

Commentary

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I. Gabriel Dumont Institute Overview

The Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) is a Saskatchewan-based post-secondary and cultural institution headquartered in Saskatoon, with offices in Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and smaller centres across the province. In 1980, GDI was formally incorporated as a non-profit corporation dedicated to providing educational and cultural programming to Saskatchewan's Métis and Non-Status Indian community.¹ The Institute is an affiliate of the Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN–S), and its board of directors represents the MN–S's twelve regions. Through partnerships with the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, and the province's various regional colleges, GDI offers a variety of accredited educational, vocational, and skills-training opportunities to the province's Métis people. Directed by a policy-driven, community-based Board of Governors, the divisions at GDI listed below offer the following core programs:

The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program provides education students with a four-year Bachelor of Education degree;

Gabriel Dumont College delivers a Masters of Education program for Métis students, as well as the first two years of Bachelor of Arts and Science degrees to Métis and non-Métis students;

Dumont Technical Institute designs and delivers Adult Basic Education, skills training, vocational, and cultural programs to hundreds of Métis across the province;

Gabriel Dumont Institute Training and Employment provides training, funding, and employment opportunities to hundreds of Métis across the province;

¹ At the time, the Institute's parent body, the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) represented both Métis and Non-Status Indians. Later, in the early 1990s when the political union of the Métis and Non-Status Indians unraveled, GDI's focus would be entirely Métis-specific. For more information about the political split between Métis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan, see Weinstein (2007); *New Breed Magazine* (July-Aug 1988; Sept. 1988; October 1988); and The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture (<http://www.metismuseum.ca>).

The Gabriel Dumont Institute Scholarship Fund provides scholarships to Métis post-secondary students;

The Publishing Department develops Métis-specific literary, cultural, and educational resources, and manages GDI's archives, museum, and art gallery; and

Library Services provides the Institute's students with thousands of Métis-specific holdings.

GDI's mission statement is to:

... promote the renewal and the development of Métis culture through research, materials development, collection and the distribution of those materials, and the development and delivery of Métis-specific educational programs and services.

GDI is a multifaceted institution committed to ensuring a strong Métis voice as an educator, employment trainer, cultural resource producer, and social justice advocate. The Institute fuses the educational and cultural development of the province's Métis into one coherent whole²; no other Aboriginal educational or cultural institution in Canada provides a similar array of services to its constituent community. The Institute also educates society at large about Métis history and culture from a Métis perspective. Its broad programming, and commitment to excellence, has made GDI a national leader on issues relating to Métis education, culture, and history. The Institute is the province's largest employer of Métis people, and is currently developing a long-term plan to create a Métis Centre of Excellence in Saskatoon.

II. GDI's Research Activities

The Institute, over its thirty-four-year history, has produced a varied body of research focused on two areas: the socioeconomic research needed to develop and support various post-secondary or technical or vocational programming and/or to document the efficacy of these programs over time; and the cultural and historical research needed to preserve and promote Métis history, culture, and languages in the form of post-secondary classes, books, and learning resources.

In 1980, the Institute was established, with the opening of a head office in Regina and opening satellite offices in Saskatoon and Prince Albert later on. For almost a decade and half, GDI had an active Research Department that conducted labour market needs assessments and wrote a myriad of funding proposals to establish programs related to adult basic education upgrading, and vocational and technical training for Métis and Non-Status individuals and Métis communities. By 1985, the Research Department was mandated to collect "information and prepare analyses of information and issues of historical and contemporary relevance to the Métis and Non-Status Indian people of Saskatchewan in an effort to aid them in developmental processes aimed at ensuring their cultural integrity and improving upon their economic and social circumstances" (GDI 1986, 10).

² For a brief introduction to Métis history, see Bird-Wilson (2012).

These early research endeavours focused on the social needs of particular Métis and non-Status populations and communities in order to develop specific programming that would alleviate social marginalization. Before a GDI upgrading, technical, or vocational program was implemented in a particular locale, a thorough needs assessment was conducted and, almost simultaneously, the Research Department would write funding proposals to various levels of government and corporate agencies.

The purpose of Research and Development is to provide policy development, planning, and research services to the Institute. Integral to these functions are program development, program evaluation, and short- and long-term planning to ensure the success of new initiatives with government and educational institutes ... All programs offered are linked to the labour market, as identified through community and regional needs assessment (GDI 1987, 14).

The Research Department also conducted research in order to develop Native Studies courses, Métis-specific curricula, and cross-cultural education programs for non-Aboriginal learners. It also developed a "Native Studies Division," which taught Métis and First Nations history and culture to Aboriginal offenders in the province's prison system and brought in social justice programming, such as the Community Training Residence for Aboriginal female offenders. Over time, the Institute garnered a great deal of recognition for its excellent research program. Much of this research, in turn, was used by the Institute's Curriculum Department (now the Publishing Department) for the production of positive Métis and First Nations learning resources to counter anti-Aboriginal bias in Canadian schoolbooks.

Many of GDI's early researchers were seasoned Association of Métis and Non-Status Indian of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) field workers who had direct connections to the communities that they worked with. As a result, the Institute often served as the AMNSIS's research arm, which led to the Institute writing many social justice-related proposals for the parent political body. By the late 1980s, the link to the then-Métis Society of Saskatchewan was unmistakable, as the Institute was preparing Métis citizens for self-government.

The Métis people of Saskatchewan must be ready to reestablish Métis self-government and take hold of the twenty-first century. The Métis nation needs people educated to take on the responsibilities of nationhood: informed citizens, professionals, politicians, bureaucrats and business people. As the only Métis-controlled post-secondary educational institution in Canada, the Gabriel Dumont Institute must be involved in the nation-building process (GDI 1992, 1).

The Institute's goal was to erase one hundred years of colonization and to restore the Métis as full equals in Confederation.

In the exercise of Métis government and our inherent rights to self-determination and equity, we embrace the goal of excellence in education. Our people will prepare, with confidence, for the challenges and opportunities of the future, through an educational system that is accessible, community oriented and technologically

relevant. In the tradition of our ancestors, we will forge a new path while holding to the principals of cooperation and respect. ... The Metis and Non-Status Indian People find it necessary to take control of their own education because mainstream institutions have not effectively delivered education services. The students of the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and of the institutions contemplated in its education network, have the same vocation; that is, to be citizens capable of governing themselves in a democratic state (GDI, 1990).

The path to Métis self-government would be achieved by developing Métis-specific cultural programming and tying it to post-secondary, adult basic education; technical and vocational training; and through the publication of Métis-specific curriculum for primary and secondary students. This led to the second aspect of the Research Department's research program: the promotion of Métis and First Nations history and culture. This research specifically dealt with the impact of colonization on the province's Aboriginal peoples.

The centenary of the 1885 Resistance and the execution of Louis Riel made the province's Métis community reflect upon their position in Canadian society. GDI also shared in this self-reflection and remained determined to ensure that the future would be brighter for the Métis than the previous hundred years had been.

This year of 1985 marks a century of effort by the Métis and Non-Status Indians of the province to establish themselves in a new society. We reconsider and evaluate our role as a people and we know that education is the key and what our people need the most to take advantage of the opportunities the future will bring ... ("An Interview with Christopher Lafontaine," 1985)³

Since the mid-1990s, GDI has reorganized its research activities. The Research Department was disbanded following an organizational restructuring. At present, research is conducted within the Institute's various programs, most notably the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), the Dumont Technical Institute (DTI), the Gabriel Dumont Institute Training and Employment (GDITE), and the Publishing Department. Also, since the political split between the Métis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan in 1988, the focus of the Institute's cultural and historical research activities has been entirely Métis-specific. For instance, researchers hired by SUNTEP produced a document entitled *Li Michif Niyannan: Explaining Métis Traditional Knowledge*, which highlighted the strength of Métis traditional knowledge and argued that, for the program's long-term success, traditional knowledge has to remain a cornerstone of the program's identity (GDI 2012, 16).

The Institute's research activities are fairly extensive, since GDI has annual revenues and expenditures of \$25–30 million dollars, which are gathered through its various entities (GDI 2012, 43). Guided by a policy-driven board, GDI's management team directs research

³ "An interview with Christopher Lafontaine," *The Potashville Miner Journal*, Esterhazy Saskatchewan, July 10, 1985.

policy after consulting with the MN–S's twelve regions. In particular, GDI conducts strategic planning, in three- to five-year intervals, to ensure that its programming meets the needs of the Métis community (GDI 2008, 32). This involves extensive consultation with key stakeholder groups: students, Métis community members, Métis locals and regions, universities and other post-secondary institutions, training and employment partners, and funding partners such as the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. Information is gathered from public meetings, working groups, and from within GDI's programs. Master documents are developed from these various activities, and the documents become GDI policy for specific periods of time. These strategic plans, such as the 2010–2013 plan, *Honouring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Shaping Our Future*, reinvigorate the Institute's core mandate to provide Métis-specific educational, training, bursary/scholarship, and cultural programming to the province's Métis community, and to the province and country in general (GDI 2012, 13). GDI is currently working on its present strategic plan for the next few years.

SUNTEP is the Institute's oldest program, and arguably has had the greatest impact of all of GDI's programs. Since its inception, SUNTEP has conducted research to track the graduation and employment rates of its graduates. SUNTEP regularly produces research reports to determine the success of its graduates not only in becoming primary and secondary teachers, but in their other chosen professional and academic careers. The more intangible aspects of the impact of these Métis educators upon their classrooms are also measured. SUNTEP graduates serve as role models because they are often the only Aboriginal teachers that Métis and First Nations students encounter.⁴

Research is conducted regularly to demonstrate the impact of the more than one thousand SUNTEP graduates who have entered the province's primary and secondary schools, as well as the general job market. For instance, in 2011, GDI commissioned University of Saskatchewan economist Eric Howe to analyze the impact of Aboriginal education on the province's population, with a specific focus on the long-term economic impact of the SUNTEP program (Howe 2011). Howe's research indicated that the total individual monetary benefit for all SUNTEP graduates (as of 2011) equals \$842 million, and the positive social benefit of these graduates (as of 2011) amounts to \$4.7 billion (Howe 2011, 4). The Institute uses quantitative research such as this to demonstrate that the public investment in SUNTEP has been returned many times over in terms of taxation paid by the program's graduates.

The first part of the Howe Report analyzed the earnings of Saskatchewan residents by education level. Not surprisingly, those with higher education levels earned a much greater income than those that did not; in particular, non-Aboriginal people had better income outcomes than Aboriginal people. However, if Aboriginal people, and Métis individuals specifically, have post-secondary education, than the income gap within the

⁴ See Littlejohn King and Rivard (2013); Relland (2002); The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture (<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/04190>); and Gabriel Dumont Institute (n.d.).

larger population closes. In fact, Métis with a university degree earn more than the non-Aboriginal population (Howe 2011, 1). Howe then discusses how the gap in Aboriginal education impacts the province's GDP. Closing this gap through increased education opportunities would increase the lifetime earnings of all the province's residents by \$16.2 billion dollars, and would provide nonmonetary benefits of \$48.6 billion dollars (2011, 3). Needless to say, Howe agrees that it should be incumbent on the province to narrow this gap: "Bridging the Aboriginal education gap is the most significant economic challenge confronting Saskatchewan. It is also our greatest economic opportunity" (42).

DTI and GDITE⁵ are the Institute's largest programs, and they have considerable research budgets. Most of GDITE and DTI's research is labour-market-oriented. DTI's research activities involve working closely with Métis regions and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology to develop specific programs in locales throughout the province. DTI and GDITE researchers also conduct research in the twelve Saskatchewan Métis (MN-S) regions to better assess labour market needs and educational requirements (Oloo 2012a, 2; 2012b, 5). DTI and GDITE partner closely to develop programs, often conducting joint research. This is a natural partnership since GDITE often funds individuals to attend DTI programs. GDITE clients, however, are not limited to attending DTI programs for training. GDITE also conducts monthly and biannual surveys and other follow-up research with its clients and their employers. For instance, for the new GDITE Apprenticeship Initiative, the Institute conducted research in March 2012 and March 2013 to see how employees rated their Métis apprentices and the program's delivery (Oloo 2013b, 2).

GDI researchers regularly track the efficacy of all of the Institute's educational, technical, vocational, training and employment, and apprenticeship programs, including graduation rates, and the ability of clients to find employment (Oloo 2013a, 1). While these quantitative statistics are important, particularly in assuring federal and provincial government funding agents that GDI is a good investment of taxpayers' dollars, the Institute wants to demonstrate the positive impact of its programming on Métis individuals and communities. Student and client success stories are regularly covered in GDI special reports, annual reports, and in internal communications such as the Institute's in-house newsletter, *GDI Communicator* (McLennan 2012, 1; Yew and Oloo 2013, 4). Such vignettes provide a human element and complement useful statistical analysis.

GDI also actively tracks any further educational attainment achieved by the Institute's graduates. For instance, GDI researchers found that about 10 percent of SUNTEP graduates received further post-secondary education, and that 75 percent of those seeking further education have pursued Master of Education degrees (Oloo 2012c, 1). This research demonstrated a community need to develop a Master of Education program, which the Institute has recently done, in partnership with the University of Regina (Oloo 2013c, 1).

⁵ GDITE is funded largely through the Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategy (ASETS) Agreement. Since the Institute took over the Métis federal labour agreement in 2006, GDITE has had almost 7,000 clients (GDI 2012, 23).

Besides analyzing labour market conditions, program effectiveness, and graduate/client tracking, GDI also conducts a great deal of Métis-specific historical and cultural research. With more than 160 literary, audio-visual, and multimedia resources produced, the Department is the only Canadian publisher that exclusively publishes Métis authors and themes, and is the largest producer of Métis-specific literary, educational, and cultural resources. Besides being a book publisher, the Department is also a curriculum development and research unit, a cultural resource centre, an archival depository, an art gallery, and an artifact curatorial centre. Maintaining all these roles requires an active research program specializing in the production and dissemination of resources pertaining to Métis history, languages, and culture. Most of the Department's books, which provide a key means for Métis people to tell their own stories, are written by emerging and established Métis authors working outside the Institute. However, some of the Institute's publications are written in-house, and are based on original research often with the close collaboration of Métis community members.

The Department conducts its own oral-history based research for specific projects as well as to build upon its already existing body of oral history interviews. Over the course of the last few decades, the Department has conducted more Métis-specific oral history interviews than any other institution. This large diverse corpus of interviews focuses on a variety of topics such as Métis veterans' remembrances, political activism, traditional storytelling, and Michif culture.⁶ The Department works with Michif⁷ speakers to preserve and promote the three Michif languages spoken in Saskatchewan: Michif-Cree, Michif-French, and Northern Michif.⁸ To date, GDI is the largest publisher of Michif-related cultural resources, including an Android app (and website adjunct) that contains an eleven-

6 Almost all of the Department's interviews are housed online at The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture: see <http://www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php>.57.

7 As part of its cultural mandate, most of the Department's books include Michif components. In particular, all the Department's children's books are translated into and narrated in a Michif language.

8 Spoken mainly in southern and central Saskatchewan and Manitoba and down into North Dakota (the area in and around the Turtle Mountain Reservation), Michif-Cree is considered by linguists to be the "real" mixed Métis language. It mixes Cree verbs and verb phrases and French nouns and noun phrases along with, depending on the locale and family, some Ojibway and English. Michif-French, spoken in various places in all three Prairie provinces, is a dialect of Canadian French that sometimes employs an Algonquian syntax. Northern Michif, spoken in northwest Saskatchewan, is a dialect of Woods Cree with a tiny number of French loan words. According to Norman Fleury, Michif speaker and traditional storyteller, the Old People said that Michif-Cree was called the "Cree spoken by the Michif people" and Michif-French was the "French spoken by the Michif people." To him, "Michif" or "Méchif" was the "nationality" (ethnicity) and the languages now known as Michif were Métis versions of "Cree" and "French," despite their differences with standard Cree or French-Canadian French (Norman Fleury to Darren Préfontaine, personal communication). Please also see Burnouf, Fleury, and Lavallée (2007); Bakker (1997, 65); and Bakker (2007, 173–81). GDI employs sociological conventions when classifying a Michif language: if a Michif person living in Saskatchewan calls their language "Michif," then the Institute respects their wishes and calls that language "Michif."

thousand-word Michif-Cree/English dictionary and an extensive grammar/phrase usage primer.

As a whole, GDI also works with community partners and outside agencies to conduct research on a variety of topics. For instance, GDI has regularly worked with the MN–S and the Métis National Council to produce reports relating to the state of Métis education across the country. In addition, GDI has partnered with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education to evaluate GDI's core programs. In 2007–2008, for instance, Ekos Research liaised with GDI researchers to assess the conceptualization, design, delivery, and efficacy of three of the Institute's programs—DTI, SUNTEP, and the Publishing Department—funded by the Ministry (Ekos Research Associates Inc., 2008). The report highlighted that the Institute's strongest aspect was the all-encompassing Métis-specific cultural mandate that permeates all GDI programs (GDI 2008, 12; Wilson 2008, 4).

Finally, GDI supports post-graduate Métis-related research conducted outside the Institute. The Institute has recently developed the Gabriel Dumont Institute College Graduate Student Bursary Program, for example, to assist Métis graduate students with their research programs. The GDC Bursary Program, part of the larger Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation II, provides bursary funding to Saskatchewan-based Métis graduate students enrolled in graduation programs anywhere in the world. The purpose of this bursary is to increase the body of Métis-specific graduate-level research and to have a talented, well-educated pool of potential Métis employees for the Institute. As of 2012, more than thirty Métis graduate students received more than \$222,000 in bursary funding (GDI 2012, 34).

Since 1980, GDI has produced a variety of quality research on a diverse range of topics.⁹ Moreover, the Institute's varied body of research has had a wide-reaching impact upon the Métis and larger communities. As Saskatchewan's demographics shift and the province's Aboriginal population increases, GDI's place as a Métis post-secondary, education, and training and cultural institution will ensure the long-term viability of the Institute's various research endeavours.

⁹ Keeping track of the Institute's disparate research activities would be a near impossible task without consulting GDI's in-house newsletter, *The GDI Communicator*, and to a lesser extent, the GDI Publishing Department magazine, *The New Nation/La Noovel Naysoon Magazine*. Electronic copies of both can be downloaded from the Institute's website, The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture. (<http://www.metismuseum.ca>). The newsletter and the magazine are part of a larger communications strategy, directed by the Institute's board of governors and management team, to ensure that the Métis community, the larger community, funding agents, and the general public are aware of the Institute's various programming initiatives.

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