

Partners





If you attended school in BC, the odds are that you spent a week or two in elementary school learning about the fur trade. You would have been regaled with stories of brave explorers traversing the wilderness and a new frontier. In high school, you may have also learned about Métis leader Louis Riel. Depending on who was teaching the lesson, Riel would be portrayed as hero or traitor. Ultimately, your understanding of who the Métis are will have been shaped by whoever was telling the story. **What happens when the person sharing these stories doesn't have the tools to tell them properly? Many knowledge**

gaps exist. Who, then, are the Métis? And why is it important to learn this within your roles as education leaders?

To understand that, we need to take a deeper look at the education system and the role it continues to play in the exclusion of Métis ways of knowing and being. In doing this, we will better understand how education leaders can walk alongside Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) to create inclusive, transformative, and equitable communities of learning.

Building Equity for Métis Learners and Staff in BC Schools

by

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Settler Colonialism

When we discuss education in Canada, it is important to understand the role settler colonialism has played in shaping that system. Settler colonialism is characterized by distinct ways of examining concepts of self-location, such as heritage, belonging, race, privilege, and power. Canada is unique in that it does not have overseas territories; instead, it directs its exploitation and extraction inwardly at Indigenous peoples, leaving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities marginalized. It has created systems and structures within Canadian society – such as the education, health care, and justice systems – that continue to uphold privileges for non-Indigenous peoples.

Settler colonialism has also created a climate wherein Indigenous peoples are forced to compete for opportunities, creating artificial social hierarchies and lateral tension. The education system continues to play a role in maintaining this inequitable distribution of power, influence, and access to data. **However, systems bend to the will of the people, and as leaders in education we all have a role to play in disrupting the status quo.**

The Birth of a Nation

Métis culture and nationhood are rooted in the intermarriages of European and First Nations people that occurred during the early North American fur trade period. Beginning in the 17th century, fur traders from France, Scotland, England, and other parts of Europe married First Nations women in what historians have referred to as ‘country marriages’ (or ‘*a la façon du pays*’). These marriages were recognized by the laws of the land. The children of these couples may have been mixed Indigenous people, but they were not yet Métis. Over time, these individuals chose to marry other mixed Indigenous individuals, resulting in the creation of distinct Métis kinship networks, communities, and cultural norms. Gradually, a distinct culture and Nation solidified over generations. Historic Métis communities emerged in

British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Northwest Territories, as well as in Montana, North Dakota, and Idaho. **Contrary to what many have been taught, the term Métis does not encompass all individuals with mixed Indigenous and European heritage. Rather, it refers to a distinctive people who developed their own worldview, customs, way of life, and recognizable group identity that is separate from their First Nations or European forebears.**

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The Canadian government designed a system of institutionalized racial segregation in which First Nations and settlers were designated different lands, schools, and hospitals, leaving Métis families in a jurisdictional grey zone that continues to create barriers. It was not until 1982 that Métis gained recognition under Section 35(2) of the Constitution Act 1982 as one of the three rights-bearing Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, along with First Nations and Inuit. Despite Métis inclusion in the Act, the courts had still not defined who the Métis were, and neglected to specify how Métis rights would be recognized by the federal and provincial governments. Realizing the disadvantages in ambiguity, Métis governments came together in 2002 to put forward the following definition:

"Métis means a person who self – identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples, is of historic Métis Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation."

(Metis National Council, 2002)

Métis identity is self-determined rather than dictated; contemporary as well as historical. Why does this matter to you? As participation in Indigenous-focused programs and data collection occurring at a school level is rooted in self-identification, **education leaders have a responsibility to walk alongside Métis communities to ensure that schools are culturally safe and inclusive environments for the social and intellectual development of our children, as well as our citizens who work there.**

School Communities as Sites of Decolonialization

Schools are important sites of social-emotional, academic, and wellness related learning for children and adult educators. Schools are a place where an appreciation for life-long learning is instilled, where young minds begin to build self-identities and locate themselves within a larger society. Historically, schools have not always been safe or inclusive spaces for Métis families. The legacy of education systems as sites for assimilation and exclusion continues to influence how Métis people navigate Canada's K-12 and post-secondary education systems, as well as the labour market today.

Much like with First Nations and Inuit, the federal government sought to assimilate Métis people into Canada's settler society by forcibly removing Métis children from their communities through the residential and day school systems. Métis experiences within these institutions vary greatly, community to community. Métis continue to be left out of federal compensation programs and are often left out of the narrative entirely. It is important that schools take a distinctions-based approach and are inclusive of Métis experiences when teaching about the residential and day school systems.

In addition to this, many Métis children came from road allowance communities¹. Following the mass dispossession of their homelands through the scrip

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system², Métis found themselves forced into the geographic and economic margins of Canadian society. From the late 1800s until the mid-to-late 1900s, Métis peoples used the road allowances as new home communities. These parcels of land were typically found on the border of a larger municipality, a First Nations Reserve, or in distant rural areas where the Métis could safely build their homes. Those who lived on the road allowance did not contribute to municipal property taxes, and thus were denied access to municipal services such as schools and hospitals. Not surprisingly, this outright exclusion has led to generations of Métis people being raised with a general distrust of formal education systems, and lower labour market outcomes in absence of generational wealth accumulation. In this way, Canada's education systems have continued to play an important role in the destruction of Métis culture, language, values, social structures, and economic viability. **It is important to be mindful of the intergenerational trauma many Métis families carry as they navigate modern education systems.**

Just as schools have played a role in upholding colonial attitudes, they have an even more important role to play in the decolonizing of Canadian society. True decolonization is a collective process. If Métis children are to achieve successful educational and developmental outcomes, changes need to occur, for Métis learners need to see themselves reflected respectfully and meaningfully in the education system.

¹ www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis-road-allowance-communities

² www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis-scrip-in-canada

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Questions about the EIP?

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humanworks

EMAIL: admin@humanworks.ca

PHONE: 604-734-4130

www.humanworks.ca





For a minute there,
I lost myself

"For generations the tree cache was a symbol of honesty and respect."
"Kajash ooshchi laarbr kawmaekit ki ooshchi kaniwapinikash oo tapich kood."
"kwayesh aen tootamik pi miina chi kishohitaymook."

cache as a message centre
h, laarbr ki apachinaewuk chi
y.

This cannot be achieved by Métis people alone, nor can it be accomplished through the delivery of euro-centric or pan-Indigenous programs and supports. Indigenous cultures are not homogenous; each Nation has very diverse and beautiful ontological and epistemological systems, and ignoring this can cause harm to Métis children and their families.

The 2021 Canadian Census reveals that the self-identified Métis population ages 5-19 is significantly larger than the self-identified Métis student population as reported by provincial education authorities across the Métis homeland. If Métis parents and guardians felt that self-identification in the public school system brought advantages, they would be more willing to self-identify and self-identification rates would be significantly higher than the ones reported.

To achieve educational success, Métis learners need to see themselves reflected in the education system. This is as much our responsibility to our citizens, as it is yours in a position of leadership. We share a duty of care to protect Métis children and nurture their identities. **We do this together by promoting authenticity and visibility, and facilitating community connections.**

Walking Together, Centering our Children

Access to dedicated, distinctions-based programming provides Métis children invaluable opportunities to learn traditional ways of knowing and being, and ensures cultural continuity resulting in better health and wellness outcomes.

In 2018, MNBC embarked on a survey project to identify barriers to health and wellness experienced by Métis youth, aged 15 to 30. The survey found that 20% of Métis youth reported having engaged in traditional or cultural activities in the past year. Those who participated in cultural activities were more likely to feel connected to their community and were more likely to have volunteered regularly¹. Métis youth who engage in cultural activities are more likely

to experience a sense of belonging and contribute meaningfully to society. **It is our shared responsibility to facilitate these connections, so how do we accomplish that? We start at the beginning.**

Metis Early Years

On March 6, 2019, the government of Canada and the Métis Nation entered into a ten-year Métis Nation Early Learning and Child Care Accord with the goal of implementing the Métis Nation Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Framework. The overarching goal of the Métis Nation ELCC Framework is to create and enhance early learning programs and supports for Métis children and their families, that are anchored in Métis culture and responsive to the unique needs of Métis children and families.

The Métis Nation has a vision for ELCC in which Métis children and families throughout the Homeland are provided with culturally-relevant, self-empowering ELCC programming and services that focus on the development and maintenance of strong Métis families and communities across their lifespan, beginning at birth. MNBC will promote the healthy growth and development of children and families through experiences grounded in Métis culture and community ways, while Métis-specific wraparound services, programs, and policies will support their ongoing well-being.

One of the most effective ways to ensure that Métis learners, families, and communities are reflected in educational institutions is by connecting Métis Chartered Communities with their school districts and post-secondary institutions. The strongest relationships are those built in the community.

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¹ McCreary Centre Society, 2018, p. 47

Early Years Programs

It is more important than ever to understand the impact early learning can have in setting up Métis learners and families for lifelong success. Culturally relevant programming sets our learners up for success in transitioning into and beyond the K-12 education system. MNBC offers many programs to support the development of Métis children. Education leaders can support Métis children by connecting them to the following programs:

Métis Family Connections – Early Years

is for families with Métis children birth to 8 years. Métis Family Connections – Early Years is focused on helping families build a network of support that provides children with opportunities for early learning and childhood development.

Métis Family Connections – Middle Years

is for families with Métis children aged 9 to 12 years. Métis Family Connections – Middle Years is focused on connecting families with culture and providing opportunities to access the Métis Child Care Benefit program.

The Métis Child Care Benefit (MCCB) Program

is a service offered by the Métis Child Care Navigation and Support Program, for families with Métis children birth to 12 years. Through the Métis Child Care Benefit Program, eligible families may be able to access funding that is additional to that provided by the Provincial Affordable Child Care Benefit to support the cost of childcare.

The Métis Winter and Spring Break Supplement helps Métis families with the cost of childcare during school breaks – exclusively winter and spring break.

The Miyoopimatishihk (Wellbeing) Program was developed by MNBC for families with Métis children birth to 8 years. Métis families can apply for – and access – services funded directly by MNBC.

The Imagination Library is a literacy program for children birth to 4 years. Métis children that are registered in the program receive a free, age-appropriate book each month.

To learn more about these important programs, and how you can connect your Metis students and families, please visit: www.mnbc.ca/education

To extend your knowledge on Métis history, culture, and identity, MNBCs learning resource *Kaa-Wiichihitoyahk* provides Métis perspectives on cultural wellness. This resource can be purchased Métis Trading Post: metistradingpost.shop

