

“In From the Margins”: Government of Saskatchewan Policies to Support Métis Learning, 1969-1979

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In 1969, the Government of Saskatchewan had a three-part plan to bring Métis children and youth in from the margins of formal educational attainment. Administrators solicited evidence-based opinions from teachers and scholars on effective pedagogy and curriculum for Métis learners. Administrators and members of the Legislative Assembly hoped to adapt the existing school systems to support Métis learners all over Saskatchewan, especially in the province's north. The educational experts besought the Government of Saskatchewan to consider their Métis learners not as “culturally deficient,”¹ but as culturally different children who required diverse supports. Teachers agreed and responded with a number of course proposals that they hoped would attract and retain Métis learners. Scholars and teachers recognized that learners' communication styles varied and that students spoke variations of English, and there was a need for relevant pedagogy and curriculum to accompany these observations. Although changes to school infrastructure and curriculum resulted, school administrators were less successful at finding out how Métis children and youth learned. Furthermore, despite recommendations from government committees for Métis family involvement in school and curriculum planning, no such structures were ever achieved in Saskatchewan's schools during the period under consideration. Consequently, the Government of Saskatchewan, school administrators, and teachers never understood the role of Métis families in their children's learning. Finally, the changes to curricula were never evaluated; families had no formal mechanisms to articulate their responses to the changes in the schools.

From 1938 to 1945, Saskatchewan's newspapers and administrators from the Government of Saskatchewan's Department of Education highlighted what they termed the “social deficiencies” of the Métis of rural southeast Saskatchewan. Stories by reporters as well as reports and correspondence from provincial administrators and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police told of transience, low rates of school attendance and high rates of withdrawal from school, and “age-grade retardation.” The Province's response to the memos, letters, reports, and media coverage was to bring Métis children and youth in from the margins of educational attainment through a three-part plan: studies of the “deficiencies” of Métis learners and their families; investment in schools; and solicitation of evidence-based expert opinions from teachers and scholars on effective pedagogy and curriculum for Métis learners (Department of Education, 1970). Administrators and members of the Legislative Assembly hoped that they

could adapt the existing school system to support Métis learners. The policy reforms would target Métis families in northern Saskatchewan although the first reports that concerned Métis poverty and low educational attainment came from rural southeast Saskatchewan.

However, the reforms and new textbooks that came after 1969 were of negligible value to Métis learners. Although the policy reforms provided required infrastructure for the schools and scholars, and administrators struggled to develop programs to support Métis learners through adjustment of pedagogy and curriculum, the gatekeepers or administrators of the existing system did not engage Aboriginal families meaningfully in discussions. No one asked how Métis children and youth learned or what values, pedagogy, and curriculum were important to families and communities. Thus Métis learners may have stayed longer in school, but their experiences in school changed little. Government personnel started to see Métis learners as “culturally different” pupils who needed to learn how to cope with social and economic change, but Métis families had no control over education in their communities.

In this article, I examine the educational achievements of the Métis in the middle of the 20th century as seen by the provincial government. I discuss how the Government of Saskatchewan addressed what they saw as deficiencies in Métis achievement in institutions of formal learning. I detail the consultations that the government held in the 1970s on effective pedagogy and curriculum; I cover ongoing efforts by government personnel to devise transitions that promised to alleviate the cross-cultural cracks that occurred between the schools and the communities they served.

The four above-mentioned goals for this article were motivated by attempts by the provincial government to modernize the province’s northern schools and to promote racial tolerance and cross-cultural understanding in them (Department of Education, 1970). Their efforts resulted in course proposals for classes that would help learners to adjust to modern society. This article closes with a discussion of why attempts to correct “deficiencies” did little to help Métis learners feel comfortable in school. I argue that in the middle of the 20th century, government leaders and their appointed administrators believed that the traditional Métis economy with its concentration on fur trading, trapping, hunting, and fishing, the kinship ties shared by families on the land for several generations, and the Indigenous languages shared by relatives represented relics of a pre-modern and preliterate society. Consequently, schools and their pedagogy and curriculum were redesigned to help Métis children and youth adjust to changing social norms and economic activities. Unfortunately, no outlets were provided for Métis families to critique the principles and practices of reformed schools.

Government personnel argued that modern schools were a panacea for Métis families and communities in transition to a modern society and

economy. They reached consensus on the operating principles for a reformed system of schooling and then implemented new courses that they believed would better serve students in northern Métis communities. Despite advocacy from educational lobby groups for parental involvement in school planning, school administrators and teachers believed that they understood best how to educate Métis children and youth. But they did not question how Métis students learned, what values Métis families thought were important for their communities' schools, and how they believed schools affected their families and communities.

Government Enumeration of Métis Learners' "Deficiencies"

The Government of Saskatchewan recognized the challenges associated with education for Métis learners. Schools and wage labor promised to remedy educational challenges in Métis communities. The government hoped to rectify the problems, difficulties associated with high rates of withdrawal from school, age-grade disparity in classes, and family transience through financial investments in education, especially in northern Saskatchewan communities. Administrators in educational, social welfare, and northern services argued that "education for Métis ... is one phase of a larger problem—the adjustment of these people to our mode of living" (R.C. Moir, personal communication, November 20, 1959).

Therefore, the Government of Saskatchewan measured Métis communities' social and economic wealth through the lenses of educational attainment and wage labor. For example, Barron (1997) found that one of the post-World War II provincial government's success indicators was "the extent to which Métis children were leaving the rural areas for employment in the cities" (p. 57). The departure of children and youth from their communities represented a chance for them to become citizens of the modern state of Canada.

Saskatchewan's government was partly correct in its promotion of the value of public schools for Métis children and youth. When Adams (1972) surveyed Métis and non-status First Nations and inquired what they desired from a public educational system, participants responded that a white or Western-based style of instruction was important for the success of the children and youth in public schools. The participants in Adams' study went on to suggest that instruction in topics related to social services, the law, and policy was needed. Therefore, Saskatchewan's Métis recognized the inherent value of modern education for their communities; change would result from Métis integration into modern schools.

Teachers, Scholars, and Administrators Work To Address Métis Learners' "Deficiencies," 1969-1979

Ideologies that Governed Attempts to Address Deficiency

In this subsection I discuss the larger concepts that governed pedagogy and curriculum. Administrators and scholars agreed that children from

northern areas were culturally different and not deprived or disadvantaged (Department of Education and Northern School Board, n.d.). Scholars had besought the Government of Saskatchewan's educational administrators to reconsider how they perceived Métis students, especially those who spoke English as their second language. These scholars asked administrators and teachers to think of these children as culturally different and not as culturally deficient or incapable of understanding the modern school system, its pedagogy, and curriculum. Administrators hoped that education would help Métis families to acculturate or adopt the sociocultural and economic practices of settler society. Through integration, families would be part of "progress" and not "relics of a past society." In order to be ready to emulate self-sufficient settlers, Métis students needed to understand that mainstream society now relied on wage labor as the means for survival; Métis children and youth needed to recognize that they could modernize their people. They could use their education to change their families and communities, or they could maintain practices that had the potential to maintain poverty, age-grade retardation, and high attrition from school, according to government administrators (Department of Education, 1970). Understanding change would enable children and youth to become economic and political leaders. Métis children and youth could work with settlers to build understanding across cultures.

Department of Education efforts to address "deficiencies" would help to bring Métis students into the body politic of modern Canada. Therefore, administrators and teachers identified differences among learners, taught them about progress and change, and helped Métis communities to define what progress meant for them. The existing school system would remedy differences, and then Métis communities could effect social and economic change that would keep their families away from the margins.

Culturally Different Children: Insights on Aboriginal Englishes

One scholar who was most passionate about English as a Second Language (ESL) students and their abilities to learn English as culturally different and not "culturally deficient" students was University of Alberta professor Gloria Sampson (Sampson, 1970). In 1970, she told Department of Education administrators that literacy reflected the objectives of society for its learners (Battiste, 1986; Cummins, 2000; Doige, 2001; Gutwein, 2003; Morgan, 2001). According to a speech given by Sampson, teachers unfairly assessed students whose spoken language satisfied community expectations but failed to meet the standards of the Department of Education. She said in terms of rural First Nations and Métis in Saskatchewan that,

The problem in the classroom of non-readers and non-speakers may be due to the fact that the classroom incorporates none of the situations or aspects that would evoke a linguistic outpouring from these groups of people or other people from communities where a nonstandard dialect of English is used. After all, what is left for a child to say, when after he

expresses himself saying [']Tanks, I don't want non a dat.['] he [sic] is told that this language, which he uses to his mother and father and which they use to him, is not *good* English, and that nice people or intelligent people don't talk like that. What is he to think of his mother and father and of other people he loves. Either they are not nice people, or the people who speak Standard English (such as his teacher) aren't worth listening to. If the child has any family loyalty, the proper thing to do is just to turn himself off and not listen too much to the teacher who either has stated this explicitly, or functions with this implicit premise in the classroom. (p. 1)

In order for culturally different students to learn standard English (SE), teachers in the existing system needed to understand that the schools had contributed to the marginalization of Métis students. Teachers had labeled Métis students culturally deficient and this had made the existing system seem irrelevant for their students.

Sampson believed that teachers saw spoken English as objective and value-free. Rather than embark on a journey to understanding the children's home environments and the communities' command of spoken English, teachers tended to label students' English as deficient and their home environments as disadvantaged (Sampson, 1970; Saskatchewan Education, 1997; Fayden, 2005). For the Government of Saskatchewan, the appreciation of Métis learners as culturally different from mainstream of students would give way to a larger discussion of supports to help Métis students progress through the mainstream school system. The term *educational deficiencies*, which was used extensively in government correspondence in the years leading up to 1969, was replaced with a discernible goal, *integration*. Administrators would now strive to integrate culturally different Métis children who were once on the margins of the school system into the existing school system (Department of Education, 1970).

Although the provincial government recognized the obstacles that Métis and First Nations students and workers faced (i.e., racism, unemployment and underemployment, and homesickness) and the diversity of Englishes spoken by Aboriginal learners, their administrators believed that the acquisition of English and Euro-Canadian world views about education, household organization, and profit accumulation would reduce the barriers to training and workforce participation and advance the integration agenda. Thus Sampson's (1970) arguments were not put into practice through initiatives designed to attract and retain Métis learners in K-12 schools. Instead administrators strove to craft small adaptations to the existing school system (Department of Education, 1970).

According to administrators, families who lived on the land and spoke Indigenous languages hindered their children's chances of receiving elementary and secondary levels of education. The provincial government saw Indigenous languages as transition languages; extended families were unnecessary holds on children and youth; and the communities had to modernize (Knull & Davis, 1967). The languages that these Métis families spoke undermined the chances for students to participate in the modern

and post-World War II economy. Students stayed on the margins because their parents did not teach them English. Overall, the social structures of Métis families and communities were “deficiencies” that required correction; the public school system promised to identify and remedy linguistic, economic, and familial “deficits.”

Throughout the proceedings of provincial government committees and in every proposal for educational programs, administrators and teachers stressed that Métis children, especially those from northern Saskatchewan, were only culturally different and in need of special supports, especially in the early years of their schooling (Department of Education, Curriculum Committee, 1972). Senior Department of Education administrator McLeod wrote in a 1973 letter, “A committee of Northern Areas teachers is working on a program designed to assist Indian and Métis children [aged five to seven] in their orientation to school and to develop a language arts program that will enable them to make the transition from native language to English” (McLeod to Fowlie, January 9, 1973). The program was developed in tandem with an Early Childhood Readiness Committee for Northern Areas, established in the early 1970s (Department of Education, 1972-1973). Schools also devised ESL programs to support learners. Committees and the programs and services they created worked to integrate Métis learners into the school system, and interventions like English-language training would start as soon as the students began school.

Governmental personnel operated from the mistaken assumption that their Aboriginal learners represented a preliterate population that required intervention by educational authorities (Adams & Burt, 2002; Adams, Burt, & Peyton, 2003). The English that the students used was the result of limited contact with non-Aboriginals and was not specific to their sociocultural backgrounds. The Department of Education apparently believed that Métis students gravitated toward the same English literacy as their non-Métis peers. Once in school, these culturally different students would gradually accept the same English literacy, numeracy, and citizenship lessons as their non-Aboriginal peers.

As culturally different students, Métis learners would be proud of their distinctive history in Canada while they embraced social and economic change in the province and accepted the literacy, numeracy, and citizenship lessons offered by their teachers. At an interprovincial conference on education held in Saskatoon on June 1-2, 1970, veteran administrator Pitsula identified Métis education as a topic for further study. His comments indicated a need for curriculum relevant to these now culturally different youngsters:

There is a need for more social studies material that is unbiased and which positively portrays Northern and Indian/Métis life-past and present. Resources such as booklets, case studies, filmstrips and tapes could meet this need ... instead of preparing materials relative to “Indians of Saskatchewan” or “Indians of Manitoba,” it would be preferable to deal with “the Swampy Cree of the Prairies” or “The Ojibway of Ontario and the Prairies.” ... More

literature books should be written about contemporary Indians ... A boy hunting with his father ... using guns ... A boy's encounter with the elements showing how his experience with his environment enables wise action on his part ... A guidance kit should be provided containing material that will serve to make a child aware of his cultural background. This could be tied in with social studies as he learns of treaties, status and non-status Indians, Federal and Provincial governments, etc. (Department of Education, 1970, p. 10)

The proposed material would "produce pride in native students," but also acknowledge the problems faced by Aboriginals in contemporary society (Department of Education, Interprovincial Conference Instructional Materials, n.d.).

A delegate at the conference, Mr. Currie, suggested that teachers consider both cultural background and the local community when they crafted lessons and curriculum. For example, the teaching of Canada's Food Rules would be revised in a northern Saskatchewan classroom to reflect the diets of the families (Department of Education, Interprovincial Conference Instructional Materials, n.d.). Or in a grade 1 classroom in northern Saskatchewan, teachers would refer to a "skidoo instead of a train ... [or sing] 'The Trapper in the Bush' instead of 'The Farmer in the Dell'" (Department of Education, Curriculum Committees and Early Childhood Readiness Committee for Northern Areas, 1973, p. 2). Thus classroom lessons and curriculum would be culturally relevant for these culturally different children and youth and germinate from the surroundings in which they were raised; lessons would help students to adjust to Eurocentric schools in their communities.

Teachers who attended the conference announced a series of projects intended "to provide material and approaches for units which would be particularly applicable to Indian, Métis, and Northern students" (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1970, p. 2)² as part of their attempts to bring Métis students in from the margins. Teachers would publish "resource materials ... in reading, literature, social studies and language arts ... about native people ... pictured in the contemporary local scene ... [and] produced by Indian people in the Indian language" (Department of Education, Interprovincial Conference on Instructional Materials for Children-Indian Ancestry, n.d., pp. 14-15). They believed that people in communities where their culturally different students resided could participate in the development of films and filmstrips that showcased the sociocultural and economic pursuits of these communities. Therefore, teachers and their supervisors strove to modify their schools and curriculum to produce pride in Aboriginal students; improve their chances for academic and social success in English literacy, numeracy, and citizenship; and integrate them into the mainstream system.

Progress and Integration

In the 1970s, educational administrators, curriculum planners, and teachers recognized the challenges the public school system imposed on First

Nations and Métis children and youth. These conclusions resulted from the recognition that students were culturally different but not culturally deficient. In their quest to integrate First Nations and Métis students into the public schools, Government of Saskatchewan administrators developed programs and committees that explored promising practices for the integration of students into public schools. Integration satisfied the larger goal of social progress. Education worked to shift Métis learners away from the social, economic, and cultural practices of their families and toward advanced education and the workforce. Schooling would enable Métis learners to become citizens of modern Canada; Department of Education administrators believed that these outcomes represented progress for Métis learners.

Teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers at the departmental and school board levels believed that schools helped to develop “attitudes necessary for living” (Department of Education, Curriculum Committee, 1973, p. 1) in modern Canada. If teachers were attuned to the distinct needs of Métis students and used culturally relevant material, and the Department of Education explored ways to integrate Métis students into the existing schools, then Métis students would accept SE, math, and science instruction in schools. Furthermore, these Métis students would help to lead their families and communities out of traditional pursuits and into the modern wage labor economy. Economically and socially, the next generations would share the same values as the settler society in Canada.

Schools had reinforced the Métis’ marginalized position in Saskatchewan society. Teachers had either unintentionally kept their students on the margins through the use of irrelevant curriculum or because of their ignorance of Métis languages, traditions, and kin ties. Or administrators had not understood the differences held by Métis and non-Métis society over the value of schools for their children and youth. Conversely, federal and provincial insensitivity to the Métis’ plight in the years before World War II showed how schools deliberately stymied attempts by the Métis to receive an education and integrate into settler society.

Teachers could not simply reinforce socioeconomic and racial differences through the use of prescriptive textbooks. They had to facilitate intellectual and social growth in the classrooms of the province. For Métis students, such processes had the potential to make them understand how they could become active agents in the social and economic advancement of their communities. Schooling for Métis students would no longer stabilize differences between the Métis and students of settler parents, but instead work to reconstruct new contexts for race relations whereby Métis and settler students were able to understand differences between cultures and people.

*Tangible Outcomes of Provincial Government Attempts to Modernize
Culturally Different Métis Children and Youth*

The 1970s brought a large number of new courses proposed by teachers across the province. The course proposals were not only in the social sciences, languages, and humanities, but also in the burgeoning practical and applied sections where classes like home economics, art, physical education, and environmental studies belonged (Department of Education, 1973-1975). Administrators and curriculum planners hoped that new courses, renovated facilities, and revised pedagogy would help to attract and retain Métis learners. School plans would be designed according to the social and economic backgrounds of community members as a means to make schools relevant and remedy Métis alienation from public schools.

The infrastructure of schools reflected the social and economic backgrounds of the students they served. The Education Committee Saskatchewan Task Force on Indian Opportunity conceived Recommendation I.C.(5):

That highly flexible schools be established ... Conceivably, in a workshop, one student could be studying the snowmobile, another the oil furnace[,] and a third building a canoe ... [and] with these activities, relevant and related "academic" programs could be provided. (Department of Education & Northern School Board, n.d., p. 3)

These flexible schools delivered effective, relevant, and engaging curriculum to their students. Teachers responded enthusiastically with course proposals designed to reflect the social, economic, and racial composition of the communities where they taught. Provincial committees and inter-provincial conferences between academics, administrators, and teachers led to curriculum that reflected the racial diversity of the province. Overall, it was no longer acceptable for teachers to accept Métis students' withdrawals from school, age-grade disparity, and truancy.

New and revised courses were developed to inspire students to propose solutions to contemporary issues. Sheldon Williams Collegiate in Regina proposed an environmental studies program that required students in grade 11 to develop pamphlets about sites around Regina and to disseminate the information to youngsters in the elementary grades (Department of Education, Curriculum Committee, 1973). A mathematics program proposal directed students "to have the intellectual security and self-confidence ... derived from having mastered the skills of independent inquiry ... [and] should ... [allow the ability of independent thought to develop for] the pupils of all ability levels" (Department of Education, Curriculum-General Schools-Correspondence, 1973-1975, p. 2). The Department's Educational Council discussed the work of "a committee ... attempting to develop an integrated or unified program [Division IV Science] for Grades X, XI[,] and possibly XII. The new program will be designed to be more meaningful to life by integrating concepts common to biology, chemistry and physics" (p. 4).

Course proposals from communities with a majority Métis student population highlighted the importance of these towns' attachment to the land and of the need to maintain emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental balance, values of educational importance for local Métis families. The author of a proposed grade 10 and 11 art program at Buffalo Narrows included a project that required the students to present 12 pictures from one of four categories: "work in Buffalo Narrows ... school life ... town recreational activities ... [or] effect of a season on people" (Department of Education, Program and Course Development, Northern Areas, 1969-1976, p. 2). In Ile-a-la-Crosse, a proposed grade 12 physical education program for the second semester of the 1975-1976 academic year would allow students

to appreciate the importance of regular exercise found in various activities ... to value optimal fitness, respect for themselves as fully functioning human beings, ... strive to gain and maintain a satisfactory level of mental and physical health ... [and] contribute to a personal value system. (p. 2)

These courses attempted to make formal learning relevant for the students in these communities who had sat on the margins of formal learning because of their culturally different backgrounds.

Courses also addressed race relations and social inequality in Saskatchewan. A teacher in Saskatoon, Helene Burnstien, said that any revisions to Christian ethics courses should include a comparative framework as a means "of removing prejudice due to ignorance and in understanding others" (personal communication, May 2, 1973). A grant proposal to the federal Citizenship Branch for the Project Canada West program underscored the need to reflect on the diversity of cultures that resided in Canadian cities and to translate the knowledge into lesson plans for the students in six classrooms at Saskatoon's Brunskill School (Department of Education, Curriculum-General, Schools-Correspondence—Approval Courses, Texts, Etc., 1973-1975). The developers of an Economics 30 course proposed "core Issues ... as basic areas of study ... inflation and unemployment, poverty and regional disparity ... The Supplementary Issues includ[ing] ... pollution, regulation of competition, labour relations ... health/educational and social services ... [and] urban economies" (Department of Education, Program and Course Development, Miscellaneous—1973; 1973-1975, n.p.). All the proposals required the students to conduct a form of original research, to share their findings, and draw their own conclusions in a culturally sensitive framework (Department of Education, Program and Course Development, Miscellaneous—1973; 1973-1975; 1973-1974). Curriculum was to ensure that no racial groups sat on the margins of learning.

In 1969, the Government of Saskatchewan's Educational Council addressed a proposed course from Saskatoon's E.D. Feehan High School. The course was "History and Culture of Indian People" (D.M. McLeod, per-

sonal communication, August 15, 1969). Although teachers and their supervisors wished to include Aboriginal people in the curriculum of Saskatchewan's schools, they were not ready to accept a course focused exclusively on Canada's First Peoples. Although approved on an experimental basis with the condition that the Department be kept apprised of the course's development, dissenters and moderates stressed a "preference for a more general type of program on Canadian Studies which would make provision for local history and include the study of Indian history and culture" (Department of Education, Educational Council, 1969, p. 2). Educators wished to revise the curriculum to reflect local issues and to sensitize students to Aboriginal issues as part of their plans to retain Métis students and facilitate cross-cultural understanding. However, they were not entirely sure of how best to position topics in the existing curriculum.

Discussion

Educational administrators, curriculum planners, and school boards acknowledged the need to revise the curriculum and include local topics in the course materials. Administrators and teachers believed that relevant curriculum and lessons would keep Métis students in school and rescue them from the margins of Prairie society. However, students had to accept the existing system of education if they were to meet the standards. The goal was for students to graduate proficient in English and ready to attend postsecondary institutions or join the workforce. Many of the proposed revisions to the curriculum rested on the willingness of teachers to undertake new projects and school boards and superintendents willing to approve these initiatives. No new courses of major structural overhauls could be introduced without the approval of Educational Council, and only one new course in which Canada's First Peoples were at the center of the lesson plans was created in the years leading up to 1980 (Department of Education, 1973-1975).

The Department of Education was not willing to revise its pedagogy and overhaul the curriculum so that it could place Indigenous literacies, epistemologies, and knowledge at the center of the curriculum or naturalize Aboriginal perspectives into lesson plans. Instead of placing Aboriginal history, culture, and political issues at the center of the lessons, curriculum planners continued to keep the issues on the margins of curricula. In Saskatchewan, administrators allowed more relevant local curriculum, but tried to situate it in the existing courses or in the mainstream system without substantial changes to school policies and expectations. Some teachers tailored their courses to the environment or to regional needs, actions that inadvertently led to inclusion of more Aboriginal topics.

The Department of Education wished to include Aboriginal perspectives in its curriculum and to bring Métis families into 20th-century public

schools. However, they did not develop clear mechanisms to facilitate the inclusion of Métis families in policy discussions that would support their culturally different children. Although the bodies that represented the teachers and parents in Saskatchewan advocated parental representation, there was no evidence of Métis or any Aboriginal family participation in discussions of school reform that took place in the 1970s.

Parents and their children continued to remain outside the development of teaching styles, content, and grade-promotion standards. Three organizations, the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF), the Saskatchewan Federation of Home & School Associations (SFHSA), and the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA), argued for family and community involvement in the creation of courses (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1970). In 1970, the STF issued a report to the General Advisory Committee on Curriculum that argued that to insert relevance and tailor content to location necessitated, "a great involvement by teachers and students in decisions about content, resources, texts, and approaches which are best suited to young people in each classroom" (p. 2). A delegate in attendance at an annual convention of the SFHSA argued:

Parents and teachers must somehow get together to improve the education of the young. A clear verdict: seven out of eight³ think there should be established everywhere boards (or committees) composed of parents, students, teachers and ordinary citizens ... the biggest problem is lack of parental interest ... In the very choice of recipients of government funds politicians play an important role in determining the format of parent involvement in education ... any school could have parents voluntarily assisting teachers or assisting in various activities, or attending educational meetings. (Saskatchewan Federation of Home and School Associations, 1973, n.p.; see Gray, n.d.)

At its 1973 annual convention, SSTA delegates voted on the motion "BE IT RESOLVED that we ask the Minister of Education to include lay persons on provincial curriculum committees and that they be assured of direct involvement in all curriculum activities" (SSTA, 1973, n.p.). Teachers wanted more involvement from the community, but the use of local resources for the development of school policy escaped visibility in the 1970s and continues to plague the educational system, particularly Aboriginal education, into the present.

The Department of Education in Saskatchewan refused to step up to the task of formalizing the style of community participation. Coincidentally, members of the Early Childhood Readiness Committee for Northern Areas listed objective 7 under a category of "Readiness" as "learn[ing] through the utilization of parents and other community resources" (Department of Education, General Advisory Committee—Education, 1969-1973, p. 5). However, there was a substantial void between theory and practice. Although committees wanted children's relatives to participate in policy discussions, no documented conversation existed. Therefore, revisions to the existing curriculum and inclusion of Aboriginal

topics happened, but not because of contributions from Elders, parents, and other persons involved with childrearing in Métis communities.

Without the insights of family members, the pedagogy and curriculum that evolved served only the needs of the Government of Saskatchewan, whose politicians, administrators, and teachers wished to modernize the families living in the northern areas of the province. In order to facilitate changes in economic pursuits, living arrangements, and the languages spoken at home, the government needed the support of Métis families and communities. Government personnel used education to garner support from communities and to persuade the youngsters to accept socioeconomic change.

Changes in pedagogical approaches and curriculum were the outcome of discussions of how best to support Métis learners in the Western system of education. However, English literacy, numeracy, and citizenship skills remained the fundamental functions of schools and schooling. The changes that stakeholders in education contemplated would help to retain Métis learners, but did not get to the spirit of Métis learning with its attachments to traditional pursuits on the land, place, kinship, and languages. Instead, textbook authors, curriculum designers, teachers, and principals integrated Métis and First Nations history into the existing narrative of Canadian history through an "add and stir" approach (Battiste & Henderson, 2008, p. 13).⁴ Those involved in formal learning did not experience a paradigm shift that obliged them to ask how children learned and the values that were for Métis students important to their learning journeys.

Battiste (1986) said that modern teachers considered English literacy a "benign liberator of the mind" (p. 23). Anishinaabe literacy practitioner George (2008) supported Battiste's contention that the acquisition of English literacy has been thought of as liberating, objective, and value-free. The provincial government believed that their policies, pedagogies, and curricula would be the means for the elevation of Métis children and youth from poverty. Thus was created an "objective" curriculum that policymakers believed all children needed to live in modern Canada. Through "add and stir" methods, the Department of Education attempted to modernize the Métis and their families; administrators and teachers integrated tiny components of Aboriginal history into a few of the courses offered to students.

Representation of First Nations and Métis history was within the confines of a Euro-Canadian system of schooling and decided by non-Aboriginal practitioners. Teachers and administrators did little to effect positive self-esteem and foster healthy identities in Métis learners. The only notable change was in the belief held by teachers and administrators that the learners who sat in their classrooms were culturally different

students who required extra supports for them to be drawn into the modern Canadian body politic.

Despite the reports that came from rural, southeast Saskatchewan that covered the “social deficiencies” of Métis families, much of the research and committee work of the Government of Saskatchewan concentrated on Métis families who lived in north-central and northern Saskatchewan. Interventions and supports for Métis learners in the period under consideration and in the southern areas of the province are notable by their absence. The Government of Saskatchewan mistakenly assumed that needs were greater in the northern regions of the province and devoted less attention to the implementation of supports for Métis learners in regions such as the Qu’Appelle Valley and the Souris River Valley.

Conclusion

Government control over schools and their pedagogy and curriculum helped to provide better opportunities for Métis learners to graduate from high school. However, subsequent reviews of pedagogy and curriculum in the 1970s proved them to be less successful at the task of identifying the forces that needed to be harnessed to promote Métis learning. The Department of Education attempted to decentralize its curriculum creation and approval processes, solicited critiques from academics and practitioners, and tried to sensitize its personnel and teachers to Aboriginal cultures and heritages. However, little evidence of effective practice existed. Furthermore, there was no substantial discussion of the successes or failures of proposed courses once they were approved by Educational Council. The voices of Métis families did not emerge in any policy discussions despite the attempts on the part of the Departmental officials to build school environments, pedagogy, and curriculum that reflected Aboriginal perspectives on the history of Canada.

School administrators strove to improve educational attainment for Métis children and youth through improvements to school properties and academic support systems. Pedagogy and curriculum concentrated on adapting the existing system to support learners. However, teachers and administrators were less successful at finding out how Métis children and youth learned. The insights of Sampson, the lone champion of distinct Aboriginal Englishes, were ignored by Government of Saskatchewan administrators and teachers, who believed that if adaptations to the K-12 school systems were accomplished through new courses and revised curriculum, then Métis learners would aspire to and acquire the same standards of literacy as their non-Métis and non-Aboriginal peers.

Notes

¹I follow the terminology used by the Government of Saskatchewan, Department of Education’s records held in the Saskatchewan Archives Board in order to illustrate how administrators conceived of formal learning for Aboriginal learners in the 10-year period under consideration.

²The province's Educational Council approved the delivery of the proposed courses that resulted from these teachers' projects.

³The delegate did not identify if the survey was performed by the SFHSA.

⁴Battiste and Henderson said that Indigenous knowledge "is not a 'add and stir' method of cultural topics, but rather a foundational learning process that draws from a particular perspective of holism, recognizing the interrelated and holistic nature of one's place in the universe, and the historical links to Indigenous peoples" (p. 13).

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