

STATE OF MÉTIS NATION LEARNING

Prime Minister Paul Martin: Reply to the Speech to the Throne (February 3, 2004)

To turn the corner will require a new partnership. It will require a shared commitment to improving Aboriginal governance - essential to self-government and economic development.

With our partners, we will tackle head on the particular problems faced by the increasing number of urban Aboriginal people and by the Métis.

WHO ARE THE MÉTIS?

The Métis Nation is a distinct society within the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada. The Métis are distinct from the Indian and Inuit and are the descendants of the historic Métis who evolved in what is now Western Canada and part of the northern United States, as a people, with a common political will, consciousness, language, culture, history and homeland.

Having experienced physical and political conflict and dispossession in the late 1800s, the Métis people are still engaged in a continuing struggle to rebuild our social base and to revive Métis cultural heritage and pride. As such, the Métis people are striving for the political, legal and constitutional recognition and guarantees of the rights as a People, including the right to a land and resource base, self-government and self-government institutions.

The Métis National Council represents the Historic Métis Nation in Canada at the national and international levels. At a regional level, the Métis Nation is represented through democratically-elected, province-wide Governing Members who come together to form the Métis National Council. The Métis Nation's homeland includes the three prairie provinces and goes into part of Ontario, British Columbia, Northwest Territories and northern United States. The Métis people constitute a very significant proportion of the overall Aboriginal population in all areas of the Métis Nation homeland. This is especially true "off reserve" where Métis account for approximately one half of the Aboriginal population from Ontario westward. Within the Métis National Council and Governing Member structure, the women form provincial organizations, with a national voice for Métis women through the Women of the Métis Nation. Youth are organized similarly, with the Métis Nation Youth Advisory Council. Both women and youth are represented in all governance and committees.

In addition to the recognition of the Métis Nation, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples speaks to what they have called the "Other Métis". They make reference to the early relationship on the east coast between the women of the Inuit and Innu populations and the European fishermen. The

Labrador Métis Association, while remaining culturally connected to their Inuit ancestry, have recently begun to identify themselves as Métis.

A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Métis in Canada have had both a similar and an unique experience from the other Aboriginal peoples. Confederation becomes a significant marker in understanding how the relationship of the Métis Nation to the federal state took a divergent turn. While treaties defined a relationship with Canada and afforded some protections for many First Nations, this was not the case for the Métis.

The Essence of the Métis Way of Being:

The Métis Nation is a distinct and unique Aboriginal nation, and as such we are guaranteed the right of self government and self-determination. Reclaiming and preserving Métis culture and language is the foundation of all life long learning. (MNC Consultations with the Métis Community)

Despite this recognition, First Nations today face significant challenges to the protection of their rights, now protected, along with those of the Métis and Inuit people in the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The desired approach to addressing these challenges is unique to each of the three peoples. However, the implementation of self-government remains at the core of those visions. Hence, in addressing the challenges of Métis children, youth, adult and elders, the context for implementation must be set

respectfully within the self-government framework, both in terms of representation and authority. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples began the consideration of what this might mean for the Métis Nation today. This paper begins where the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples left off. The protection of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights is the lens through which a conversation on Aboriginal education, and in this instance, Métis Nation education, must be viewed.

The negotiation of Manitoba into the Canadian confederation in 1870, the federal government's actions in Red River, the mass exodus of the Métis from their traditional territories into the west, in the early 1870s, and the taking of arms against the Métis Nation at Batoche in 1885 and the subsequent hanging of Louis Riel, the leader of the Métis, for treason, marked the turn of history for the Métis people. What once flourished was now underground. The time is now 120 years later. For the last 75 – 100 years, the Métis people have been formally organized with societies and collectives to address and speak to the issues facing the Métis Nation.

Constitutional Act, 1982

Section 35 (1) and (2) set out the protections of the Aboriginal peoples under Canada's highest law. "The existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples) of Canada and hereby recognized and affirmed."

The Period of Exclusion

In 2001, a Métis Elder recounted her life and experience growing up at Crooked Lake, Saskatchewan, across the lake from the neighbouring Indian Reserves, and then her family's subsequent move to the Métis settlement of Crescent Lake. She was born around 1910. She recounted reaching school age, speaking the language of her Métis people – Michif – and her father taking her to the nearby Indian Reserve Day School where she was turned away because she was Métis and not Indian. Her father then took her to the nearby Grayson school to register where she was turned away because she was Métis and not white. She recounted her father's words: "You are not going to school, my girl! I take you to one place and they turn you away and I take you to another and they turn you away there, too. There is no place left to go." She returned to her way of life as a Métis, working the hides and meat of her father's hunts, the deer, the muskrats and the rabbits. She recalled the tanning and the beadwork, the making of quilts. She spoke of the collection of medicines and plants, the gathering of berries. She was a midwife and delivered many of the children born to the nearby families. She remembered the dancing, the laughter, the language, the community and the families. A school was eventually established on the Crescent Lake Métis Settlement. This story is recounted because for the Métis this is a common story. The history of Métis education began with exclusion.

Residential and Mission Schools

The period of exclusion was followed by the establishment of the Residential Schools where many Métis children attended along with their First Nations relations. Many Métis children were taken by the church-run Mission Boarding schools as well. In Isle-a-la-Crosse today, several Aboriginal healing Foundation projects are in place to attempt to address the lingering and devastating experiences of the Métis who attended Residential and Boarding Schools. One such project, now part of a

The Métis strive for the protection of the right of the nation to grow and develop as a unique Aboriginal people within Canada.
(MNC Consultations with the Métis Community)

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant to address the need for increased capacity for Métis participation in the governance of the natural resources and local economy, has attempted to reconnect the Métis family by undertaking extensive genealogical research, capturing historic and contemporary land use activities, and creating intergenerational links between the Elders and traditional resources users (then and now) with the youth. One of the impacts of the Residential and Boarding Schools is the disconnection of the Métis families with the land and the languages (Michif, Cree and Dene) to which their experiences and stories are held. It is an effort to revitalize the Métis community by reuniting the young people with their spiritual, economic and cultural connections to the lands traditionally used by their ancestors. Isle-a-la-Crosse celebrated its 225th anniversary as a Métis community in 2001, marking its beginnings as 1776, more than 129 years before Saskatchewan became a province.

Across the Métis homeland today, the Métis community tries to heal from this history. But healing is not only about prayer and forgiveness; it is about acting for change. Healing for the Métis Nation is about recognition. The Métis are active in trying to secure a place for the Métis

Nation in society. The Métis are active in protecting their language and culture. The Métis are trying to find opportunities for the promotion and celebration of the Métis way of life. The Métis are descendants of a very spiritual people. Many today remain devout Catholics and faithful Protestants who revere the priests and ministers (relative to the French or English connection) as was the way of life on the buffalo hunt. The Métis have always been and continue to be a political people, who continue to fight the complex and long struggle for the recognition of their rights as Aboriginal peoples, whose rights are now protected in Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982*. For the Métis, identity, language, culture, history and tradition are one and wound within this is the vision for education. The sash is a symbol of this complex weaving.

Modern Schooling

The Canadian federation has only recently turned its attention to the needs of the Métis learner. As the Métis are not a "land-based" people, with the exception of the Métis Settlements of Alberta¹, the issues of cultural survival and self-government become paramount. The jurisdictional wrangling between the federal and provincial governments over responsibility for the Métis remains a core impediment to resolving the growing problems facing the Métis. Where First Nations have moved ahead with "on-reserve" educational efforts, the Métis remain without recognized jurisdiction and authority. The Métis are schooled within publically-funded schools, and in Catholic school systems governed by the provincial governments and specific protections by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Many communities across the homeland were once predominantly populated by the Métis. Today the Métis are a minority in most of them. Many projects are underway across the nation to re-write the history of these communities to reflect the contribution of the Métis families and the Métis community in their early development. The Métis are in a process of re-claiming their history across the Métis Nation homeland. The Canadian population generally is not aware that there is a Métis Nation and is not aware of the history, culture and special rights of the Métis Nation - resulting from the need to reconcile occupation prior to confederation. The Métis Nation is not unaffected by a colonial past. Métis Nation identity, culture, language, traditions are weakened. And little is being done to support the efforts of families and the community as a whole to address this breakdown.

¹ The land base for Alberta Métis began with the formation in 1895 beginning with the colony of St. Paul des Métis, established by the government of Canada, and later opened for public homesteading. The Métis of Alberta, disenfranchised from their lands, beginning in the late 1800s with the treaty process and the issuing of half-breed scrip until as late as 1921, petitioned the provincial government on behalf of the Métis for assistance in "obtaining land, education, medical care and free hunting and fishing permits", forming the Métis Association of Alberta, now known as the Métis Nation of Alberta. The Ewing Commission was struck, resulting in a series of recommendations and the enactment of the *Métis Population Betterment Act* (1938). The Métis Settlements were formed shortly thereafter, setting aside of 1.25 million acres of land, governed by provincial legislation. By 1979, the Settlements had achieved administrative authority for delivery of local housing, education and culture programs. (Bell, Catherine E. *Alberta's Métis Settlements Legislation*: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994)

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

Prime Minister Paul Martin: Address at the First Canada-Aboriginal Roundtable (April 19, 2004)

From our vantage point, we will ensure a full seat at the table - as we have ensured today - to Aboriginal communities and leaders. No longer will we in Ottawa develop policies first and discuss them with you later. This principle of collaboration will be the cornerstone of our new partnership.

In forming the new government, I gave mandate letters to each Minister outlining what they were expected to fulfill. Now I am writing again to Ministers, instructing each to work in partnership with you and to discuss in advance important policy initiatives relevant to your areas of need. Changes are also needed on your side. Building capacity to achieve transparency, accountability and good governance is an important step towards Aboriginal self-government.

Land-Based and Non-Land-Based Authority / Community Ownership

The government has two lenses for approaching Aboriginal education. These two lenses are off reserve and on reserve. For the Métis, these two lenses say nothing about the current educational environment. While the majority of Métis people reside in urban centres, many remain connected to their traditional settlement areas. The transition to the urban centres is often described as a short term solution for the purposes of employment, education and training, as well as for medical treatment. Métis children are primarily educated in the public or separate educational systems within the urban areas and in the rural and northern villages across the homeland.

Métis Living in Urban Centres

In western Canada, Métis form the majority (or the near majority) of the Aboriginal population in major urban centres. As reported by Census 2001 under Statistics Canada and the Aboriginal Peoples Survey “about 295,000 people who live in non-reserve areas identified as being Métis during the Census. This group represented about 40% of the total Aboriginal non-reserve population in Canada.”² In the cities of Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Prince Albert, the Métis exceed 50% of the total Aboriginal population and represent well over a third of the Aboriginal population in most other western cities, including Vancouver. The Métis make up a significant proportion of the Aboriginal people as well in Thunder Bay and Toronto. This mirrors the 1996 census outcomes, where a focus on Aboriginal populations aged 15-19 shows Métis numbers are greatest in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Thunder Bay, Edmonton, Sudbury, Victoria, Calgary, Vancouver and Ottawa³.

² Statistics Canada Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1996, page 9.

³ Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2002, page 20.

| Total Aboriginal Identity and Métis Identity Populations of Selected Census Metropolitan Areas, 2001 | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| CMA | Total Abo ID Pop | Métis Single Respon se ID | Percent Métis |
| Toronto | 20,300 | 5,095 | 25.1% |
| Thunder Bay | 8,200 | 1,795 | 21.9% |
| Winnipeg | 55,755 | 31,395 | 56.3% |
| Regina | 15,685 | 5,990 | 38.2% |
| Saskatoon | 20,275 | 8,305 | 41.0% |
| Prince Albert | 11,640 | 5,950 | 51.1% |
| Edmonton | 40,930 | 21,065 | 51.5% |
| Calgary | 21,915 | 10,575 | 48.3% |
| Vancouver | 36,860 | 12,505 | 33.9% |
| Average | 25,729 | 11,408 | 44.3% |
| Source: 2001 Canadian Census | | | |

According to Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, "of the Aboriginal peoples, the Métis are the most likely to be urban residents and move frequently. Almost 70% of all Métis live in Canada's urban areas: one third of all Métis live in just five cities: Winnipeg; Edmonton; Vancouver; Calgary; Saskatoon.

For young Métis, if they live in a city, their chances of living in a lone-parent family are double that of their rural counterparts. Their chances of remaining in one place are much less than other Aboriginal peoples: one-fifth of all Métis moved in the year previous of the 2001 census⁴. Poverty rates for the Aboriginal Identity Population, reported in the Senate Report, for 1996, shows that for all of these cities from Thunder Bay through to Vancouver, rates are between 47.8 to 66.12%.

As captured in the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey Report by Statistics Canada, "the North American Indian and Métis populations reported similar levels for most chronic conditions - arthritis or rheumatism; high blood pressure, asthma; stomach problems or intestinal ulcers, diabetes, heart problems"

The right of the Métis Nation to self-determination and to govern itself and ensure that future policy / processes address issues of racism and assimilation must be protected, regardless of residency.
(MNC Consultations with the Métis Community)

⁴ Senate, Ibid. Page 21

(p.15). Health experts maintain that inadequate housing can be associated with a list of health problems. Crowded living conditions can lead to the transmission of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis A, and can also increase risk of injuries, mental health problems, family tensions and violence ⁵. The APS report goes on to say that crowded households “is an issue for Aboriginal people living in many of Canada’s largest cities, particularly Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton.” For the Métis, the crowding percentages extend also to Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver ⁶.

This picture also includes figures on educational standing for Métis in urban areas. According to the 2001 census, 52% of non-reserve Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 in 1996 had incomplete secondary school as their highest level of schooling. By 2001, this figure had declined to 48%.

The Métis Nation is clearly facing significant challenges in urban and rural Canada in addressing the gap between Métis and non-Aboriginal Canadians. The Métis Nation has a unique and special history in Canada, one that is tied to northern and remote areas but one that is also tied to the urban settlement. Winnipeg is a prime example of the unique relationship between the Métis Nation and urbanization, having been the majority population of the Red River Settlement which grew to today’s City of Winnipeg. This city engulfs Métis Nation lands. Traditional hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering territories, grew around Métis Nation culture, language, heritage and story. The Métis are not strangers in Winnipeg, rather Winnipeg is at the heart of the Métis Nation homeland, history and identity. In the City of Winnipeg, the Métis experience unique challenges in maintaining cultural identity, ties and teachings, in finding employment and raising Métis children to know this history and to find their way to a good life among many Canadians. Within this urban context, self-government becomes significantly more difficult but equally more important.

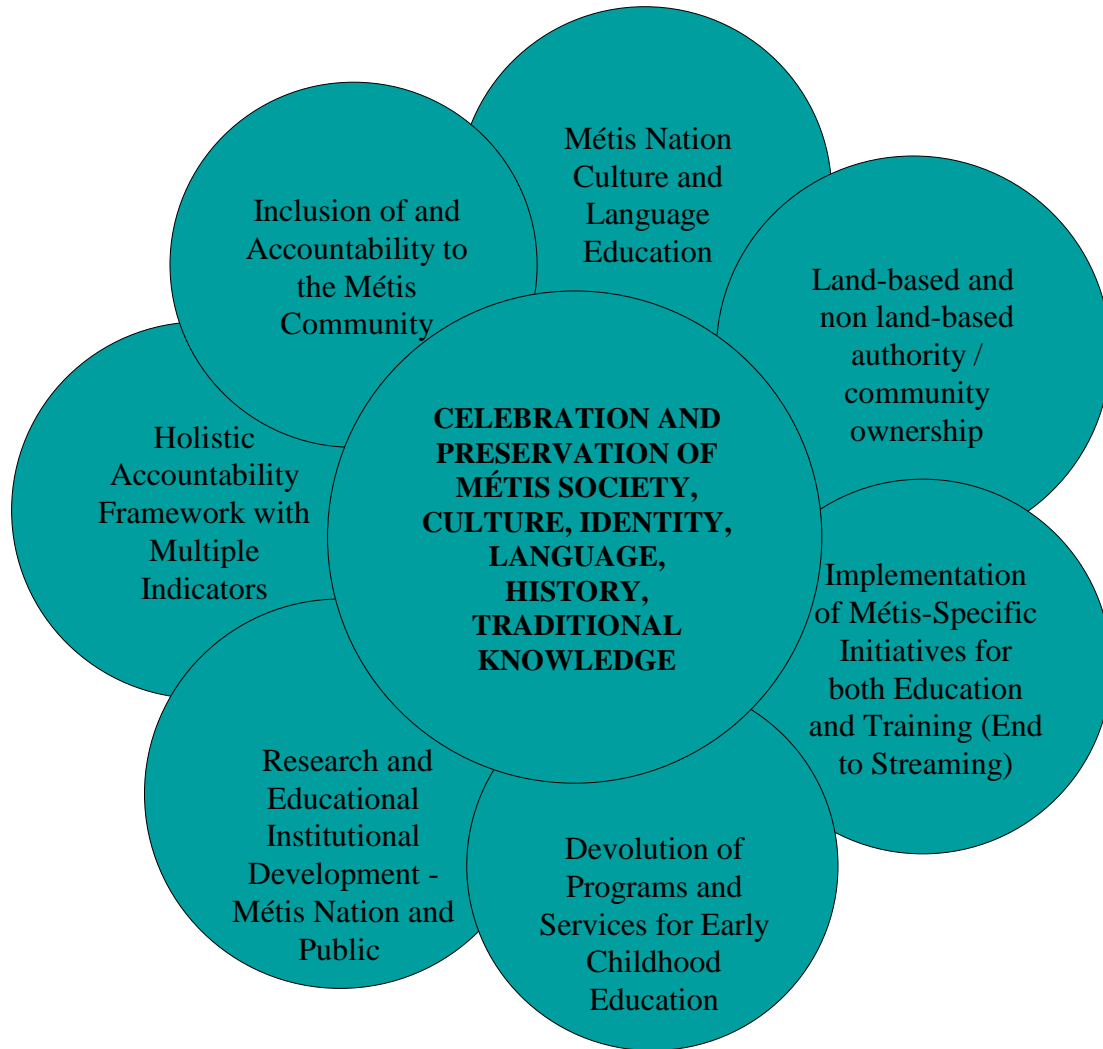
⁵ Government of Canada, Health Canada Report on Infectious Disease, 1999, page 14.

⁶ Statistics Canada. Aboriginal Peoples Survey, page 25.

MÉTIS NATION EDUCATION: FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

From the context of the Métis community, as set out in a series of roundtable dialogues with Métis educators, Elders, women and youth from across the Métis Nation homeland, a number of principles were set out to guide future dialogues with Canada and the provinces on the development of initiatives to address the future of Métis Nation education. These are as follows:

- The central goal for Métis education is the preservation of the Métis Nation, including the preservation of the history, culture, language and identity and the relationship of the Métis to the land.
- The celebration and preservation of Métis society, culture, identity, language, history and traditional knowledge is closely linked with the preservation of the Métis to their traditional lands and the traditions so intimately tied to these lands.
- The Métis Nation shares with the other Aboriginal Peoples and Indigenous Peoples worldwide the impacts of on-going colonization and racism.
- The Métis strive for the protection of the right of the nation to grow and develop as a unique Aboriginal people within Canada.
- The Métis Nation wants to ensure that all processes and policies linked to life long learning and education for existing and future generations promote the preservation of the Métis Nation. This is the foundation for the success of the Métis people in all contexts of life, including the full continuum of life long learning from cradle to grave.
- Implementation must be Métis-specific in order to respect the unique situations of Métis people in urban, northern and rural settings across the Métis Homeland.
- The Métis Nation must develop the capacity / authorities to govern these educational / other institutions and to secure the necessary relationships of benefit to the Métis Nation.
- The right of the Métis Nation to self-determination and to govern itself and ensure that future policy / processes address issues of racism and assimilation must be protected.
- Jurisdictional wrangling continues to be a core issue in finding solutions to the problems of Métis education. The imposition of provincial boundaries over the traditional territories of the Métis Nation means an unregulated and irregular framework for these and other issues. The Métis seek resolution to the question of jurisdictional responsibility.

TOWARDS A MÉTIS NATION MODEL OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

The Purpose of Métis Education is the Preservation and Celebration of Métis Society, Culture, History, Identity, Language and Traditional Knowledge.

The path to a new future is through education. It was the reason behind the establishment of the residential schools. It was the reason for the establishment of French language education by the Francophone community. It is the reason why First Nations fought to gain Indian Control of Indian Education⁷. The purpose of any system of education for Métis learners, in this century, is to reconnect the Métis community to its sense of being; connected to family and the land. It is to make an effort to fix the damage caused by the past and to imagine a future of possibilities. This is the thinking of the Métis community today⁸.

An Excerpt from the Métis Nation Submission to Canadian Heritage on the Protection of Aboriginal Languages⁹

There is a Métis Nation. Métis are not “half-Indians”. Our people originally had Indian ancestry, to be sure, but there is more to being Métis than that. The Métis coalesced into a distinct people in the Old Northwest, well before Confederation or the take-over of the Northwest by Canada. We are a new Nation – a unique nation – a people original to what is now known as North America. Our Homeland roughly includes the three prairie provinces, and parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the northern United States.

You will understand nothing about the Métis unless you appreciate the central role that national identity plays in defining who we are. That national identity is founded, first, on a history of doing things together; and second, on a common culture that makes us different than either First Nations or Europeans.

⁷ National Indian Brotherhood: Indian Control of Indian Education. 1973

⁸ The Métis National Council, in compiling a Métis Nation position for the purposes of the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtables on Life Long Learning, gathered a group of Métis educators (university faculty; secondary education teachers, primary education teachers, policy experts, curriculum developers, Aboriginal education coordinators, adult education instructors, teachers union staff, government policy staff, Elders, program developers, special education experts, women’s representatives, youth representatives, Michif language specialists, representing the Métis Nation from Ontario westward) together to discuss the issues facing the children, youth, adults and elders in the Métis community as it relates to Life Long Learning. The internal sessions served to produce the Métis National Council position paper (attached), as well as served as the discussions which were then undertaken with the broader education community, including policy experts, which included Métis and non-Métis participants. This paper is a summary of the internal discussions within the Métis Nation.

⁹ Métis National Council Presentation to the Aboriginal Languages Task Force, Ottawa, August 26, 2004

Since the 1870s, it is safe to say that Métis history has been dominated by the overriding imperative of maintaining and protecting our national identity and heritage in the face of persistent and overwhelming pressures from the federal government and society at large to deny our existence as a distinct people. Nation building has emerged as the central vehicle for our survival as a people, and as an expression of our right of self-determination. We survive because we stick together – as families, as communities and, above all, through our national and provincial representative governments.

Our people do not fit the organizational/governmental paradigm associated with the First Nations peoples. First Nations peoples have land bases – normally called “reserves” – which each have their own government. Métis do not have reserves. Our people were dispossessed from our lands through the biggest government sponsored swindle visited upon an Aboriginal people in what is now known as Canada. Only in Alberta has any land been set aside by that province specifically for Métis. The vast majority of Métis live either in small rural and remote communities, primarily in the northern reaches of the former Métis homeland, or in the urban centres of mainstream Canada, both large and small.

The form of organization that best gives expression to our reality is province-wide representative organizations, now emerging as governments. In this, we are very different from First Nations. It is critically important for the federal government and this Task Force to understand that we do not fit the First Nations governance paradigm. We are constantly bombarded with federal directives for “community-based” programming. However, this approach reaches a small minority of Métis living in rural communities where the majority of inhabitants happen to be Métis. If you want to reach the general Métis population, you have to deal with our provincial representative governments. This is how we are structured.

I mentioned that a common culture is one of the central foundations of our national identity. Where ever Métis have organized for collective purposes, their organizations have placed priority on Métis culture and cultural activities. This is key to the nation-building efforts to which I referred earlier. For us, there can be no separation between culture on one hand and political life of the community on the other. They go hand-in-hand. This is why the Métis so strongly oppose any attempt by the federal government to usurp our responsibilities for the cultural well-being of our people – including the development of

policy on languages and culture of the Métis Nation. If you want to help the Métis, you must give us the tools to promote our culture and preserve and enhance the use of our original languages. However, it would be wrong for the federal government to believe that it can do this for us.

The assumption we make is that in the early education of young children that the best place is the family and the community. That is where we are starting. But because of the systemic issues as a result of colonization, etc, the government is very interested in our children. As a responsible person in our community, just because you are poor does not mean that you have to give up that right. The best people to educate that child at a young age is the family and the community. We want to be a part of that.

(MNC Consultations with the Métis Community)

Devolution of Programs and Services for Early Childhood Education

The Government of Canada, in their Background Paper on Aboriginal Lifelong Learning, November 2004, acknowledges that there is international, national and regional interest in developing a lifelong learning policy approach to Aboriginal education which addresses a broad range of social, economic, cultural and political development objectives¹⁰. This policy objective was echoed by the provincial governments. For the Aboriginal people, as presented at the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtables (CAPR), the lifelong learning continuum was part of the bundle of Aboriginal rights protected under the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and specifically as it relates to the Métis, it was believed that it was the right of the Métis learner to learn in a context which is respectful, knowledgeable and inclusive of Métis society and culture. This is especially true in the context of early childhood education.

The Métis community sees that early childhood education is the earliest part of the lifelong learning path and the most important part of the path in terms of forming a strong sense of pride, identity, language and cultural knowledge. The Métis child has a right to begin the lifelong journey of forming their Métis way of being. The best place for this learning is within the family and community. Métis parents want to prepare their children for the formal educational institutions by grounding them from an early age to be responsible people, to be strong in the knowledge of who they are, where they come from, and how to proceed in life in a meaningful way. Some believe that the goal of government is to break the Métis family down. The Métis community wants to unify the Métis family and reconnect the Métis family with Métis culture and values.

International Declaration of the Rights of the Child Principle 7

The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgment, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.

The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right.

¹⁰ Government of Canada. *Aboriginal Lifelong Learning Background Paper*. Prepared for the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable Dialogues, November 2004 (unpublished).

For this reason there needs to be Métis Nation controlled early childhood centres at the community level. These early childhood centres would teach the Michif language, be designed and implemented by Métis families for their children. Métis Nation institutions such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatoon and the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg must be supported to undertake research and develop the curriculum for use in early childhood education. There must be a Métis lense on the analysis of data. This curriculum would be available for use in the Métis - specific early childhood centres but also for use in early childhood centres in the general public. Métis culture, identity, knowledge and ways of knowing, must be a legitimate part of the curriculum and the stories which hold this understanding must become a part of the curriculum for all children, not just Métis children and integrated in a way that transforms the curriculum. The Métis Nation must be given the capacity to begin addressing these challenges. Capacity development must be within the nation, not outside of it. The responsibility for educating the Métis child rests with the Métis community.

The Métis community asks: How best can the Métis community be supported to carry out this responsibility? What types of educational/other institutions are best able to carry out this work on behalf of the Métis Nation? In 1999, as in 2005, a group of Métis Elders sat together and identified that the issues facing the Métis children were resulting because of the loss of connection to the land and their Aboriginal language. All things must connect back to the land and life in harmony with the land, they said. How will current institutions / future policies promote the re-connection of the Métis people to the land and environment? How are current institutions held answerable / accountable to the Métis Nation for these outcomes?

The Métis Nation must ensure that all processes and policies linked to life long learning and education of our existing and future generations promote the preservation of the Métis Nation. This is the foundation for the success of the Métis people in all contexts of life, including the full continuum of life long learning from cradle to grave. (MNC Consultations with the Métis Community)

Currently, the Government of Canada approaches early childhood education for the Métis child as a provincial responsibility. The federal department of Social Development most recently devolved new funding in the amount of \$5 billion for the Aboriginal component of this program to the provinces under the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreements. It is the position of the federal government that off-reserve Aboriginal children will have access to the \$2.2 billion already allocated to the provinces. There is no indication that the provinces will institute an Aboriginal set-aside within this allocation, nor that within that allocation, there will be a Métis-specific allocation. Further, governance of these dollars provides no involvement or accountability to the Métis community, leaving the goals and visions of the Métis community to remain outside of this new federal effort.

***Minister Denis Coderre, Federal Interlocutor - Address at the
Canada-Aboriginal Roundtable (April 19, 2004)***

We also need to improve our relationship with the Métis. Since the time of Louis Riel, Métis people have had to fight for their rights. And on September 19th, the Supreme Court of Canada released its first ever ruling on Métis Aboriginal Rights - The Powley case. The Powley case affirmed that Métis are a distinct people that hold collective Aboriginal rights, a full-fledged rights-bearing people. The Powley decision was a watershed in relations among Aboriginal people and the government of Canada. We recognize the truth of that decision and are turning the corner, renewing the relationship. The decision has changed the nature of our relationship with the Métis people.

Implementation of Métis-Specific Initiatives for both Education and Training

The Métis Nation had proposed that the model for addressing the issues facing the Métis child be through the design of Métis-specific components to programs of general application, which would then be devolved directly to the Métis community, through Métis governance structures and authorities, similar to the successful Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. The devolution to the provinces is a guarantee of a patchwork, hit and miss, gap-filled model, at best. At worst, there will be no programming dollars set aside to meet the needs of the Métis child. There is only one Métis Nation and the homeland stretches over five provinces and one territory.¹¹ The statistics show that the Métis are a very mobile people. From one province to another, there are little or no consistencies in the approach to a Métis-specific model of implementation, of the structure and content of that programming or to the respect for, or lack thereof, to the self-determination aspirations of the Métis Nation. The Aboriginal Headstart program is the only other mechanism to address issues of early childhood education within the Métis community and there exist only a handful of Métis-specific programs across the country. This is a source of ongoing frustration. An analysis of the gaps in programs and services for the Métis people shows that of the Aboriginal programming for early childhood development (once dealt with exclusively through the federal department of Health through the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB)), there were no dollars for the Métis. The jurisdictional wrangling between the federal and provincial governments over who is to take responsibility for the Métis remains a stumbling block in beginning serious and meaningful dialogue and change.

¹¹ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recognized the possibility of other Métis people. Specifically, the Labrador Métis Nation is one such consideration, although in their submission to the Supreme Court of Canada in the R v. Powley case in 2000, they specifically asked the Justices to support their legal and cultural rights as Inuit peoples. The potential for other Métis remains.

In addition, the Métis Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement holders echoed a similar concern over the AHRDS renewal process, calling upon the federal government to address Métis childcare needs.

¹²These employment and training funds are allocated to address the lack of Métis participation, in this specific case, in the economy. Currently, the childcare component of the AHRDS is managed by the FNIHB and is used for access to child care spaces for single and other parents while addressing employment and training upgrading. The Métis do not have access to these childcare or any other childcare dollars. As set out in the Métis National Council paper on Life Long Learning, the federal government, in its own paper on lifelong learning acknowledged that:

Parental and community supports are equally important factors in ensuring the developmental foundation needed in early childhood education. There is abundant evidence that children who have experienced high quality early childhood development programs, such as prenatal health programs, Head Start programs and quality childcare programs (among others) are highly effective means of ensuring children get the best possible start in life, and ensuring school readiness, by addressing developmental and cultural needs in the early years, if administered in culturally sensitive and targeted ways.

*The research and statistical evidence available suggests that the overall regime of federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal services and programs currently supporting Aboriginal learners is not producing acceptable results. While significant progress has been made in improving life chances for Aboriginal children and youth and Aboriginal educational attainments in general, it is not occurring at a pace comparable to that of non-Aboriginal Canadians nor in a way that meets the cultural and other learning needs of Aboriginal peoples. This suggests that a concerted effort by all partners is required to ensure consistent access to culturally relevant quality programs and services and improved learning outcomes throughout the continuum.*¹³

The imposition of provincial boundaries over the traditional territories of the Métis Nation means an unregulated and irregular framework for addressing educational and other issues. It is

Implementation must be Métis-specific in order to respect the unique situations of Métis people in urban, northern and rural settings across the Métis Homeland.

(Consultations with the Métis Community)

Jurisdictional wrangling continues to be a core issue in finding solutions to the problems of Métis education.

(Consultations with the Métis Community)

¹² Métis National Council. Life Long Learning Policy Paper prepared for the Canada Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable process. November 2004.

¹³ Government of Canada. *Aboriginal Lifelong Learning*. Ibid.

recognized that implementation must be Métis-specific in order to respect the unique situations of Métis people in urban, northern and rural settings and it must be governed by the Métis community on a national level which respects the need for local and regional autonomy and implementation of programs and services. A national multilateral process specifically for the Métis Nation with the federal and appropriate provincial governments is required to address the issues of lifelong learning and to ensure involvement of and accountability to the Métis community has been proposed. The Métis Nation Framework Agreement, signed on May 31, 2005, as part of the policy outcomes of the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable process, sets out the framework for an ongoing multilateral process with multiple subject areas. A Multilateral Process Agreement is currently being negotiated. Any new funding resources to address issues of Métis education are called on to be allocated under the governance of the Métis Nation multilateral process or to Métis Nation institutions (such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute and the Louis Riel Institute and others) rather than mainstream institutions to ensure a change in long term goals. The engagement of the local and regional authorities for the Métis community must reflect the aspirations of the Métis Nation to be self-governing and support the on-going capacity development of the Métis community through existing structures and agencies.

The Métis community asks: What is the process for analyzing current relationships and determining what relationships are required for successful implementation? How does the Métis Nation manage the different relationships so there are fewer gaps? What will the Métis Nation's relationship be with federal, provincial and territorial governments?

We must support the Métis Nation to develop the capacity / authorities within the Métis Nation to govern these educational / other institutions and to secure the necessary relationships of benefit to the Métis Nation. We must ensure respect for the right of the Métis Nation to self-determination and to govern itself and ensure that future policy / processes address issues of racism and assimilation. (MNC Consultations with the Métis Community)

Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Systems

Kindergarten to grade twelve systems of education are not meeting the needs of Métis learners. The Métis community discussed the notion that Métis children are being streamed into certain training for reasons other than that of their parents and community. The Métis want certainty that the parents are making the decisions about the education of their children. The continuation of the relationship of children, youth and adolescents to their elders must be respected. The Métis community must be an active partner in the education of Métis children, setting the goals of the system, not merely adopting the goals of the majority. It is clear that not enough is being done to address the needs and supports of the Métis learner in existing K-12 educational systems. Existing educational policy is not adequate to the challenges of the rising youth populations in the Métis community. Clearly options exist to do things differently, both in redesigning public education to meet the needs of the learner, without promoting a "Métis side-show" approach, and in establishing alternative systems of learning, giving families a choice and giving Métis children

hope that change is real. Education needs to promote role models, demonstrate to youth that the future is rich with possibilities. In Manitoba, the Selkirk School Division has undertaken partnership arrangements with both the Manitoba Métis Federation (provincial) and Métis Locals, promoting Métis-specific stay in school programs, mentorship programs and altering music curriculum to include fiddles and Métis music. There needs to be a holistic approach to addressing the needs of the Métis learner and implementation of a continuum of learning supports. The partnership with the Métis community is a necessary part of this continuum. School boards need to be held accountable to the Métis community for meeting the educational needs of the Métis child. The establishment of province-wide Métis Nation education councils may be required to provide accountability mechanisms from the existing systems. These educational councils could also provide direction and authority on behalf of Métis parents.

In terms of future systems development, the Métis National Council seeks a national strategy to pilot kindergarten to grade three schools, where numbers warrant under Métis Nation institutions such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute's SUNTEP program. These pilot schools would be governed by the Métis community education authorities, designed by and answerable to the Métis community. At the federal level, the establishment of a multilateral process to discuss national issues related to kindergarten to grade twelve education will bring together educational partnerships committed to seeing positive results in the tasks before us.

Research and Post-Secondary Educational Institutional Development - Métis Nation and Public

Penetration of minority issues into existing educational systems, while not impossible, will prove extremely difficult for the Métis community. In the talks leading up to the First Ministers Meeting on Aboriginal Affairs, set for November 2005 in Kelowna, British Columbia, the Working Group on Métis Education¹⁴ engaged in talks on what core issues exist in the K-12 system and what can specifically be done. The jurisdictional issue was acknowledged by all parties at the table and captured in a context piece felt to be relevant to all agenda items. The multilateral partnership agreement is resulting from the First Ministers Meeting talks on Relationship, one of the other three agenda items for the upcoming meeting, and will be applicable for educational talks. Extensive discussions took place on the need to develop complimentary but separate Métis Nation educational capacity which could provide an alternative entry and educational system for the Métis learner and work complementarily with the public and separate school systems as a liaison and support for those Métis learners who are educated within these structures.

Métis-Specific Institutions

Institutions such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis and Applied Studies and the Louis Riel Institute are two examples of successful provincially supported and Métis Nation controlled educational institutions. Métis-specific institutions:

¹⁴ (Participants in the dialogue: Office of the Federal Interlocutor, Provincial Governments of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Northwest Territories, Métis National Council, Métis Nation of Ontario, Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Nation - Saskatchewan, Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Native Womens Association of Canada)

- provide immersion-like opportunities;
- recognize the importance of Métis controlled institutions in holding responsibility for cultural survival,
- including the contributions of the Métis,
- promoting the distinct history, culture and Michif language, in the short and long term,
- ensuring the protection of the fundamental human right to be Métis,
- promoting Métis-specific teacher education and data collection, and
- promoting the role of Métis Elders to validate, guide and nourish the institutions, enhance Métis identity, and undertaking Métis specific curriculum development.

Public Education System

The public education system would gain access to these culturally sensitive and appropriate curricula as well as access to institutional support:

- increasing cultural competencies for teachers, curriculum and other services through training and professional development opportunities, including access to Métis teachers.
- the public education system would ensure an increased number of Metis teachers,
- professional development for teacher's associations and teachers so that they have an appropriate level of expertise regarding Métis curriculum,
- so that the curriculum is pedagogically supported and integrated into all areas of study, beyond history and social studies, and
- the public system would seek changes in policy directions within government, teacher associations and unions as required to increase Métis participation in all levels of the educational system.

As set out in the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, where numbers warrant, there needs to be consideration of the development of Métis-specific institutions, including educational institutions. These institutions need to be charged with the responsibility and developed to the extent required to conduct the relevant research and development as it relates to curriculum, program design and educational programming. This notion was supported in principle by the various provinces engaged in the First Ministers talks on Métis education, however, the question of jurisdictional responsibility overshadows any major initiative. The Métis community asks: How can this jurisdictional question be addressed? How does the Métis Nation manage the gaps in services from one province to another, from one federal program to another and the gaps in the relationships? How do the Métis engage in a full discourse on the critique of existing policies and processes?

Currently, the Métis Nation has administrative devolution of federal funding for employment and training. The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy is an Aboriginal set-aside of a program of general application, administratively devolved and implemented through the Aboriginal governments and their respective institutions. The Métis Nation administers about \$60 million nationally, designing short term training programs, partnering with First Nation and

provincial post-secondary institutions in purchasing seats into training. The Métis-specific carve out from this national allocation has allowed for the government of Canada to speak confidently that they have made a commitment to Métis participation in the marketplace. These funds, while falling significantly short of the demand, have allowed the Métis community to become active in building partnerships, supporting community members and providing culturally appropriate programming and supports.

However, beyond skills training funding, there is no post-secondary funding for educational opportunities or for program support beyond 52 weeks. The Métis learner is required to borrow from student loan programs, assuming they do not have “poor” or “absent” credit ratings, designed as supplementary loans. The assumption that the student, through their families, brings financial contributions of up to 33% of their annual cost of living, tuition and books to their education program, is an assumption which is clearly not reflective of the economic profile of the Métis. Further, the low income subsidies which used to offset student costs directly for single parent mothers and low income students have now been done away with in replacement by the Millennium Scholarship process. There is no indication of the number of Métis students who have accessed this fund, leaving lingering questions of accountability as to whether this “new” scholarship fund is any better than what was there before for the Métis learner. The investment in university education and higher skills and knowledge areas, such as those set out in Canada’s Innovation and Skills Agenda¹⁵, demand a contribution toward post-secondary education costs for the Métis student. “Through to 2010, increase the admission of Master’s and PhD students at Canadian universities by an average of 5 percent per year; Over the next five years, increase the number of adults pursuing learning opportunities by 1 million”¹⁶. The rewards speak for themselves.

As set out in the 2002 Update Report of the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research an analysis of the Poverty Profile Report, 1998¹⁷, and Statistics Canada’s Métis Profile from both 1991 and 1996 sets out the poverty issues of the Métis learner. They conduct a cost-benefit analysis of providing post-secondary education to Métis adults. They quote that of the 428 females who graduated from the SUNTEP¹⁸ program with an education degree, 304 or 71% were living at or below the poverty line (estimated at \$10,421 annual income per year - 55% of which came from government sources) when they began their studies. Upon graduation, the annual taxable income would be about \$50,000, generating 27% of their salary towards federal

¹⁵ Government of Canada. Achieving Excellence, Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity: Canada’s Innovation Strategy 2001

¹⁶ Government of Canada. Achieving Excellence, Ibid.

¹⁷ National Poverty Profile 1998, published by the National Council of Welfare, in 2000, for the Government of Canada.

¹⁸ The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program is a four year bachelor of education degree, granted by the University of Saskatchewan but imbedded within the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis Studies and Applied Research institution. Funding is provided provincially. In the past, a special number of seats each year were held for First Nations students. The Institute has SUNTEP programs on each campus in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

and provincial income tax (\$13,500 per graduate), as well as Employment Insurance, Canada Pension and other economic spinoffs to the provincial coffers. The average debt load per student at the end of the four year program is approximately \$40,000¹⁹. As part of the “ask” to the federal government, the Métis Nation has put forward a proposal for a Louis Riel Scholarship Trust and Enhancements of Existing Métis Scholarship and Bursary Trusts across the homeland.

Holistic Accountability Framework with Multiple Indicators

Accountability and Definitions of Success

The emphasis on accountability in federal and provincial policy talks is on completion of grade twelve. The Métis Nation believes this is inadequate. Multiple indicators are needed. If one only measures grade twelve success, what of the student who does not make it to grade twelve? What has been done for them? What are the barriers to their success? What could have been done to support them personally and pedagogically to find this success? A measure of grade twelve success is inadequate to the kind of transformative change that the Métis community is aiming for and that the Métis people deserve. As in the health framework and the health indicators which are being developed under the Aboriginal Health Blueprint, the Métis Nation / educational systems need to establish the educational indicators for success. If the Métis Nation holds the promotion and celebration of Métis Nation identity, culture, language and history as the central goal of an educational system, how is the success of the educational system to support these goals being measured? It is the responsibility of the family to raise a child to be proud and knowledgeable of their Métis Nation ancestry and identity. It is the responsibility of the school to support the family and the community at large. What are the mechanisms required to hold existing systems accountable for their success or lack of success in educating the Métis child?

Data Collection Issues

The Métis community asks: How do we know Métis children are being served in the public education system? The Prime Minister’s Aboriginal Report Card will need to have a Métis-specific component. How will the system produce such information? Schools do not know who the Métis children are. Issues of data collection are a critical aspect to ensure that the systems and programs are put in place to address the issues facing Métis children are accountable and are indeed serving the needs of the Métis learner.

The Métis Nation needs to develop a national registry that can be used to determine whether or not the Métis learner is actually accessing any support programs. And how have the programs impacted the issue? Benchmarks and target specific populations within the Métis community need to be set. Specific outcomes for meeting the needs of Métis learners must be put in place. Programs need to be designed to achieve these outcomes and there must be in place a framework of accountability that answers to the success and/or failure of these programs. Currently, no such accountability framework exists.

¹⁹Gabriel Dumont Institute 2002 Update. Ibid. P 25.

Inclusion of and Accountability to the Métis Community

On November 18, 2004 in Aylmer, Quebec, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Honourable Andy Scott spoke at the evening reception of the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable on Education of the importance of adopting a long term perspective on addressing issues of First Nations, Métis and Inuit education. He acknowledged that First Nations, Métis and Inuit needed “authority over their own lives and priorities.” He went on to recognize Canada’s shortage of good quality schools, sensitive curriculum and Aboriginal teachers. He quoted the 1996 census statistics which reflect the seriously low rates of high school completion and how even a high school diploma is not enough in launching a career in our knowledge-based society. He quoted the characteristics of successful programs as including: the delivery of programs close to home; the development of alternative admissions and assistance programs; and Aboriginal control over education, including programming, curriculum and institutional development.

The Métis community does not want to be included as an educational “side show.” Currently the approach to inclusion of the Métis community in education is “hero additive” rather than meaningful integration of the knowledge, skills and values inherent in Métis Nation cultural traditions and ways of being into the pedagogy and curriculum. The Métis learner wants knowledge that is useful today and tomorrow. This is called “transformative education.” The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples set out that there must be integral learning, knowledge that they can build on. Where is this knowledge currently included? What is the framework for quality education as it relates to Métis Nation education? The Métis Nation feels a need to politicize the process to ensure that the Ministers of Education get feedback from the Métis community directly.

Accountability Mechanisms

The Métis participants at the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtables called for the establishment of a Métis-specific multilateral process (federal, provincial governments from Ontario westward, territorial, Métis Nation) on “life long learning” for the purposes of long term planning and implementation, leading to an accord and ultimately an agreement on a model of implementation similar to the Aboriginal Human Resources Development model.

The Métis National Council and the Government of Canada, on May 31, 2005, signed a Métis Nation Framework Agreement which sets out the context, objectives and process for on-going talks between the Métis and Canada on various subject areas, including establishing a national multilateral process. Building upon the existing bilateral and tripartite relationships currently in place, it is the hope of the Métis Nation to include in future subject discussions, education. Clause 3.1 (e) and (f) deal with devolution of programs and services to the Métis Nation and specifically dealing with bursary and scholarship opportunities. Clause 4.1 sets out the commitment to include subject matters agreed upon. Further, the Métis National Council has secured Treasury Board approval for resourcing to carry on the work of a multilateral process (which includes the provinces from Ontario westward, Métis Nation governing bodies and the Government of Canada).

The Métis Nation has recommended the establishment of a national multilateral mechanisms on Métis Nation education with the goal of enhancing existing relationships and attaining optimal educational relationships and outcomes for Métis children learners with respect to the K-12 system. This mechanism could serve as a coordinating body with responsibility for future

Recommendation 4.5.5 Education
When implementing this Commission's recommendations on education affecting Aboriginal persons, great care be exercised to ensure the preservation and propagation of distinct Métis culture. Measures to achieve that goal might include, where appropriate,

- (a) **consultation with Métis elders when educational programs are being planned;**
- (b) **establishment of and public funding support of separate Métis schools where numbers warrant;**
- (c) **assisted access to post-secondary education for Métis persons;**
- (d) **creation of a college of faculty of Métis studies and professorships, scholarships and programs of Métis studies; and**
- (e) **provision of residential facilities in post-secondary educational institutions that will be congenial to Métis students.**

(RCAP, CH 4, p239)

dialogue on education, including issues of jurisdiction and control as these areas relate to education. A terms of reference would need to be established setting out various roles including the allocation of funding to promising projects and institutions, identifying best practices, conducting and initiating relevant research and evaluations, identifying and developing accountability mechanisms and indicators of success; and providing support for regional forums and dialogues. Development of legislation and policy would be considered to support Métis student learners where they do not already exist. One of the core duties of the national multilateral team on Métis Nation education would be to develop and implement a Métis-specific Education Framework, including overseeing and advancing the development of Métis-specific curriculum through existing Métis institutions, developing formal Métis advocacy councils and champions that would advocate for change in the K-12 and other educational systems. Specific attention would be given to educating and providing professional development for teacher associations and teachers so that they have an appropriate level of expertise regarding Métis curriculum and so that the curriculum is pedagogically supported, including

training on Métis Nation perspectives / distinctions terminology. A key goal of the national multilateral process and educational framework on Métis education would be to ensure a holistic approach to education, with appropriate cultural transmission, access and support for Métis families, support mechanisms and incentives for Métis learners (including access to appropriate second and third level support services) and most important development of multiple indicators of education success which capture among other things the extent to which Métis curriculum is adhered to in prescribed learning outcomes / plans.

Development of Métis Culture and Language Education

Historically, the Métis people spoke many languages - French, English, Cree, Sauteaux, Dene - reflecting the mixed heritage of the Métis people. The Métis people also developed their own unique language - Michif - a mixing of French (nouns) and Cree (syntax and verbs), honouring both but being neither. In 2000, the Métis National Council adopted Michif as the national language of the Métis Nation. However, it would be fair to say that more Métis today speak Cree, Sauteaux or Dene than Michif, due to the increased support to these languages and lack thereof for the Michif language. The number of fluent Michif speakers left is hard to calculate but is likely no more than 1000, with the majority being elderly and living either in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or North Dakota. Consequently, Métis have a two-fold interest in Aboriginal language policy: a) to protect, enhance and promote the use of Michif - the national language; and b) to access support for other Aboriginal languages spoken by the Métis people. It is therefore critical to recognize that not all Aboriginal languages are in the same circumstances: with many other Aboriginal languages, you still have a reasonably large core of elders upon whom you can rely to transmit the language to youth - Michif does not have that luxury. The work required to rescue the language, let alone propagate it is immense. It must also be recognized that the Métis people do not have access to First Nation instruction in what are traditionally regarded as First Nation languages. Efforts must be made to ensure that Métis also have access to language support for Cree, Dene and Sauteaux. Pan

Recommendation 4.5.6 Culture and Language
When implementing the recommendations made in Volume 3, all governments and relevant agencies bear in mind the distinct circumstances of Métis culture and languages.

Governments and private authorities and agencies should collaborate with authorized Métis representatives on measures to preserve, cultivate and study elements of Métis culture, including the following,

- **Aboriginal languages: to encourage and assist Métis people to learn and use the Aboriginal languages with which their Métis ancestors were historically associated;**
- **Michif language: to implement, with Métis collaboration and public funding, special measures to save Michif from extinction and to encourage and assist Michif research and instruction;**
- **research and publications about Métis history and culture: to provide financial support for research and publications to disseminate information about Métis Nation history and culture by means of print, radio, television, film, theatre and other modes of expression;**
- **historical sites: to establish major Métis cultural history centers in historically significant sites such as Batoche and the Forks in Winnipeg, to be owned and operated by Métis representatives; and**
- **repatriation of artifacts: to repatriate major Métis artifacts from public and private collections to appropriate Métis-run locations. (RCAP, CH4, p244)**

Aboriginal approaches do not work for the Métis - nor do they respect Métis Nation governance structures and aspirations.

Government of Canada's Aboriginal Languages Initiative

The Aboriginal Languages Initiative had a set aside for Métis to be used for Michif. In the implementation of an Aboriginal Languages Centre, this would be lost. The Aboriginal Languages Initiative gave some flexibility in terms of policy and program development which would be usurped by a bureaucracy over which the Métis community would have little or no control. The danger that a significant portion of the \$5 billion dollar fund announced by Canadian Heritage for the Aboriginal Languages Centre initiative will be diverted to support a bureaucracy to process applications (such as has happened with the National Aboriginal Health Organization) and speak on behalf of Aboriginal people, rather than supporting the people to speak for themselves. This pan-Aboriginal model of devolution is a counter-productive model to the goals and aspirations of the Aboriginal people, and in specific to the Métis Nation.

The Michif language and indeed Aboriginal languages are at the core of the protection and celebration of Métis society and culture. In addressing the needs of the Métis learner, a partnership is sought between the Government of Canada and the Métis Nation on how to promote, protect and enhance Métis languages and culture. The recommendations of the Royal Commission, on the need for nation-to-nation approaches to addressing the issues of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada must be implemented, establishing an ongoing dialogue. Further, the National Michif Language Working Group²⁰ has established a ten-year strategy for this work. What remains is for the governments to support the Métis Nation in building the tools to carry out this work. The Métis community asks what the successes are and how these successes can be enhanced / reproduced? While many of the recommendations of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture Report²¹ make good sense, the major flaw of this approach is the fact that the proposed national language committee is not accountable to the Aboriginal people through their representative governments and authorities. The government has failed to understand that

²⁰ The Métis National Council has established a national Michif Language Working Group, funded by the Aboriginal Languages Initiative of Canadian Heritage. This Working Group was established in 2000 and represents Michif Language speakers from across the Métis homeland, women, youth and program coordinators from Métis Nation governance. Each of the Métis National Council Governing Members - Métis Nation of Ontario; Manitoba Métis Federation; Métis Nation - Saskatchewan (Gabriel Dumont Institute for Métis Studies and Applied Research), Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia) oversee the implementation of programming as set out by the National Michif Working Group. The Métis National Council oversees the development of a coordinated approach to language initiatives. The Métis National Council remains focused on the development of capacity within the Métis Nation to address the issues of promoting, protecting and enhancing the Michif languages amongst the communities, families and youth. The early childhood development components of this paper are closely linked to the Aboriginal languages efforts suggested here. The Métis National Council is funded \$47,000 annually to conduct the work of the national Michif Working Group and other national coordination work, including formulating positions on the Aboriginal languages dialogue. The remainder of the \$500,000 dedicated to Michif language retention in Canada is devolved to the provincial Governing Members for program implementation, producing dictionaries, children's literature, and general Michif language curriculum and community adult programs.

²¹ Government of Canada. Towards A New Beginning: A Foundational Report for a Strategy to Revitalize First Nation, Inuit and Métis languages and Cultures by the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005.

the retention and promotion of Métis Nation language and culture is the responsibility of the Métis community. The government should be supporting the development of capacity within the Métis community to carry out this work rather than creating national institutions which cannot maintain the community control so vital to the retention of the Aboriginal languages.

Concluding Remarks

The assumption of the Métis community is that the best place for early education of young Métis children is within the family and the community. That is where the dialogue began. The systematic result of colonization has allowed outside governments the jurisdiction to interfere in this process. The Métis Nation wants to be regain this authority.

There is a need for a long term strategy: The Métis Nation has to develop a plan. Métis Nation languages, culture, history, identity and knowledge systems have been eroded over centuries – this cannot be repaired in a year – a long term commitment by all parties is required. The Métis National Council and its Governing Members must undertake a Métis Nation Education Agenda. Multi-Year Funding Agreements are necessary to

implement such a strategy – the one-year approach is not suited to long term planning. Funding must be sufficient. There must be specific funding – a set aside – for Métis. Funding channels must respect Métis Nation governance structures – this is the only way to reach the Métis population as a whole – and recognize the distinctive reality of Métis relative to First Nations and Inuit. It is through partnerships with existing and future institutions and agencies that the Métis Nation will create the momentum required for meaningful change. At the core of this struggle, of course, is the struggle for self-determination. Partnerships must be built amidst the struggle.

The development of the Canadian Council on Learning's Knowledge Centre on Aboriginal Education, if respectfully placed within the struggle, can make major contributions toward the implementation of the recommendations set out by the Métis community. In collaboration with the appropriate representatives, the Métis Nation could be strengthened by the work of the Centre. It must be the mandate of the centre to support the Métis people in achieving their dream. If the relationship is good, much good will come of it.

“We, the Métis Nation, are a distinct Nation among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and as such our Aboriginal rights are recognized and affirmed under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. We, the Métis Nation have the inherent right of self-determination and self-government, which includes the right to drive the propagation of the Métis way of being in all sectors. Learning is the most relevant way to protect and propagate the Métis identity, therefore it is necessary that the Métis community, through its governance structures leads the decisions and implementation at every level regarding life long learning.” (The Essence of the Métis Way of Being” – Core policy statement of Métis Educators and Métis Policy Experts at the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable on Life Long Learning)

The Supreme Court of Canada - R. v. Powley, 2003

The inclusion of the Métis in s. 35 is based on a commitment to recognizing the Métis and enhancing their survival as distinctive communities. The purpose and the promise of s. 35 is to protect practices that were historically important features of these distinctive communities and that persist in the present day as integral elements of their Métis culture. (Pgh 13)

We would not purport to enumerate the various Métis peoples that may exist. Because the Métis are explicitly included in s. 35, it is only necessary for our purposes to verify that the claimants belong to an identifiable Métis community with a sufficient degree of continuity and stability to support a site-specific aboriginal right. A Métis community can be defined as a group of Métis with a distinctive collective identity living together in the same geographic area and sharing a common way of life. (Pgh 12)

...The constitutionally significant feature of the Métis is their special status as peoples that emerged between first contact and the effective imposition of European control. The inclusion of the Métis in s.35 represents Canada's commitment to recognize and value the distinctive Métis cultures, which grew up in areas not yet open to colonization, and which the framers of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognized can only survive if the Métis are protected along with other aboriginal communities. (Pgh 17)