decision is now under appeal.

In March of this year, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the federal government had failed to implement the Métis land rights section of the *Manitoba Act* in accordance with the honor of the Crown.

Despite these legal advances, Ottawa continues to deny its jurisdictional responsibility to deal with us.

Hence we are to this day excluded from federal education and health programs and funding available to First Nations and Inuit.

Nonetheless, we have been very active and consistent in pursuing our right to self-government and engaging with the federal government in areas where it is willing to deal with us such as economic and skills development.

The MNC comprises five provincial affiliates or Governing Members that have long established province-wide one person one vote ballot box elections for leadership.

They also have established professionally managed and arms-length institutions for delivering programs and services including education and training institutes such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan, the Louis Riel Institute in Manitoba and the Rupertsland Institute in Alberta.

As well, our Governing Members administer about \$55 million annually in skills development funding under the federal Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy or ASETS and have been able to deploy some of these resources for education purposes.

This historical and political background has influenced the situation of the Métis in schools today. So has demographics.

Our population of 400,000 is younger than the general population although not as young as the other Aboriginal peoples.

We are the most urbanized of the Aboriginal peoples at about 70%, with 40,000 Métis in Winnipeg and 28,000 in Edmonton, making us the largest part of the Aboriginal population in those cities.

We are one of the most mobile populations in the country.

Our labor force participation rate generally exceeds that of the general population and this can be attributed in part to our youthful demographics.

Our high school completion rate of 65% is higher than First Nations and Inuit but 11 points lower than non-Aboriginal people.

Likewise, our university completion rate at 7% is higher than First Nations and Inuit but considerably lower than the 18.5% rate for non-Aboriginal people.

As residents and taxpayers of the provinces and municipalities, we receive education as part of the general population.

Because of the barrier of jurisdiction, there is no special means of addressing our unique circumstances and aspirations.

At the same time, we feel that as a people with an inherent right to self-government and as taxpayers that we should be able to use part of our taxes for our priorities.

Broad goals for Métis education include both economic and cultural renewal for the Métis. Education must prepare Métis people to fully participate in the economy of our communities and Canadian society.

Mainstream education systems have failed the Métis on a number of fronts, in particular by failing to foster Métis cultural pride or identity.

Métis education must focus on more than simply replicating the status quo. It must be firmly grounded in Métis culture as a best practice to ensure success and instill cultural pride and perpetuity.

Broad-based development and application of learning materials, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches that reflect Métis culture, traditions and values is an undertaking that cannot be ignored.

Developing this awareness, knowledge, and understanding in the mainstream population is also imperative.

The K-12 system is also plagued by a lack of Métis specific data. Data has not been collected in any coordinated way between educational systems and provinces resulting in a lack of quality Métis data in the K-12 systems to speak to the specific education results of Métis students.

In cases where data is collected in the K-12 system, the data is most often identified as Aboriginal and does not specify Métis, First Nations or Inuit. There is a preconception that by and large, the Aboriginal student population is First

Nations. The information about Aboriginal people our children encounter in public schools is likely to have more to do with First Nations culture than their own.

Accountability to the Métis community is an important aspect of any policy direction.

While the Métis largely seek to work in conjunction with the provincial education authorities, there is a need to expand the capacity of Métis Nation institutions to influence the mainstream system.

Our foremost educational institute, the Gabriel Dumont Institute was incorporated in 1980 to serve the educational and cultural needs of Saskatchewan's Métis community.

GDI offers community-based accredited programming in communities across the province.

The Institute holds affiliation and federation agreements with various educational institutions in the province such as the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology.

The Institute offers a wide range of programs and services, including SUNTEP or Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, a four-year Bachelor of Education degree program that has graduated more than 1,000 Métis teachers since 1984, and Dumont Technical Institute, which provides Adult Basic Education and Skills Training to over 700 students each year in communities across the province.

The MNC has in the past proposed the establishment of pilot K-3 schools in specific Métis communities, under the control of Métis community educational authorities across the Métis Homeland and in conjunction with existing Métis teacher education programs, such as SUNTEP.

As national president, I work with the federal government in trying to break down the jurisdictional barriers that impede Métis access to early childhood learning and childcare.

The ASETS program for skills development has generally worked well for Métis but it excludes Métis undergoing training from federal childcare resources otherwise provided for First Nations and Inuit.

Although eligible for federal off-reserve Aboriginal head start programs, Métis children end up being marginalized.

In 2006 only 6% of school aged Métis children in Winnipeg had attended these

preschool programs compared to 25% of First Nation children.

In a recent meeting I had with the Prime Minister, I proposed that a facility for purchasing day care for Métis persons in training as well as an equitable part of Aboriginal headstart funding, should be built into the upcoming renewal of our ASETS agreements.

We also discussed means of addressing the huge disparity between Métis and the non-Aboriginal population in university educational attainment.

Métis are excluded from federal Aboriginal post-secondary education assistance offered to First Nations and Inuit and many of our people from the working poor cannot afford to go deep into debt with student loans.

Our ASETS holders have been able to use a small part of their ASETS funding to establish endowment funds that provide bursaries to Metis students for their post-secondary education. These endowments leverage matching funds from the post-secondary institutions where they are established which get their funds from the Provinces.

As some of these provinces have now suspended or eliminated the matching funds due to fiscal austerity, I asked the Prime Minister to look at a National Métis Endowment Fund that could be drawn upon to create endowments for Métis students on a matching basis with Métis organizations and other donors.

Shortly before our meeting, I and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs signed the renewal of the Métis Nation Protocol that has been the cornerstone of the relationship between the MNC and the Government of Canada since 2008.

Under the Protocol, our leadership has worked with the federal Minister, his counterparts from the five westernmost provinces, and industry on a collaborative approach to Métis economic development.

That process has involved significant federal and provincial investments in our economic development institutions and is culminating in a long-term Métis economic development strategy.

The Métis Nation has also been engaged with the Council of the Federation (COF), which is composed of the provincial and territorial Premiers, and since 2009, the newly created Aboriginal Affairs Working Group (AAWG) which meets between the annual COF meetings to move the government-Aboriginal agenda forward. One of the agenda items dealt with is education, and we have also in this connection interfaced with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

I have proposed to the federal government and the Premiers of the five westernmost provinces that we duplicate this multilateral approach in the

development of a Métis Education Strategy that could address the most serious obstacles to progress that I have discussed today.

As you may have noticed, the Métis National Council's preferred approach when dealing with all matters pertaining to the Métis Nation is to proceed on a distinctions-based approach; Métis, First Nations and Inuit.

We believe this approach better serves our people and promotes the implementation of the inherent right of self-government as enshrined in s.35 of the *Constitution Act 1982*.

The purpose of this Métis Education Strategy will be to improve Métis educational outcomes throughout the life long learning continuum.

The principal goal of the Strategy will be to close the education "gap" between Métis and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The means of achieving this will include greater Métis Nation participation in early childhood education and expanded capacity to support the needs of Métis children at the elementary and secondary levels of the educational system.

We believe that this can be accomplished in part through the establishment of specific Métis curriculum, development of Métis authorities, valuing Métis Nation knowledge, values and skills, and pedagogical environments that respect this authority.

We also seek to expand access to post-secondary education by way of direct student support in the form of bursaries and through the expansion of current Métis post-secondary institutions.

A Métis Education Strategy should recognize that multiple orders of government and their institutions have a role to play which speaks to the need to break the jurisdictional impasse on Métis Nation issues.

The MNC has attempted to downplay the need to make a determination on the issue of jurisdiction and has instead proposed the need for a pragmatic practical discussion on improving Métis educational outcomes.

Therefore, the Métis Education Strategy will be developed through an iterative process with all stakeholders.

A first step will be an open-ended education Seminar in the late fall of 2013. The purpose of the Seminar will be to discuss Métis education issues and the MNC will work with the federal Minister to encourage the participation of provincial education Ministers, School Boards and stakeholders.

This will include bringing together Métis post-secondary and educational/cultural institutions.

In this regard the MNC would also welcome the active participation of the Canadian Teachers Federation.

I look forward to working with you on this.

Marsi, Merci, Thank you.