

VOLUME 5, NOVEMBER 2023

Journal of Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples

Proceedings of the Convention of November 2022



Canot triomphal (Triumphal canoe), by Christine Sioui Wawanoloath (2022)



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FEEDBACK ON THE
5th CONVENTION ON PERSEVERANCE
AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
FOR FIRST PEOPLES



With the theme of Fifty Years of Taking Ownership of Indigenous Education: Progress Made and the Way Forward, the 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples was held at Université Laval from November 2-4, 2022, under the honorary chairmanship of Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Québec-Labrador.

Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk



WORDS OF REFLECTION

Édith Picard

Convention Accompanying Elder



Last year we walked on the same path, for during three days we were invited to observe the beauty and greatness that surrounds us. On paths, Nature is a witness because we are fortunate to contemplate her riches, her wisdom, her strength through perseverance, collaborations and hope, all revealed by her very elements, for Nature tells us to:

Listen, Observe, Appreciate, Learn, Act.

Her riches: the vast diversity of plants and animals.

Her wisdom: for Nature turns between action, turmoil and a time for renewal: night versus day, or spring, summer and fall versus winter.

Her strength through perseverance: following the example of water, which can traverse barriers and create meanders to continue flowing, or trees, which grow little by little, refining their intended purpose.

Collaboration: let us remember the wild geese or the three sisters (corn, beans and squash).

Hope: let us think of the constancy of spring renewal or the wondrous capability in the rebirth after a forest fire.

And so, on our path throughout the Convention, we were able to listen, observe, appreciate and learn—and sow the seeds of action. We were able to appreciate the wealth of ideas, engagement and wisdom, the strength of perseverance and collaboration, as well as hope.

I left suffused with deep emotion for the trust young people have put in us through their words, with a feeling of admiration for the sharing of experiences instead of “every man for himself,” for the openness and for the participants welcoming all the different ways of doing things that can complement each other.

I can’t wait to read the reflections shared in the pages that follow, the same “can’t wait” feeling I have in spring with the first signs of awakening, because what begins at that moment is both new and familiar in some respect, and I never grow tired of it; it always evokes interest, joy and enthusiasm. May your reading be filled with the same interest, joy and enthusiasm.

INTRODUCTION

Annie Pilote

Professor
Faculty of Education
Université Laval



Jean-Luc Ratel

Research Professional and lecturer
Faculty of Education
Université Laval



Since 2014, the Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples has continued to refine the blueprint of its first edition, each time bringing together several hundred people from diverse backgrounds around a common goal of sharing knowledge and current practices in Indigenous education. On November 2, 2022, the 5th edition of the Convention opened at Université Laval with words of wisdom and reflection from Wendat Elder Édith Picard, who has been our guiding light since we started preparing for this edition, and today her presence continues to honour us as we read the proceedings of the Convention contained in this Journal. As Université Laval is at the crossroads of the Nionwentsïo of the Huron-Wendat People, the Ndakina of the Wabanaki People, the Nitassinan of the Innu People, the Nitaskinan of the Atikamekw People and the Wolastoqiyik People of Wolastokuk, we felt that inviting Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly, to act as honorary Convention chair would be a fitting tribute to this gathering of Peoples. In his opening address Chief Picard spoke at length about the challenges of First Peoples fully participating in education and achieving self-determination and reconciliation.

Over three days, more than 400 Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants gathered at Université Laval to pursue this goal of sharing knowledge and practices, in a much welcome return to large-scale face-to-face gatherings following two years of COVID-19 lockdown measures. So it was a great pleasure for all to be able to exchange ideas in person, be it at any of the major speeches, oral presentations or panels discussions that brought together Nations par Peoples, teachers and education professionals, school and Indigenous organization managers, students, scholars and Indigenous cultural activities leaders.

The year of the 5th Convention marked the 50th anniversary of the release of *Indian Control of Indian Education* in 1972 by the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations). Considered a watershed moment in the advancement of First Peoples taking control of their education, it called for the transfer of educational administration to Indigenous communities, and the right to teaching in the classroom in Indigenous languages and teacher training in Indigenous communities, as well as Indigenous representation in schools and post-secondary institutions across Canada, with a view to achieving self-determination well beyond the principal's

office. To commemorate five decades of this landmark policy statement, the theme of the 5th Convention was *Fifty Years of Taking Ownership of Indigenous Education: Progress Made and the Way Forward*. Its focus was looking back with a critical eye at the changes in Indigenous education in the intervening five decades and sharing current practices and improvements needed to bolster self-determination in Indigenous education from a decolonizing perspective. The year 2022 also marked the dawn of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Languages, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, and several of the presentations highlighted the pressing issue of revitalizing Indigenous languages, particularly in schools.

In keeping with the spirit of sharing knowledge and practices, the nearly sixty authors in the 5th edition of the *Journal* offer you over twenty articles and reports of the presentations given during these three days of intensive sharing practices, first-hand accounts, stories, scientific papers and interactive workshops. Following this Foreword, there are three reports on the keynote addresses highlighting the theme of the Convention: acculturation and Indigenous education (Jacques Kurtness), the education of our children as a sacred duty (Marion Buller) and the creation of healing schools (Lorinda Riley). In Part One of the *Journal* you will find a selection of articles on teaching and training practices from pre-school to university, from an Indigenous perspective of holistic, lifelong education. Part Two features articles on support practices aimed at bolstering the educational achievement of First Peoples learners. Collaborative practices between First Peoples communities, schools and universities are highlighted in articles in Part Three. Finally, articles in Part Four cover the issue of cultural safety practices concerning all education stakeholders, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to create a more welcoming and respectful environment for First Peoples.

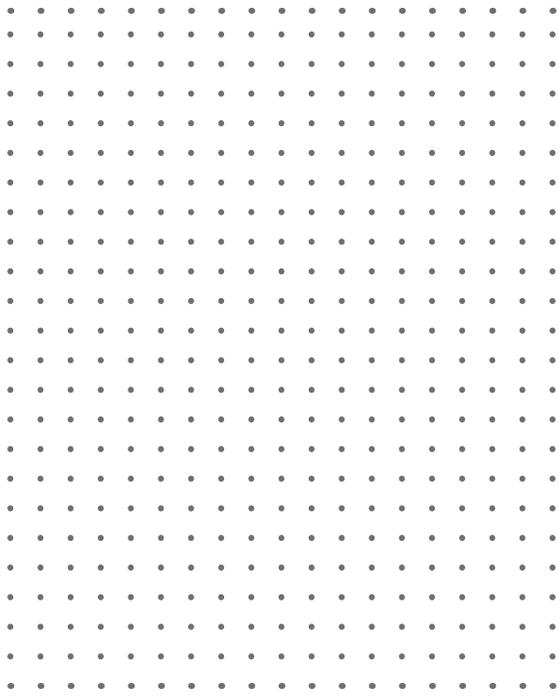
We hope that this 5th edition of the *Journal* will provide a better insight of what we have achieved so far and the work that remains to be done in the field of Indigenous education in Québec and beyond. We also hope to see you at the 6th edition of the Convention, to be held November 6-8, 2024 at the Palais des Congrès de Montréal. In a spirit of solidarity, partnership and continuity we hand the torch to our colleagues at the Université du Québec à Montréal in pursuit of the same goal: to promote the sharing of knowledge and practices in Indigenous education that improve student retention and success, while respecting the cultures and identities of First Peoples.

FEEDBACK ON THE
5th CONVENTION ON PERSEVERANCE
AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
FOR FIRST PEOPLES



During the three days of the Convention, over 400 people attended sixty-four presentations, three major conferences and two roundtables.

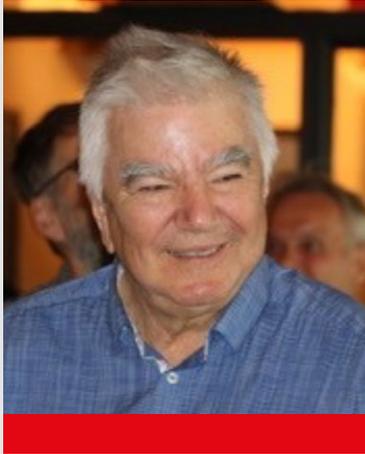
Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk



A Look Back at the Conferences



Indigenous Acculturation and Education



A CONFERENCE BY

Jacques Kurtness

*Hailing from Mashteuiatsh (Pointe-Bleue), an Innu community on the shores of Piekuagami (Lac Saint-Jean) in Québec, Canada, Jacques Kurtness is an Innu thinker and researcher who has combined an academic career with political engagement. He holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from Université Laval, and worked between 1979 and 1999 as a professor and researcher at Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC). He was also chief negotiator for the Atikamekw and Montagnais Council (AMC) and the Mamuitun Tribal Council from 1991 to 1997. In 1999 Dr. Kurtness became Regional Director, Negotiation and Implementation for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Quebec Region. Since 2003, he has been appointed to several boards of directors, including the Centre interuniversitaire de recherches et d'études autochtones (CIÉRA) and the Réseau DIALOG (INRS). He is currently a member of the Scientific Committee of the Musée de la Civilisation de Québec (MCQ) and is co-researcher of Design and Material, a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), as well as a number of the latter's CURA projects. He has also been advisor and director of education and employment for his community. In 2014 he published *Tshinanu, nous autres, et moi qui appartiens aux trois Amériques* [Tshinanu, We, and Me Who Belong to Three Americas] (Presses de l'Université Laval).*



Author: Jean-Luc Ratel

Research Professional and lecturer
Faculty of Education
Université Laval

For the opening of the 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples, it was an honour to welcome as speaker the Innu thinker Dr. Jacques Kurtness, PhD, who over the past five decades has made a remarkable contribution to the history of Indigenous education in Québec. With a nod to the convention's theme of critically looking back at "Fifty Years of Taking Ownership of Indigenous Education," and the way forward, his address provided participants the fortuitous opportunity to hear from a voice that not only witnessed the milestones of this period first-hand, but was also as an instrumental player in many of them.



Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

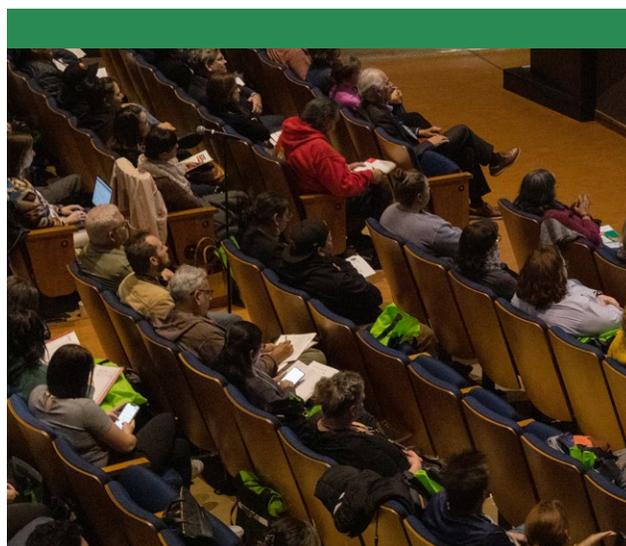
Indeed, it was Kurtness' ground-breaking research in Indigenous psychology in Québec that led the way to a better understanding of Indigenous identities by filling in the gaps in the more standardized data collection and analysis tools for populations with markedly different cultural and social realities. He has often partnered with international scholars in the fields of Indigenous psychology and intercultural relations, working with Indigenous populations that share the profound impact of colonization on identity.

Dr. Kurtness was also Director of Collège Manitou, founded in 1973 in La Macaza (Québec)—a turning point in post-secondary education by and for First Peoples in the movement of self-determination in Indigenous education that flourished in the wake of the 1972 release of *Indian Control of Indian Education* by the National Indian Brotherhood. During the same period, Kurtness submitted his master's thesis in Psychology to Université Laval entitled *Rétrospective et prospective dans l'éducation des Amérindiens* [Hindsight and Foresight in First Nations Education], in which he explored the relationship between Indigenous student cultural identity, First Peoples' control of institutions and their participation in Québec society.

The opening address was a welcome opportunity for this committed thinker to revisit his life's work from his early days as a student and throughout his prominent career as a teacher, researcher, administrator and negotiator.

Dr. Kurtness reminded those present that the relationship with Indigenous identity is central to Indigenous learners, and that it is only by taking ownership of their own institutions that First Peoples can truly develop an education system that reflects their concerns and contributes to their fulfillment.

After half a century of First Peoples taking ownership of their education, in closing Dr. Kurtness cautioned that despite great strides in managing Indigenous educational institutions and organizations by and for First Peoples, today Indigenous learners continue find themselves with less control over their institutions due to a colonialist history tarnished by assimilationist policies. Seen in this light, the principles advocated for in *Indian Control of Indian Education* must continue to inspire empowering actions that improve educational success for all Indigenous learners.



Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

Educating Our Children: A Sacred Responsibility



A CONFERENCE BY

Marion Buller

Marion Buller is Cree and a member of the Mistawasis Nehiyawak First Nation in Saskatchewan. The first Indigenous woman to be appointed as a Provincial Court Judge in British Columbia, Ms. Buller established B.C.'s First Nations Court and helped build the foundation for that province's first Indigenous Family Court. After presiding on the bench for 22 years, she was appointed Chief Commissioner for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Since the completion of the National Inquiry, Ms. Buller has returned to the practice of law, and is currently Chancellor of the University of Victoria. She has received an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Thompson Rivers University, and was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 2022.



Author: Fatou Dia

Doctoral Student in Measurement
and Evaluation in Education
Université Laval

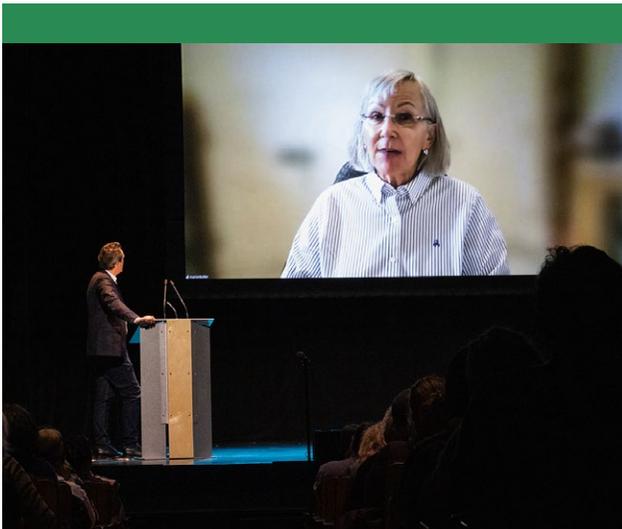
Education for children is not a gift, but a right! This is one of the highlights of a speech on children's education given by Marion Buller, Chancellor of the University of Victoria and member of the Mistawasis Nehiyawak First Nation in Saskatchewan, during the 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples on November 2, 2022. Education is indeed a human right, and no child should be left behind.

Generations of Indigenous parents in Canada have suffered the historical trauma of residential schools which impacted countless lives, the former Chief Commissioner for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls reminded us. It is vital then to ensure that our children move past this devastating trauma, and to instil in them the desire to go to school. Buller then asked us how we can achieve this: An open-ended question that concerns us all.

Despite their right to education—a universal right recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—barriers are still being erected.

This is specifically about a proper education that namely respects Indigenous languages and cultures. A call for action was then made to educators as the central players in the education of our children, for the latter need to be taught about the missing and murdered women to keep the memory of these events alive.

Education, therefore, must be done *by* and *with* Indigenous people and *not for* Indigenous people! It should also be done through an approach that embraces children, girls and women. The first Indigenous woman to be appointed judge to the Provincial Court of British Columbia, where she sat on the bench for 22 years, Buller touched on advances made in education, noting, for instance, how she no longer hears the remarks she used to when she was in law school.



Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk



Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

Buller did make a point of stressing that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for all Indigenous people. Irrespective of level, education is a fundamental right for all, and must be taught with impartiality. It is essential, then, that human rights in general and Indigenous rights in particular be respected. To achieve this, we must continue our work fighting against injustice in institutions and society at large, by tackling systemic racism that especially impacts Indigenous people.

The central theme of Buller's speech was how the education of our children is everyone's responsibility, and a shared responsibility that falls on the Indigenous community first and foremost: by members and for members. It is therefore imperative that educators be part of this action. Since the completion of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Buller has returned to practicing law. She was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 2022 and is a recent recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Thompson Rivers University.

Seeking Mauiola: Creating Healing Schools



A CONFERENCE BY

Lorinda Riley

Dr. Riley holds a joint appointment in Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Health Specialization at the Office of Public Health Studies and Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at Hawai inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge. Her research work is focused on understanding Native Hawaiian historical trauma, identifying Indigenous models of restorative justice, and nation building. She has a keen interest in conducting research engaging Indigenous communities that leads to meaningful policy. In her free time, Dr. Riley enjoys relaxing at the beach, trying new foods, and watching her kids play sports.



Author: Serigne Babacar Fall
Doctoral Student in Education
Administration and Policy Studies
Université Laval

On November 3, 2022, Dr. Lorinda Riley gave an engrossing and moving lecture at Université Laval's Théâtre de la Cité Universitaire on the need for restorative justice for Indigenous people of Hawai'i in the wake of historical traumas they have experienced, and on nation-building.

She began her lecture by touching on one of her recent qualitative studies on how young Hawaiians interacting with the justice system experience and understand historical trauma. According to Dr. Riley, while the State of Hawai'i has implemented several progressive policies related to trauma-informed care in general, it has not addressed the specific issue of historical traumas experienced by Indigenous People. The lack of legislation specifically dealing with this in Hawai'i in bills related to historical traumas is a perfect illustration and hinders identifying issues and including these historical traumas in the legislative agenda.

The loss of land, of language, of power and of family—to name but a few—coupled with the myriad impacts of colonization, in her view, eventually engendered among Indigenous peoples what they call *Kaumaha*, or heavy and oppressive sadness. She explained that these losses and emotional and psychological wounds, piling up over the course of a lifetime across generations, have been associated with emotional, psychological and behavioural issues.

These thoughts on historical losses are also common among incarcerated Indigenous youth and have often been linked to emotional distress and increased stress among adolescents. Care models that ignore these historical wounds can lead, in her view, to perpetuating the cycle of untapped potential and incarceration of these youth.

She advocates for increasing awareness and treatment of historical traumas in Hawai'i through education adapted to the culture and health justice frameworks, for the healing of the community and racial equity. She referred to the Kawaioloa Youth and Family Wellness Center programs, with its access to residential vocational training for youth that offers community-oriented alternatives to prison.

Additionally, Dr. Riley suggested that cultural values and practices and educational programs grounded in culture can promote the health and wellbeing of Hawaiian Indigenous youth. She provided the example of Adult Friends for Youth, a not-for-profit organization based in Honolulu which deals with high-risk youth by applying nondirective and nonjudgmental models to prevent youth turning to gangs, violence and underachieving in school.



Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

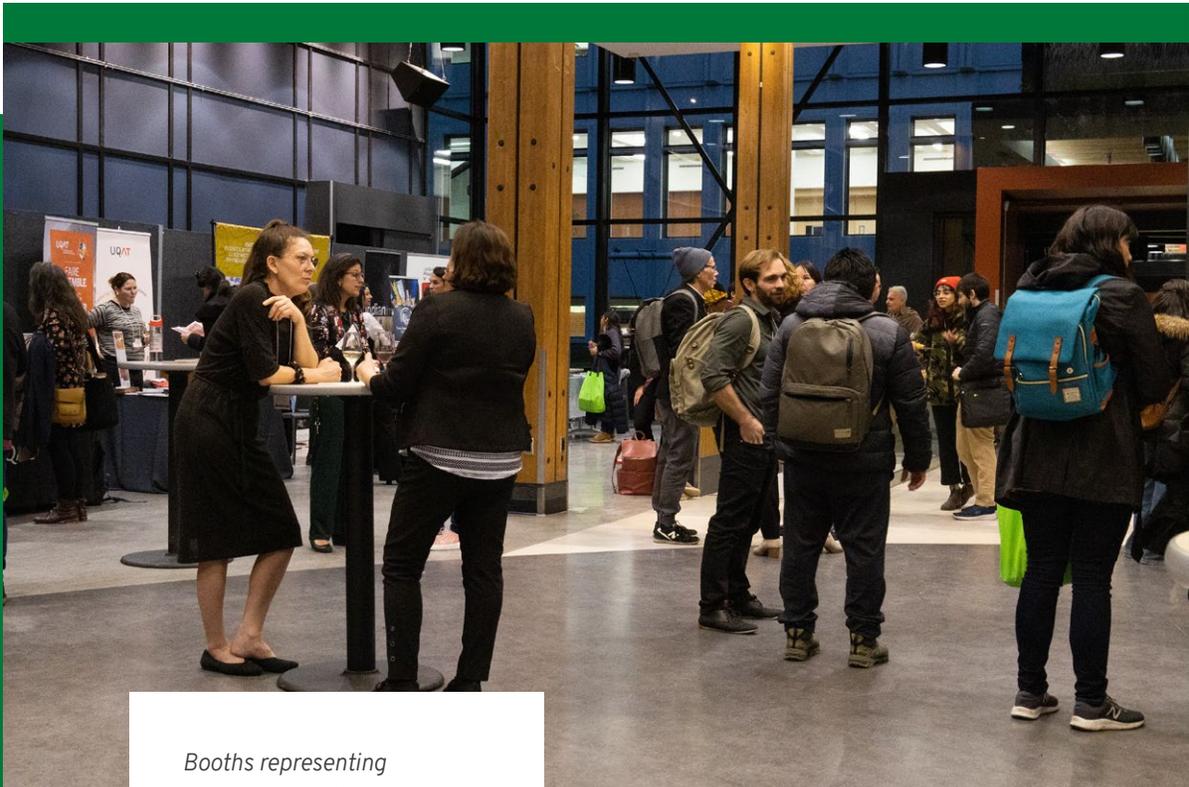
In her closing remarks Dr. Riley called on political leaders to better support these types of programs that give young Indigenous Hawaiians caught in the justice system a chance to succeed by maintaining their connection to their land, their language and their culture.

She believes that the time has come to move forward in collective healing and for the creation of a working group to study the issue of historical traumas among Hawaiians, to continue to eradicate the crimes committed by the State and to support restorative justice programs.



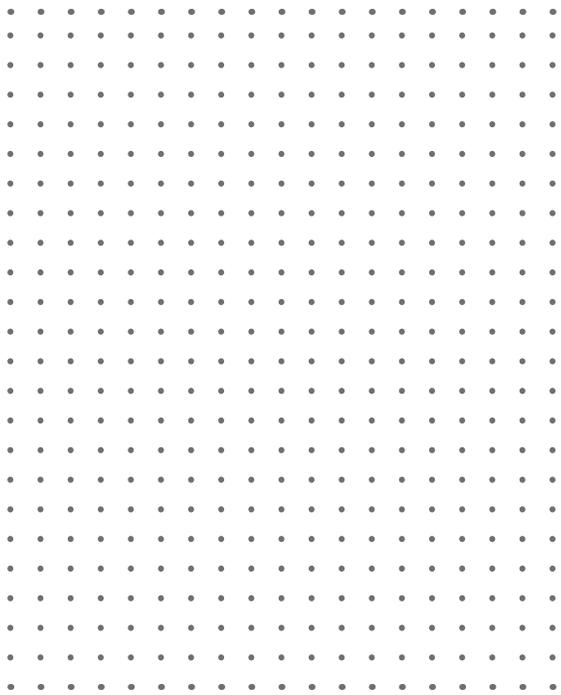
Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

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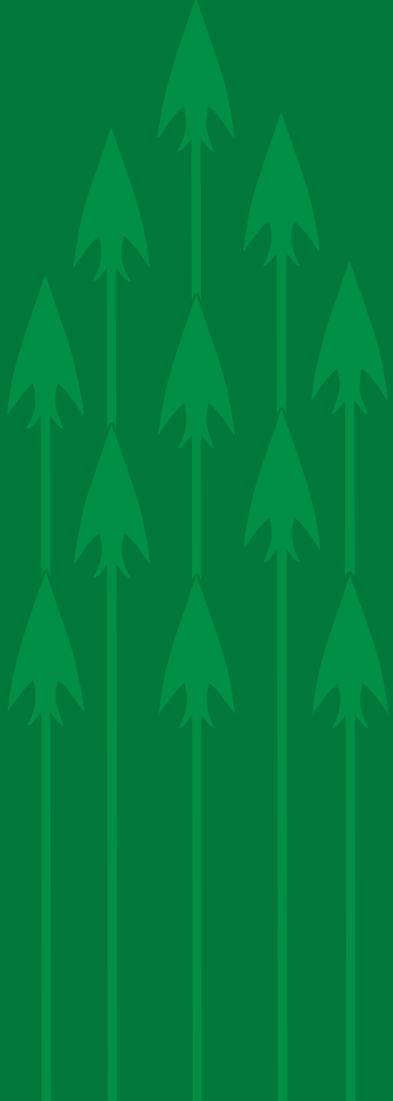
Booths representing many organizations in Indigenous education set up in the Exhibitor Area, the place for attendees to meet, chat and network.

Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

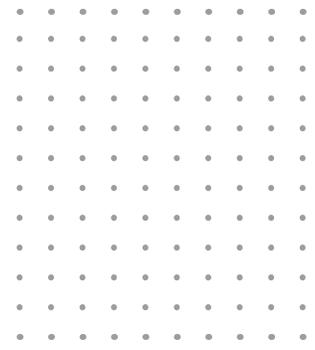


PART 1

**Teaching
and Education
Practices**



Toward Self-Determination: Proposing a Conceptual Model for Rethinking Vocational Training for First Peoples



Julie Rock (center), katshishkutamatshesht / Professor
Department of Psychoeducation and Social Work, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

Sandra Coulombe (to the left), Professor
Department of Education Sciences, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

Christine Couture (to the right), Professor
Department of Education Sciences, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

BACKGROUND

In the Québec public education system, policies, programs and institutions have historically been introduced without considering the needs of Indigenous youth (CCSNA, 2017). Even today, First Peoples do not have full access to educational services that meet their needs, empower them to reach their full potential, and strengthen their cultural identity. In Québec, the delivery of adult education and vocational training programs are typically the purview of provincial secondary education institutions (MEQ, 2021). Some programs now allow for vocational training to take place in First Peoples communities, for example in partnerships with Regional Adult Education Centres (RAECs), affiliated with the First Nations Adult Education School Council (MEQ, 2021).

To advance on the road to self-determination, we propose a conceptual model for rethinking vocational training for First Peoples. This model was developed as part of a doctoral thesis project on cultural safety practices that support the perseverance and success of First Peoples youth and adults in vocational training. The model was designed to study practices adopted by instructors, actors and administrators working to develop programs infused with First Peoples languages and cultures. We share it here in the hope it can be used as a source of inspiration for those communities who wish to rethink the offer of vocational training.

TOWARD A VOCATIONAL TRAINING ROOTED IN THE LANGUAGES AND CULTURES OF FIRST PEOPLES

The concept of cultural safety predicates overhauling both individual and collective practices to calibrate equal and respectful relationships between different cultures (Ball, 2007; Blanchet Garneau et al., 2018; Brascoupé & Waters, 2009; Curtis et al., 2019; Koptie, 2009; Lévesque & Polèse, 2015). As members of First Peoples, we recognize cultural safety as central to us moving forward in exercising our rights to self-determination. As enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ONU/UN, 2007), we argue in favour of establishing and controlling our own education systems where teaching is done in our language, is respectful of our values and is aligned with our cultural methods of teaching and learning. For this to happen, starting with cultural safety, we affirm the importance of studies and development of practices that can lead us to self-determination in every level and sector of the education system, including vocational training.

To develop a vocational training offer firmly rooted in our languages and cultures, we suggest a hybrid model inspired by a system of professional teaching practices (Gagnon, 2008, 2019) crossed with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), applied in some research studies on student

perseverance and success in vocational training (Coulombe et al., 2021) and Indigenous students (Manningham et al. 2011). Our tree-shaped model is patterned after the one developed by members of First Nations (CCA/CCL, 2009), and adapts the one proposed by the Elders Committee during the work carried out by the UNESCO Chair, Transmission of First Peoples' Culture to Foster Well-Being and Empowerment (Kaine, 2020).

To develop our tree-shaped model, as members of First Peoples we let our Indigenous worldview guide us.

At the centre of our model, our identity is represented by the tree trunk, which itself is rooted in our heritage: our values, beliefs, language, cultures and traditional knowledge, all of which are connected to cultural safety (Lévesque & Polèse, 2015). In vocational training, cultural safety practices are represented by the branches, and involve management, support and guidance, and teaching alike.

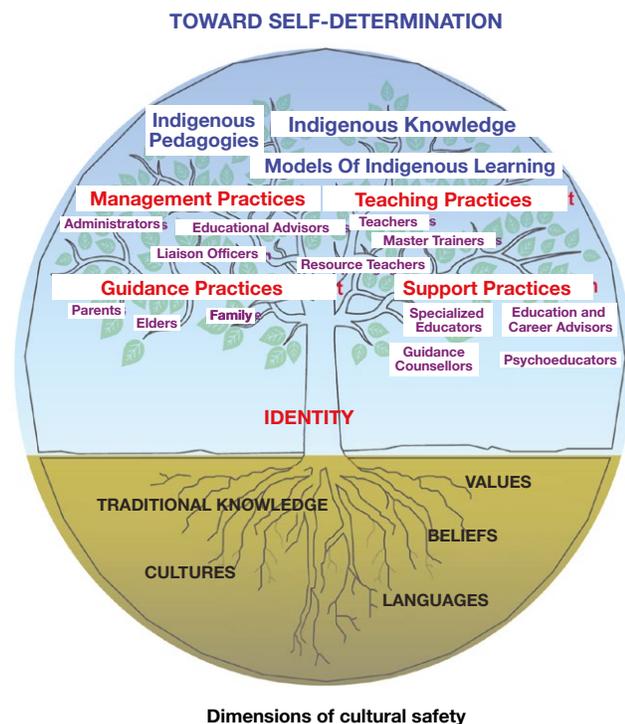


Figure 1. Towards self-determination in vocational training

The leaves on the tree symbolize the individuals carrying out these practices, which encompasses Indigenizing programs (Lavoie et al., 2021) in an approach to self-determination, and using our own knowledge, pedagogies, and teaching and learning models. In our model's holistic approach, cultural safety inspires us to look at the practices of administrators, instructors and actors who work to support perseverance and success of First Peoples youth and adults in vocational training.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITATS PROGRAM

Cultural safety opens opportunities to explore language, cultural transmission, relationship to the land, learning models, teaching principles, cultural knowledge and other aspects of Indigenous health and wellbeing (Battiste, 2017; Campeau, 2015; CCA/CCL, 2009; Mashon, 2010; CVR/TRC, 2015). The RAEC Centre Mitshapeu Katshishkutamatshetshuap provides one such example: It has partnered with the Centre de formation professionnelle du Grand-Fjord to adapt the Protection and Development of Wildlife Habitats vocational training program. Reorganizing the First Nations component of this ministerial program following our model made room to incorporate the cultural knowledge and traditional practices of the Innu Nation. The customized program now includes several hands-on workshops in the outdoors: fishing, hunting, trapping and survival techniques. As reported by Blanchet (2019), building on the lead author's experience as past Director of the RAEC Uashat mak Mani-Utenam [now called Centre Katshishkutamatshetshuap], the program's reform was jointly planned by the different Indigenous and non-Indigenous education representatives, using management practices. While the program included some theoretical components, more importantly it had a hands-on learning component that included spending several weeks on ancestral lands. The pedagogical content was thus reworked using a holistic approach and an interactive and participation-based methodology drawing on our knowledge and modes of transmission related to teaching practices. The partnership between the two Centres required the hiring of both a non-Indigenous instructor with great adaptability to Innu realities and Innu trainers with expertise in cultural knowledge and traditional practices. Beyond teaching, the instructor and master trainers provided student support and guidance. This is an example that best illustrates how cultural safety practices in vocational training implemented by administrators, instructors and actors can help shore up the perseverance and success of First Peoples youth and adults.



Figure 2. Competency statement: Non-motorized forest travel (2017-2018 cohort)

CONCLUSION: CONTINUING ON THE PATH TO SELF-DETERMINATION

As part of the lead author's doctoral dissertation, our proposed model will enable the study of cultural safety practices implemented by those actors on the ground who worked in developing a First Nations component for a vocational training program. These management, teaching, support and guidance practices will be studied through the lens of the changes introduced to ensure Indigenous language and culture are built in. The concept of cultural safety will also help us to delve deeper into the ones related to Indigenizing programs (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), specifically in the field of vocational training, to see how First Nations traditional cultures and practices can be embedded in programs that were originally



Figure 3. Competency statement: Applying animal biology notions (2017-2018 cohort)

created for the mainstream Québec population. A critical stance with respect to this concept, say, for a member of the Innu Nation, would permit a long-term view from a perspective of self-determination.

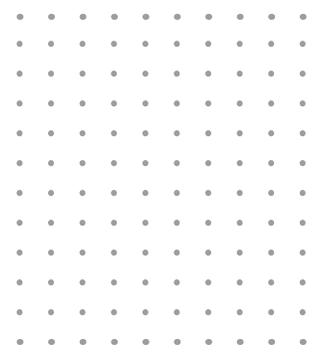
**By sharing our model,
we hope it can inspire different
communities to develop more
practices and programs**

Doing this work together can certainly help us make headway toward reconciliation (CVR/TRC, 2015), and also assert our rights to self-determination as First Peoples.

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Sharing Welcome and Support Measures that Foster the Transition to Post-secondary Education for Indigenous Students in Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean



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BACKGROUND

In Québec, a host of systemic factors shape access to post-secondary studies for Indigenous students. These include geographical remoteness—given that the latter must leave their communities to study in urban centres—which can lead to the loss of identity and the safety net of home and community, and financial hurdles, especially in terms of employment and housing (RCAAQ, 2020). Entering post-secondary studies is also a time of transition involving a change in a person's life course (Doray et al., 2009)—in this case, their education path. Consequently, to promote transition to post-secondary studies for Indigenous people, welcome and support measures are being implemented in many institutions of higher learning, for example prep courses on becoming a student (Kinnane et al., 2014; Ragoonaden, 2017) and assistance with getting financial aid and the admission process (Parriag et al., 2010). Yet literature indicates a persistence of major transition-related issues (e.g. Barney, 2016; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021; Parriag et al., 2010; Ratel, 2019). In light of this, the Comité de recherche sur les transitions aux études supérieures des étudiants.es autochtones was formed to develop a collaborative research project in Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean, bringing together those in charge of welcoming and supporting Indigenous students in their institutions to document what is already in place and to promote and share initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

This article provides an overview of current welcome and support measures to foster school transitions of Indigenous students in four colleges in Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean (Collège d'Alma, Cégep de Chicoutimi, Cégep de Jonquière and Cégep de St-Félicien) and at the Centre des Premières Nations Nikanite (Université du Québec à Chicoutimi). Sharing these measures is important as Indigenous education paths are often interrupted by a series of transitions (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021). In fact, because of their greater mobility, it is often common for Indigenous students to have to deal with not only transitions between levels of instruction, but also between settings (urban centre and Indigenous community) not to mention additional barriers simply transitioning between one level of instruction to the next (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021).

Although non-exhaustive, a literature review highlighted a number of conditions for successful transitions. Ontogenetically speaking, personal motivation and commitment (Barney, 2016; Ratel, 2019) and social engagement (Gallop & Bastien, 2016) were shown to be determining factors in a successful transition. Also noted were the benefits of peer and family support, the presence of Elders (Parriag et al., 2010; Ratel, 2019) and successful role models (Rhonda et al., 2013). Lastly, receiving support from Indigenous Friendship Centres (Barney, 2016; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021; Gallop & Bastien, 2016) and from the student's post-secondary institution (Barney, 2016) were also found to be crucial. In terms of cultural safety (Dufour, 2019), students who feel comfortable in their place of learning and receive support in overcoming barriers are more likely to have a positive experience in their transition and succeed in their educational plans.

OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

We initiated a collaborative research project to pool expertise and ensure the sustainability of current welcome and support measures for Indigenous students.

During the initial data collection, the work involved compiling an inventory of current measures in five post-secondary institutions in Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean. To accomplish this, managers of welcome and support services (n=5) for Indigenous students were interviewed and the activities mentioned were input into a data sheet. A second data collection was done online with post-secondary actors (n=21) working with Indigenous students attending their institution. Collected in an “opportunity café”-style format (where participants engage as a team in rotating fashion discussing a number of predetermined questions on a given topic), the data facilitated identifying the kinds of welcome and support activities and measures in place. This was done during three rounds of exchange where everyone got a chance to talk, share and improve on their solutions (Communagir, n.d.). A third data collection took the form of face-to-face meetings with staff (n=4) in charge of welcoming and supporting Indigenous students in their respective post-secondary institutions, to validate and clarify the information gathered during the first data collection. This approach to co-constructing knowledge around a professional practice helped to produce a regional picture of the measures in place. The two focus groups were transcribed verbatim and their content was analyzed using NVivo 12 software, which helped pool the actions and create six broad categories of welcome and support measures.

SIX BROAD CATEGORIES OF WELCOME AND SUPPORT MEASURES

The following section presents the six broad categories of the institutional welcome and support measures that promote school transitions currently available in post-secondary educational institutions in Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean, including examples of each (Comité de recherche sur les transitions aux études supérieures des étudiant.es autochtones, 2023).

- 1 The first category contains **welcome and support measures that promote culture**. These are aimed at valuing Indigenous culture by giving it due visibility in institutions. In doing so, students can develop a sense of belonging in the educational institution they attend at the same time strengthen their own culture. Some of these institutions do this by spotlighting artistic collaborations with their own Indigenous students, or through a commitment to offer courses that respect and share Indigenous experience and reality.
- 2 In the second category are measures linked to **welcome services that directly support transitions**, accommodating Indigenous students to help them adapt during this pivotal moment in their education plans. Some of these measures include swiftly reaching out to newly enrolled students (namely through scheduled one-on-one meetings), publicizing these services, care in forging relationships based on trust, and working in partnership with the communities to meet interested future students ahead of their transition.
- 3 The third category comprises **activities that revolve around building cultural bridges**, in other words, between Indigenous students' cultures and the mainstream one shared by the vast majority of the urban student population and staff members in the institutions. For example, some institutions invite Indigenous partners to lead activities and/or conferences that are open to all, others provide—under the banner of inclusivity—target activities that give Indigenous and non-Indigenous students an opportunity to meet.
- 4 The fourth category groups **measures that provide holistic support to meet the specific needs of Indigenous students**. These are designed to accommodate the different spheres of their lives by delivering tailored support that includes family and community members. For example, some institutional staff members noted the importance of being available and flexible, namely by offering types of meetings where the students could bring a family member or even by extending their assistance beyond the confines of what the institution offers, or helping to find housing, a job or accessing healthcare.

5 In the fifth category are **measures related to learning support**. These are meant not only to help students with transition, but also to encourage them to succeed in their educational plans and stay in school by delivering a continuum of services along their path, in addition to helping them access accommodations measures such as extra time during exams. These measures are also intended to assist teaching staff, namely by establishing and facilitating on-going communication between all staff members working toward student success.

6 The sixth category of welcome and support measures covers **actions that ensure cultural safety in educational institutions**, for example, creating hubs that can be turned into living communities where students can feel at home, a welcoming environment that engages students in their educational institution, particularly in issues that impact them. Staff members also pointed out the importance of working closely with Indigenous experts in revising some school and/or educational practices so as to recognize the Indigenous vision of education.

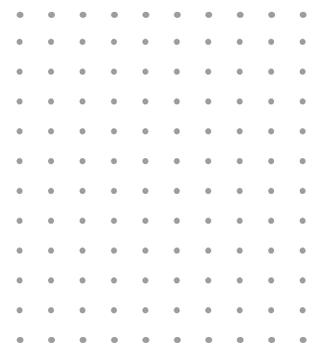
CONCLUSION

Research has shown that many factors can promote perseverance among Indigenous students. Similarly, our research project revealed a range of welcome and support measures that staff members have implemented in post-secondary educational institutions in Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean that spur action at the moment of (or even prior to) transition to these institutions, tools that can prevent the occurrence of more complex problems further down the road. In analyzing these six broad categories of measures, some key underlying principles emerged, namely the importance of building a bond of trust between students, communities and staff members. Without this bond, any intervention, as relevant as it might be, will certainly fall short of its goal. Also, any action taken needs to consider all the different spheres of the student's life and needs. To this end, it is imperative to bear in mind that creating a sense of belonging to Indigenous culture, community and the educational institution are all contributory factors to Indigenous students successfully transitioning and integrating in their surroundings. Lastly, implementing, sharing, and promoting all these measures could act as insulating factors likely to facilitate Indigenous students to transition and succeed in their education plans while softening the impact of many systemic barriers that limit access to post-secondary studies.

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Including Indigenous Perspectives in Education: Teachers' Strategies at an Atikamekw Secondary School



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BACKGROUND

The 1972 release of the landmark *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy statement has been a watershed moment for Indigenous education. In it the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada declared that programs of study in both federal and provincial schools must reflect the realities and perspectives of First Peoples. It espoused that such change, after centuries of colonialism, would benefit the identity affirmation of Indigenous students and our ability to live together. In the wake of this new policy statement, several Canadian provinces have developed elementary and secondary school programs that include Indigenous values and worldviews. In contrast, Québec has lagged behind—leaving Indigenous Nations and some post-secondary institutions to pick up the slack in developing their own range of initiatives. The Ministère de l'Éducation (2020) has since acknowledged, however, the importance of considering Indigenous realities in education and now expects that teachers revisit their roles and incorporate Indigenous perspectives in their teaching practices—despite not making it mandatory nor setting any definition or policies to this end. Currently, very few teachers in Québec are equipped to do this work due to a lack of not only training (Larochelle-Audet et al., 2013) but of knowledge of Indigenous history and realities (Environics Institute, 2021). Yet is this the case throughout Québec? What about, for instance, in Atikamekw secondary schools? How do teachers there include Indigenous perspectives in their practice?

Before delving into this question, a few brief words about secondary schools in the Atikamekw Nation. Located in the upper Saint-Maurice River valley of Québec, these schools generally opt to follow the formal curriculum of the official Québec Education Program (QEP) (Conseil des Atikamekw de Manawan, 2016). Nevertheless, they are increasingly making room for Indigenous content, to wit: the Kiskinohamasowin Atisokana program, which covers the Atikamekw social studies curriculum for the elementary and secondary levels, has been developed since this study was completed. As for staffing, secondary school teachers in the Atikamekw Nation are predominantly non-Indigenous, most likely due to a low number of trained Indigenous teachers.

OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

The data presented in this article are drawn from the author's Master's thesis project on identifying strategies used by secondary school teachers in the Atikamekw Nation for including Indigenous perspectives in their lessons. Between September and November 2019, eight teachers working in two Atikamekw Nation communities were interviewed: two were Indigenous—including Atikamekw—and six identified as non-Indigenous. Among these teachers, the number of years of working in an Indigenous community ranged between two and thirty teaching diverse subjects: Atikamekw Nehiromowin, French as a language of instruction, English, prework training courses, and social studies (history or geography).

Being non-Indigenous, the author took great care to ensure her work would fit within the paradigm of research with Indigenous people. To that end, a multi-pronged approach was used to remain attuned to the needs and concerns of the communities involved. For example, a member of the Atikamekw Nation and an expert in teaching the Atikamekw language and culture, Cécile Niquay-Ottawa, was brought on board right from the start of the project for her valuable help and guidance in adopting culturally-sensitive approaches.

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES: TOWARDS A DEFINITION AND ATTRIBUTES

In an education context, Indigenous perspectives can be defined as “curriculum content/materials, instructional and assessment methods/strategies, and interaction patterns that [Indigenous people] see as reflecting their experiences, histories, cultures, traditional knowledges, and values” (Kanu, 2011, p.96). While Kanu’s definition delineates the contours of the concept, a few gray areas remain for those who are not well immersed in Indigenous perspectives. This definition does not provide any examples of the content, strategies, or models of interaction. For this reason, a number of attributes or basic characteristics would merit clarifying. To do this, the Kanu’s definition was merged with Indigenous worldviews and perspectives adopted by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (MECB/BCME, 2015), learning characteristics of Indigenous people (CCA/CCL, 2009) and several areas of Competency 15 (CEPN/FNEC et al., 2020), three important documents authored by or in partnership with Indigenous stakeholders. After some pruning, four attributes were selected, all interrelated: *a holistic view of lifelong learning; traditional pedagogy; Indigenous language, culture and history; and community involvement*. It worth noting that the first attribute is intrinsic to all four.

In a holistic view of lifelong learning, education does not stop outside the brick-and-mortar classroom—it starts with the first breath you draw and ceases with your last. This learning is meant to lead the individual to acquire physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual skills. In a holistic approach, the individual is connected to all surrounding environments: family, community, the animate and the inanimate. As for traditional pedagogy, it can be defined as both content and knowledge transmission based on Indigenous-centric cultural practices and principles (MECB/BCME, 2015). Generally handed down through oral tradition or by first-hand observation of day-to-day activities, this ever-evolving knowledge differs from one People to the next, and even from one individual to the next. Elders, moreover, have a vital role in this transmission process, which includes the spiritual dimension of life. As for Indigenous language, culture and history, they too vary from Peoples to Peoples and community to community. Lastly, community involvement refers to the old proverb of “it takes a village to raise a child”. From an Indigenous perspective, it is incumbent on the school, parents, extended family and the local community work together to help all children thrive and reach their full potential. It is also expected that those who teach are welcoming, respectful of family and participate in community life (CEPN/FNEC et al., 2020).

RESULTS

Although not always done consciously or deliberately, all the teachers interviewed for this study, despite their sporadic training, referred to at least one of the abovementioned attributes of Indigenous perspectives. What is lacking, however, is a comprehensive approach. They use piecemeal strategies, often intuitively or by observing the environment. Indeed, half of the teachers conceded either having trouble grasping the very concept of Indigenous perspectives or were unsure of the meaning that the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok give it or, consequently, how to include it in their practice. Putting her finger precisely on this issue, Audrey, one of the participants, said:

“What are Indigenous perspectives? Who’d be giving these Indigenous perspectives? Who should it come from? Students? Or parents? Or the Council? Or maybe the school principal? From whom? From whom would these Indigenous perspectives come? That’s what I ask myself, but...y’know, you already know them.”

All the teachers also used strategies to fit the Atikamekw language, culture or history in their practice. Language appears to be the most readily incorporated of the three in the classroom (even if none of the teachers felt fluent in Atikamekw Nehiromowin), for many reasons: to establish positive relationships with their students, foster their learning, spark their interest, value Atikamekw identity or to encourage taking a political stance. With regard to culture and history, strategies vary from subject to subject. Social sciences (history or geography) teachers said in their classrooms that they talk about current events spotlighting Indigenous people, assign work or projects on local history or culture, arrange for meetings with Elders, and even spend a little extra time on parts of the curriculum that cover Indigenous people. It must be noted however, this last strategy may ironically contribute to subverting the topic of Indigenous Peoples in recent history and consequently create an image of them being stuck in the past: the social sciences curricula pay little attention to Indigenous Peoples in the post-colonial age. In French-language courses, teachers introduce Indigenous perspectives for their Atikamekw students by covering Indigenous literature, works recommended by education publishers and trips to Indigenous book fairs such as the Salon du livre des Premières Nations.

Moreover, only half of the teachers mentioned using strategies drawing on traditional pedagogy. Of those who did, some stressed the importance of grounding their lessons in real contexts (e.g., learning the names of trees on their land), others highlighted using visuals strategies such as posters, interactive whiteboards or observation activities.

Lastly, there appears to be a correlation between teachers who can easily integrate into the Atikamekw community and the implementation of many strategies that have a spot for community involvement. Teachers said that maintaining closer ties with members of the Atikamekw community seems indeed to increase the desire to interact with their students' families and contribute to their well-being, namely by attending Council meetings and ensuring food security for their students' families.

CONCLUSION

In summary, despite lacking training on Indigenous perspectives, teachers who work in Atikamekw secondary schools appear to be open to accommodating these perspectives in their teaching practices, reaching for a range of strategies linked to traditional Indigenous pedagogy, language, culture and history, getting involved in the community and adopting a holistic view of lifelong learning. Yet they are often doing it intuitively or by following comments, especially in response to favourable reactions from their students. It remains, however, that Atikamekw Nehiromowin, an easily identifiable cultural characteristic of the Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, is the strategy most often adopted by all the teachers interviewed. It also appears that those teachers who have settled well into the community where they work adopt more strategies that embrace community involvement. While this study has shed some light on the presence of Indigenous perspectives in secondary schools in the Atikamekw Nation—including the fact that the Atikamekw Nehiromowin and integration of teachers into the community can be useful levers, some questions remain and merit further study. To name just one, our project attracted the participation of social sciences and language teachers. But what about those in the “hard sciences”? Do teachers working in these fields feel that Indigenous perspectives concern them? And if so, what strategies do they bring into their classrooms?

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The First Nations Education Council (FNEC) mission is to contribute to the complete takeover of and inherent jurisdiction over education by its member First Nations. The FNEC represents and defends the interests of this collective strength by promoting the reality of each Nation and respecting its identity, culture, and traditions.

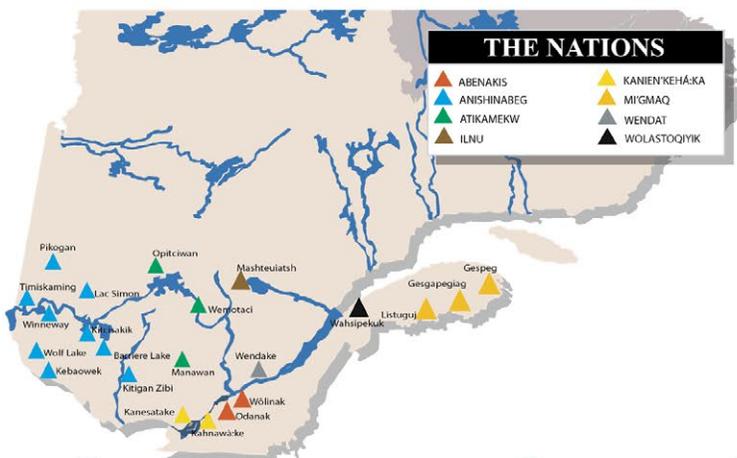
THE FNEC IS:

- 22 MEMBER COMMUNITIES
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- 1 POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION (KIUNA INSTITUTION)
- 25 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS
- OVER 5 900 STUDENTS
- OVER 60 EMPLOYEES

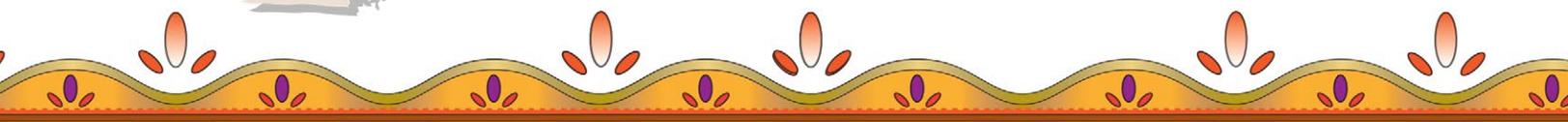
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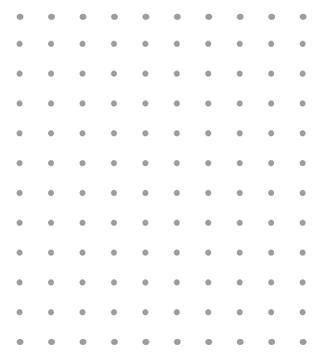
- School administration
- Human resources
- Support for teachers
- Curriculum and program development
- Training
- Computer equipment purchasing
- First Nations education funding formula implementation
- Lobbying
- Creation of a University Centre (House of Knowledge)



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Culturally Relevant Pictograms for First Peoples Children



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Figure 1. Pictogram illustrations by Abenaki and Wendat artist Christine Sioui-Wawanoloath

BACKGROUND

For First Peoples children—more than half of whom attend schools in the Québec public education system—the relationship they have with education is often riddled with the repercussions of a colonial history and its attempts to assimilate. In this period of resurgent Indigenous cultures and a burgeoning movement of self-determination that goes hand in hand with it, Indigenous student perseverance and success calls for the creation of inclusive, supportive and safe learning environments (Blanchet, 2019). Even today many factors related to cultural insecurity and systemic barriers continue to hobble these students on their education paths (RCAAQ, 2022). To help the progress and foster well-being of Indigenous students, it is crucial that they have access to pedagogical resources that are at once relevant and representative of their realities.

The pedagogical toolkit discussed in the present article consists of a guide containing close to 100 culturally relevant pictograms created by the renowned Abenaki and Wendat artist Christine Sioui-Wawanoloath and is the fruit of an extensive and collaborative project between various Indigenous organizations and post-secondary educational institutions in Québec.¹ It was funded by the Jasmin Roy Sophie Desmarais Foundation.

PROJECT CONCEPTION AND ROLLOUT

First developed to assist a special needs student by Stéphanie Guay, a social worker involved with the Petapan Project at Quatre Vents school (part of the Centre de services scolaire des Rives-du-Saguenay), the purpose of this pedagogical tool is to adequately support First Peoples students with special educational needs. Patricia-Anne Blanchet (Advisor on Indigenous Pedagogy at Université de Sherbrooke) and Léonie Thibodeau (BA student in Special Education at Université de Sherbrooke and member of the Anishinaabe Nation) were brought on board to help Guay coordinate the project. To address the lack of meaningful visual representations to support these children in their learning and drawing on an extensive collaborative approach, the guide *Pictogrammes culturellement signifiants pour enfants des Premiers Peuples* [Culturally Relevant Pictograms for First Peoples Children] (Blanchet, Guay & Thibodeau, 2022) was produced.

In a collaborative and consensual approach that reflected the spirit of reciprocity between the many partners, the guide's production included several iterative loops for adjustment and validation, adhering to the principles of decolonizing research in education by, for and with First Peoples (Battiste, 2002). The project team, comprised of over 30 members representing various organisations,² was grouped into three working subcommittees led by the project instigators, which made it possible to refine the themes and descriptions for each pictogram. Every team member thus contributed to the tool through the different phases of the project from conception to dissemination, either as a pedagogical or cultural advisor. The resulting 91 pictograms were organized around ten themes as shown in Table 1.

Themes	Depictions
Daily routines (7)	Washing, eating, getting dressed (2), putting toys away, playing, napping
Physiological needs (8)	Being hungry, being thirsty, needing to use the washroom, feeling pain, feeling hot, feeling cold, feeling sick, feeling tired
Human body (9)	Naked girl, naked boy, non-binary child, pregnant woman, baby, young girl, adolescent girl, woman, elder woman
Interpersonal relationships (12)	Friendship, love, aloneness/being in a bubble, hugging, father, mother, grandparents, intergenerational family, Indigenous parents, multiracial parents, adoptive parents/foster family, guardians
Communication (20)	I, you, he, she, they (singular masculine or feminine), we, you, they (plural masculine or feminine), don't know, asking for help, raising a hand, reading, writing, drawing, talking together/talking circle, telling a story, following an idea, asking to stop, listening
Basic emotions (9)	Pride, happiness (2), sadness, fear, trust, anger, surprise, disgust
Social and emotional needs (9)	Being comforted, expressing feelings, thinking, having empathy for someone else, controlling emotions, being recognized, being guided, feeling included, asserting oneself/asking to stop
Encouraged behaviours (6)	Apologizing, sharing, waiting one's turn, lining up, including someone who's alone, taking good care of things
Discouraged behaviours (6)	Pulling hair, laughing at someone, pushing, making faces, stealing a toy, frowning (sulking)
Recreational activities and games (5)	Playing hockey, playing house, dressing up, snowshoeing, making music

Table 1. Themes and Depictions of Pictograms

1 Centre de services scolaire Rives-du-Saguenay, Université de Sherbrooke, Centre des Premières Nations Nikanite at Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec, First Nations Education Council, Centre Mamik in Saguenay and Centre Mamik in Lac-St-Jean, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw, Marie-Vincent Foundation, Institut Tshakapesh, and the association of friendship centres Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec.

2 The list of the people who contributed to this project can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the guide.

PICTOGRAM USE AND APPLICATION

Graphic illustrations of figurative representations, pictograms are particularly popular in schools as a communication and visual tool. They are also useful in many other settings for prompting children to talk and communicate, and to learn and follow routine as well as complete tasks or encourage specific behaviours. Their visual representation is designed to be simple, uniform and easily understood by any child.



Figure 2. Pictogram for Daily Routines: Putting Toys Away

The scope of this new tool can thus extend well beyond the walls of classrooms. In fact, pictograms can be used in healthcare, social services, early childhood, youth protection and community organizations to provide, for example, cultural and social safety (Blanchet et al., 2019). They can therefore be a handy resource for anyone working with First Peoples children, either in education or intervention scenarios. Without trying to be perfect or an end unto themselves, the pictograms are intended to represent—as much as possible—as many First Nations, Métis and Inuit as possible in all their physiological diversity. In all these respects, this initiative dovetails neatly with both the current process of decolonizing and Indigenizing in Québec and the Canada-wide movement of truth and reconciliation, through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in education and social services that different commissions of public inquiry have called for (CERP, 2019; CVR/TRC, 2015).



Figure 3. Pictogram for Communication: Talking Circle

PILOT TEST AND LAUNCH

Prior to their release, the pictograms were tested with Innu and Atikamekw children taking part in the Petapan Project. More specifically, Jérôme Gagnon, a special needs teacher at the Quatre Vents elementary school, used the pictograms as a resource for language instruction with a grade 1 special needs Atikamekw pupil. According to Gagnon, the child identified equally with illustrations of children with “feminine” features (long hair, for example) and “masculine” ones, which meant that the tool had fulfilled what we had hoped—to be inclusive and gender-neutral: “I pointed to the ‘emotion’, and he nodded vigorously, happy at being understood.” Gagnon also said that the child “takes his pictogram keychain everywhere with him and uses it [...] He really likes it.”

The big launch of *Pictogrammes culturellement signifiants pour enfants des Premiers Peuples* took place during the 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples in November 2022, with Jasmin Roy from the Jasmin Roy Sophie Desmarais Foundation attending. About 50 copies of the guide, with the pictograms printed in colour on cardboard and ready to be cut out and plasticized, were handed out. During the conference, some attendees remarked on the absence of pictograms depicting cultural or spiritual activities (e.g., harpoon fishing, throat singing, braiding sweetgrass). Acknowledging this valuable feedback, Roy said he was prepared to fund a second edition of the guide as well as an English translation. It was also suggested that different Indigenous translations be added to the reverse side of the pictograms.

Since the launch of the guide—which is now available to download free of charge at the Jasmin Roy Sophie Desmarais Foundation’s website—many people have shown keen interest in using it and have relayed positive feedback on applying the pictograms in diverse fields (healthcare, social services, education) and settings (Indigenous communities, urban centres). This has led to reinstating the committee, adding new partners, and proposing 30 new pictograms.



Figure 4. Pictogram for Social and Emotional Needs: Being Guided

CONCLUSION

Despite the efforts undertaken to that effect, the main limitation of this tool remains that it does not fully represent the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in all their physiological and cultural diversity. It was remarked that no Inuit partner had been consulted in the making of the pictograms. For this reason, an Inuit organization will be on board for the upcoming rounds of consultation and validation for a revised edition of the guide. Also noted was the fact that while there was a pictogram representing the singular gender-neutral pronoun “they”, there were no visual representation of its plural. Similarly, the diverse household characteristics and compositions in Indigenous populations (e.g., same-sex couple, single-parent family) had not been fully represented.

Yet despite these few gaps, which should be resolved in phase two of the revised edition, all who partnered in developing this toolkit are confident of its relevance and application in the fields of education, healthcare and intervention. Indeed, during its presentation at the 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples, Anishinaabe undergraduate student Léonie Thibodeau highlighted the incomparable value of such a resource in these fields. In her view, the meaningful and consistent use of pictograms could certainly help build a positive teacher-student relationship, a key building block in the optimal learning and overall development of an Indigenous child.

That a teacher or intervenor can employ such a visual tool to better communicate or meet an Indigenous child’s needs is a testament to the resolve to provide support anchored in relevant cultural references likely to increase the child’s well-being.

Lastly, the authors would like to thank the many partners who contributed to making this project a reality. *Pictogrammes culturellement signifiants pour enfants des Premiers Peuples* would have not been possible without their invaluable generosity and support.

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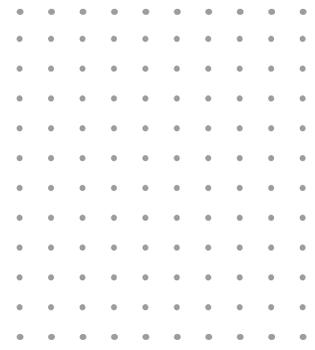
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A Tool to Evaluate Indigenous Content in Children’s Literature for the Elementary Classroom



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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Following Calls to Action 62 to 65 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (CVR/TRC, 2015) and a ministerial request to include Indigenous perspectives in teacher education programs (MEQ, 2020), Université de Sherbrooke endorsed the M8wwa L J mamu Committee.¹ Active since 2019, the Committee’s mission is to “raise awareness and support faculty in including Indigenous realities, knowledge and perspectives in teacher education programs through a collaborative approach founded on respect and reciprocity of Indigenous partners” (Université de Sherbrooke, n.d., free translation). In conducting a study of children’s literature available at the Centre de ressources pédagogiques (CRP),² an analysis by Committee members revealed that among the available works containing Indigenous realities, perspectives or cultures, most of them were picture books and 60% of these works were authored

by non-Indigenous writers. Also, 40% of these works had been written more than 20 years earlier.³ In light of these findings and following discussions with Committee members,⁴ it was decided to create a tool to assist instructors and future teachers alike to develop their critical skills in evaluating literary works dealing with Indigenous knowledge, realities and cultures. The decision to create such a tool was prompted by media coverage of a story where members of the Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence, a school board in Ontario, had decided to burn and bury the ashes of books that contained stereotypical portrayals of First Peoples (Gerbet, 2021). Reacting to this event, O’Bomsawin (2021) argues that other measures could have been taken and that those types of books should not disappear, rather they should be used as tools for teachable moments. The M8wwa L J mamu Committee concurs and has developed a reflexive tool that aligns with this view underpinning the merit of reflective guidance.

1 See www.usherbrooke.ca/education/perspectives-autochtones/comite-m8wwa-L-J-mamu

2 A resource library for education professionals (e.g., textbooks, children’s picture books).

3 It is worth noting that following this analysis, the CRP has since undertaken a wide range of initiatives, including the purchase of more than 400 works written by Indigenous authors, inserting notices inside that direct those consulting them to useful resources that can guide their critical assessment of works containing Indigenous perspectives, realities and cultures.

4 Over 20 people sit on Université de Sherbrooke’s M8wwa L J mamu Committee. These members are affiliated either with Université de Sherbrooke, the Grand Council of the Waban-Aki Nation, the Kiuna Institution, the First Nations Education Council, the Central Québec School Board or the Kativik School Board.

AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

***Clés d'analyse d'œuvres de littérature jeunesse traitant de savoirs, réalités et cultures autochtones* [Criteria for Evaluating Children's Literature Containing Indigenous Knowledge, Realities and Cultures] (Comité M8wwa L ǀ mamu, 2023) is presented in the form of a poster arranged into nine insets, each corresponding to a criterion and containing exploratory questions related to it:**

Creators and Sources

Eppley et al. (2022) reminds us that “Indigenous children deserve more Indigenous-authored books” (p.18). Thus, the first criterion is a decisive one and is applicable to all educational contexts, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. This entails taking the time to verify whether the author is Indigenous. If this is the case, then it is fair to say that using the work should not be an issue. In cases of non-Indigenous authors, we must enquire about their background and what qualifies their views of and receptiveness to Indigenous matters. If doubts remain over the Indigenous authenticity of the author, then the second criterion is applied.

Collaboration

In cases when the author is not Indigenous, it is important to determine whether the author has received permission from Indigenous people in broaching topics related to their realities or perhaps an Indigenous body had endorsed the value of what is written in the work. For example, in the series of picture books written by Stéphanie Déziel (2022, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c) and illustrated by the Anishinaabe artist Michi Thusky-Cloutier and produced in partnership with the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, although the author herself is not Indigenous, her collaboration with Thusky-Cloutier allows to further validate these works.

Illustrations

Illustrations are part and parcel of children's books. Loriene Roy (2014), an Anishinaabe scholar from Ojibwe/Chippewa, notes that a book's illustrations are just as germane as the words it contains. Illustrations can indeed portray stereotypical representations, whether in physical aspects or clothing worn by the characters, hypersexualized representation of women, false or folksy representations of dwellings, etc. (Slapin et al., 1996). The pertinent question to ask here would be whether the work had been illustrated by an Indigenous artist and what the representations convey.

Indigenous languages

This criterion is even more applicable given that UNESCO has declared that 2022 to 2032 to be the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (UNESCO, 2021). This consists in ascertaining whether works found in the classroom contain Indigenous terms, if the translation into these languages had been done by Indigenous translators and names of the Nations or communities are those decided on and desired by Indigenous people. For example, to name the ancestral land of the W8banaki, the right term to use would be Ndakina. Côté (2019) notes that “literature lends itself well for the teaching of ancestral knowledge related to land, identity and language” (p.37, free translation). Using bilingual picture books, for example, can be beneficial for Indigenous children to connect with the language of their community or even give non-Indigenous children their first glimpse to Indigenous languages thanks to translated works. Two good examples are *Awâsis and the World-famous Bannock*, by Dallas Hunt (2020)—a member of Wapsewsiipi—and *Les loups au ruban rouge* (Larouche, 2021). Both include a glossary and a full translation into Indigenous languages.

Subject Matter

One of the main purposes of this criterion is to spot whether story elements are approached from a colonialist or stereotypical perspective. For example, in the book *Un livre, c'est magique!* (Alméras, 2021), Indigenous daily life is represented as exotic and fantastical, almost dreamlike. As readers, we need to be vigilant about these types of representations. It is important to ascertain here is whether the creator intended to authentically represent Indigenous knowledge, realities or cultures. Readers will need to train an even more sensitive lens on the work if that is the case. A concrete example is the use of the igloo in *Pikiq* (Yayo, 2015). While representing Inuit people as living only in igloos is stereotypical, in this story the main character journeys through a dream. Given that the representation is set in a dream, it does not present the same problem as it would have been if presented in a reference book, or if it only included people living in igloos.

Terms

Words matter: Some works contain terms that are not only outdated, but are in fact offensive. Words such as “Indian,” “redskin,” “squaw,” “kawish” and “savage”⁵ must never be used. When outdated words are found in works, without question they must be closely scrutinized and used only as teachable moments for teachers and their students. The teacher could recontextualize the use of the term “Indian,” and use it as an opportunity to introduce the students to the names and the diversity of the 11 Indigenous Nations in Québec.⁶

Publication

This is two-fold criterion. Firstly, those works designed to show a more realistic representation of Indigenous knowledge, realities and cultures are less likely to contain inappropriate representations if they were published after 2015, that is, in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports (CVR/TRC, 2015)⁷. Paradoxically, works that recount life stories, myths or legends are more likely to produce a more faithful rendition if they date way back, given that the authors may have had direct access to people who would have imparted this knowledge.

Secondly, teachers can also make enquires about who is the publisher of the work. In fact, some publishing houses are known for specializing in titles on Indigenous knowledge, realities, knowledge or culture (e.g., Hannenorak, les Éditions du soleil de minuit and Mémoire d’encrier)⁸.

Recognition

This criterion applies after the work has been published. It consists in checking whether the work in question received favourable reviews from people in the community, was an award-winning piece recognized for excellence in Indigenous literature,⁹ is work published by an Indigenous person on social media or found in databases managed by First Peoples.¹⁰

Status

The relevance of verifying the status of a published work lies in the fact that simply because a work is known to be a classic does not mean it provides an appropriate representation of Indigenous knowledge, realities and cultures. One such example is Pocahontas,¹¹ a recurring character found in many children’s picture books and other artistic depictions. Burgess & Valaskakis (1995), the latter Chippewa from Waaswaaganing, explain that this kind of representation of Indigenous women feed on the process of making them invisible. Similarly, the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (ENFFADA/MMIWG, 2019)¹² speaks to the issue of dehumanizing portrayals of Indigenous women—which have led to the physical and sexual violence committed against them—that continue to be regarded as normal. As a book, *Pocahontas* remains a popular literary classic that most children recognize. When using this book, the clothing in which Pocahontas is portrayed needs to be contextualized, or the importance of women in Indigenous culture needs to be discussed, perhaps by creating a literary network. In doing so, students would begin to realize that even though a work may be considered a classic, we often need to take a hard look and dare to question the images that are propagated by it.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The nine different evaluation criteria presented above show that choosing culturally relevant works of children’s literature is far from a simple task for teachers, as there are multiple elements to be considered. *Clés d’analyse d’œuvres de littérature jeunesse traitant de savoirs, réalités et cultures autochtones* (Comité M8wwa L J mamu, 2023) is a tool meant to help support teachers in developing their reflex muscles about stereotypical representations portrayed in books in building awareness among their students. With time, the choice of books will become a much easier task for teachers and literary works will allow Indigenous students to see themselves in them and find a fair representation of their realities and, at the same time, open the door for non-Indigenous students to perspectives, realities and cultures other than theirs.

5 To learn more and increase awareness of such terms many references are available, such as the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ *Lexicon of Terminology* (https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MMIWG_Lexicon_FINAL_ENFR.pdf), Télé-Québec’s *Briser le code – le lexique* (<https://enclasse.telequebec.tv/contenu/Les-Autochtones-102/521>), Radio-Canada’s *L’ABC des Autochtones* (<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/special/2016/10/abc-des-autochtones/index.html>) and Mikana’s *Petit guide de terminologies en contexte autochtone* (<https://www.mikana.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Petit-guide-de-terminologies-en-contexte-autochtone-FR-June-2022.pdf>).

6 The map at www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1634312499368/1634312554965 provides an at-a-glance view of the different Indigenous Nations in Québec.

7 See <https://nctr.ca/records/reports>

8 See their respective websites: <https://hannenorak.com>, <https://www.editions-soleildeminuit.com> and <https://memoireencrier.com>

9 For example, the Indigenous Voices Awards have been recognizing excellence in Indigenous literary works since 2017. As of 2021, there is now a category for recordings as well. For more information visit <https://indigenousvoicesawards.org>.

10 For example, the Musée des Abénakis at <https://collection.museeabenakis.ca>, the Librairie Hannenorak bookstore at www.hannenorak.com or the Kwahiatonhk! thematic collections of works at www.kwahiatonhk.com/oeuvres-autochtones.

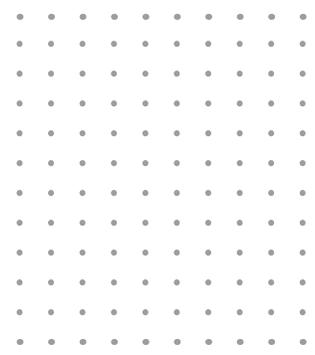
11 The seventh episode of Marie-Andrée Gill’s podcast *Laissez-nous raconter: L’histoire crochie* delves into the real-life story of Pocahontas and the issue of representation. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/balados/7628/autochtones-traditions-communautes-langue-territoire/466226/femmes-libres-culture-perceptions>

12 See <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report>

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Cultural Objects in the Recognition of First Nations and Inuit Specificities, Knowledge and Other Perspectives in Education



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INTRODUCTION

An important part of the mission of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ) is to offer democratic access to culture and knowledge and strive to inclusively represent Québec by recognizing, promoting and including First Nations and Inuit (FNI) cultural specificities, knowledge and other perspectives throughout its bodies and projects. This objective is formulated to a certain extent thanks to action research projects such as the one presented in this article, on teaching and learning situations using cultural objects, aimed at bringing reconciliation between Québec and FNI communities. In addition to funding this project, BANQ provides digital and pedagogical expertise that makes developing its different phases possible.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The first phase of the project¹ consists of a research team (Innu researcher and professional) and members of First Nations² co-developing teaching and learning situations (TLS) according to their respective ways and methods (e.g., pedagogies, collaborative work, educational relationships) that recognize, value and include the cultural specificities, knowledge and other perspectives of the Nation in question.

The project has only one requirement: the TLS must include a “cultural object” chosen by the team and the students as having pedagogical potential (objects, crafts, cultural activities, histories, rites, cosmogonies). This can be anything with binding significance for the people involved, whether through common memberships or a shared symbolic meaning for the whole community or Nation. Following various steps in co-developing the TLS as a team and planning for the classroom, the students carry out an activity. For example, in one Innu school, the cultural object chosen was a piece of caribou hide. On the land, the students listen to the Knowledge Keeper explain in Innu (and then translated into French) the significance of that particular cultural object.³

At the end of the activity, grouped into teams and led by a facilitator, the students share their thoughts on what they learned, what surprised them, and what they already knew. They are then asked to choose one element and talk about it in their mother tongue (and then in French or English) in front of a camera. The video recordings are then edited by the research team and organized according to their relevance.

At this point the second phase of the project begins, and the edited video is shared with a new team in a Québec school located outside their community, but still within the Nation’s territory.

1 This project has a very flexible approach. Each community sets its own guidelines and methods, and once partners agree to contribute to the project, the process is jointly decided and fully adapted not only to reflect the host community’s characteristics, but also those of the participating teachers and students.

2 For each Nation, a school team is comprised of one or more teacher(s), school counsellor(s) and Knowledge Keeper(s).

3 The project can be modified to accommodate those Nations that do not have separate schools. For example, among the Abenaki, both elementary and secondary students are grouped together with Abenaki education professionals and the research team. The preparation phase becomes a pedagogical workshop and instead of being filmed individually, these youth present the cultural object directly to students in Québec in schools located on their territory.

Guided by the research team, the material produced from this exchange is used to co-develop a new TLS featuring the cultural specificities, knowledge and other perspectives that the FNI students themselves had highlighted. The videos are then turned into teaching material to be shown to Québec students.

In preparing for this new TLS, a meeting is set up between a team from the participating Québec school and the one from the FNI community where the video was recorded. This is to encourage a reciprocal educational conversation on methods used, how this material can be incorporated in the classroom and to give education professionals who rarely get to talk to each other an opportunity to connect. After the TLS is complete in the Québec school, the teams meet up again for a post-mortem (e.g., what worked, what needed adjusting).

Lastly, after some final touches and editing, the TLS is posted online on the BAnQ website, available free of charge to all teachers across Québec, be they FNI or not. In addition to being turnkey material, these TLS have the added value of FNI cultural specificities, knowledge and other perspectives that can be used as pedagogical methods.

DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH

This project is part of a current and ongoing action-research initiative. The phases of the TLS process are contemporaneously being documented by the researcher with the eventual goal of disseminating to the scientific and professional community the participants' respective experiences and ideas depending on their roles and stances (emotion/emotionality, awareness, learning). Although the main objective is to identify methods for recognizing, promoting and/or including FNI cultural and linguistic specificities, knowledge and other teaching perspectives, there are a host of other objectives. In the area of teaching practices: an analysis of results by participant characteristics (respective adoption of the cultural object and pedagogical approach by community and individual) has been planned. Other secondary objectives are related to gaining a

better understanding of the educational relationship that ties teachers and students in FNI cultural contexts, observing teaching/learning methods, documenting and sharing cultural and pedagogical practices and strategies of FNI communities, as well as pedagogical mobilisation that pushes the boundaries of subject areas (interdisciplinary vs. cross-disciplinary). On a scientific level, some of the objectives are related to social and pedagogical innovation through the coexistence or complementarity of a range of culturally different pedagogical approaches and the use of a cultural anchor model (more on this below). Others pertain to defining the place of FNI cultures in Québec education and an investigation of culturally relevant elements (not only knowledge, but also methods and skills) that can be embedded in curricula.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The work conducted thus far has already yielded some very interesting results for both students and teachers. A summary of the preliminary results and the research team's observations are condensed in Table 1 below.

EXPECTED AND OBSERVED OUTCOMES (PRELIMINARY RESULTS)

For FNI communities (teachers, knowledge keepers, students)

- Taking ownership of (or reclaiming) the culture, identity and language of an object belonging to their culture;
- Developing or strengthening cultural pride and a sense of belonging (individual, group or community);
- Promoting pedagogical and educational methods, in addition to cultural and linguistic realities and perspectives;
- Boosting teachers' confidence in their pedagogies, i.e., using teaching methods not officially recognized in initial teacher training;
- Promoting practices that have been historically or even today cast aside or viewed as "not as good as";
- Supporting teaching practices and professional development;
- Reducing cultural erosion, improving legitimacy of their social identity and revitalizing their languages.

For non-indigenous Québec schools (teachers, students)

- Learning and using FNI-inspired teaching/learning models that engages students to explore aspects of FNI cultures;
- Supporting teaching practices and professional development in less linear, less sequenced or less compartmentalized manner and TLS that are a better fit to FNI teaching methods;
- Developing cultural sensitivity and humility among students and teachers;
- Acquiring a learner's mindset (teachers) as proposed by FNI frameworks such as Competency 15 (CEPN/ FNEC et al., 2020), and discovering the scope of this mindset;
- Learning about knowledge and skills involved in the "cultural leap" in a pedagogical context;
- Responding to the need for access to quality, FNI-produced resources that reflect these perspectives;
- Raising awareness and greater knowledge about FNI among students and teachers;
- Staunching historical and social prejudices, cultural bias, stereotypes and racism.

For both

- Sharing and learning across cultures;
- Reciprocal cultural awareness among students (in their learning) and by teachers (in their practice);
- Developing cultural skills; FNI and non-Indigenous Québec teachers exchanging and being open-minded to the Other and consolidating their learning, including their practices (old and new), for further reinvestment;
- Engaging in reflective teaching practices (rounds of introspection and retrospection supported by the researcher);
- Creating a network (community of learning), sharing and learning across cultures laying the foundation for future collaborations;
- Solutions for ongoing teacher training needs.

FROM CULTURAL OBJECT TO ANCHOR MODEL

To support teachers and Knowledge Keepers in the description of the chosen cultural object when developing a TLS, an anchor model (Deschênes, forthcoming) is proposed here. This in essence consists of a series of questions that need to be asked about the cultural object. Arbitrary and by no means exhaustive, these questions tend for the most part to be related to the subject being taught, and possibly even the teacher's own characteristics (previous knowledge, experiences) that cover six broad anchors guiding the identification of cultural specificities, knowledge and other perspectives connected to them. They are called "anchors" since they become bearing points for teaching, points of departure that are both essential and interrelated in multiple ways:

- ▶ Culture, identity and sense of belonging;
- ▶ Speech and language;
- ▶ Land, place and context;
- ▶ Knowledge and experiences;
- ▶ Family, community and generations;
- ▶ Spirituality and cosmology.

These anchors are governed by principles of interconnectivity (overlapping and closely linked, with thin and porous boundaries), indivisibility and holism (inchoate if isolated), interdependence (one cannot exist without the other), and specificity (each description of the cultural object expresses one community, one place, one territory, one context).

For teachers in FNI schools, using this model is intended solely to ensure that the six anchors of the cultural object's description are addressed. For example:

- ▶ How does the cultural object form part of the community's identity?
- ▶ What words should be used to define it and what do they mean?
- ▶ What knowledge, values or beliefs are linked to the cultural object?

As for non-Indigenous Québec teachers, the learning exercise becomes more extensive and requires them to search for meaning and information. These questions, in essence, need to touch on each anchor, and the answers return cultural specificities, knowledge and other perspectives that need to be promoted and included directly in the TLS. For example:

- ▶ What elements of FNI student identity are associated with the description of the cultural object featured in the TLS?
- ▶ What specific cultural and linguistic characteristics sets the object apart?
- ▶ How is the cultural object unique to the place or where the community is located?
- ▶ How does the TLS provide a glimpse into the representation of FNI people on the territory where the cultural object is found?

- ▶ What kind of pedagogy is used by FNI people for teaching about the cultural object?
- ▶ Which FNI knowledge or epistemologies of the local cultures can be linked to the descriptive elements of the cultural object?
- ▶ How does the TLS take into consideration the local FNI relationship with knowledge on an epistemic (status, role or place of knowledge) historical, social, relational (link to or place of the object in the family, community or between nations, influence of the way the cultural object is viewed), or axiological level (the value FNI people assign to the cultural object)?
- ▶ What kind of legitimacy (e.g., in the curriculum, mainstream society) does the knowledge linked to the cultural object have?
- ▶ How does TLS propose to understand the cultural object on the spiritual level in the community?

Answering these questions can help to circumscribe the specificities, knowledge and other perspective associated with a cultural object by breaking it up into smaller, more functional and practical parts for teachers wanting to promote and incorporate them into a TLS. More importantly, they provide an opportunity to find descriptive elements of the cultural object that are not necessarily coming from a mainstream perspective.

CONCLUSION

This project provides a fresh look at teaching practices and TLS content. Its relevance is considerable given that this insight is neither offered nor formalized in initial teacher training. Nevertheless, the project has some limitations slowing its progress, including a shortage of available FNI schools—busy with their own development—and overextended FNI professionals. We are also unfortunately hitting a stone wall in trying to find interested non-Indigenous Québec schools that have enough time to participate or consider this kind of project a priority. Yet we adamantly believe that teaching can foster reconciliation, especially through strengthening the teaching profession's cultural skills, continuing to look for educational practices that are culturally coherent and relevant, as well as the emergence of new mindsets among teachers such as cultural sensitivity and humility.

The benefits of the project can meet the goals of education for all, which Québec public education is mandated to fulfil, by enriching TLS with content and methods that value cross-culture, inclusivity and otherness: three powerful levers for stamping out social and educational disparities.

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The Matinamagewin Course: A Workshop on Challenges and Proven Practices in Promoting and Including Indigenous Knowledge, Perspectives and Cultural Safety



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INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, the Continuing Education Service of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT), with the assistance of a working committee, has been co-developing¹ Matinamagewin—Sharing, a training course open to any education staff member in public elementary and secondary schools or in Indigenous community schools anywhere in Québec. The purpose of this course is to raise awareness among school staff of the importance of adopting an approach to cultural safety and help build their ability to value and promote Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and cultures (history, traditional ways, pedagogies, language, realities and much more) in their field. In this course better knowledge of this heritage, combatting prejudice and fostering and promoting living together in harmony are placed front row and centre. Also covered are communication and collaboration between school, family, communities and the urban environment. The Piwaseha (morning twilight)² course is a prerequisite to the course.

The 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples in November 2022 provided an excellent opportunity for UQAT's Continuing Education Service to facilitate a hands-on workshop where participants were able to learn a thing or two about the Matinamagewin—Sharing course. The present article summarizes the course content covered and discussions during the workshop.

During the Convention, we felt it important that participants get real-time, first-hand experience and a live demonstration of ways of doing things that reflect Indigenous pedagogies. To that end, as they entered the room for the workshop participants were asked to share one wish, one strength and one challenge or uneasiness associated with promoting Indigenous knowledge and cultural safety.

1 Such training courses developed by UQAT's Continuing Education Service are the result of sustained and ongoing consultation with First Peoples partners. Courses are co-constructed with advisory and support committees comprised primarily of Indigenous and some non-Indigenous members who have long been involved in Indigenous matters. Firmly believing that education is a determining vector in moving forward to a more equitable and inclusive society, our team stands by the collaborative principle of *by, for and with*, where the prominent voice belongs to First Nations and Inuit, thus acknowledging their expertise of issues that concern them.

2 First developed in 2008 at the request of the Anicinape Nation Programs and Services, this introductory course covers key basic concepts of Indigenous realities and offers new lines of thinking on building positive relationships. Both courses are available in French or English free of charge to education staff in urban settings or communities across Québec. To learn more please visit www.uqat.ca/formation-continue/services-educatifs.

They were invited to write their thoughts on a poster of a beaver, which according to the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers, is an animal that teaches us that the “building communities is entirely dependent on gifts given to each by the Creator,” and calls on us to have “the wisdom to use these gifts to create peaceful and healthy communities” (CSSSPNQL, 2018, p.18, free translation).

Working with an animal native to Canada and arranging the participants in a circle during the workshop are just two examples of how our pedagogy embodies an Indigenous approach to knowledge and teachings. These details are helpful in creating ideal moments conducive to being open, learning and helping one another. All participants joined in this reflective exercise, showing once again how the voice, experience and role of each individual is important in upholding the community and living together.

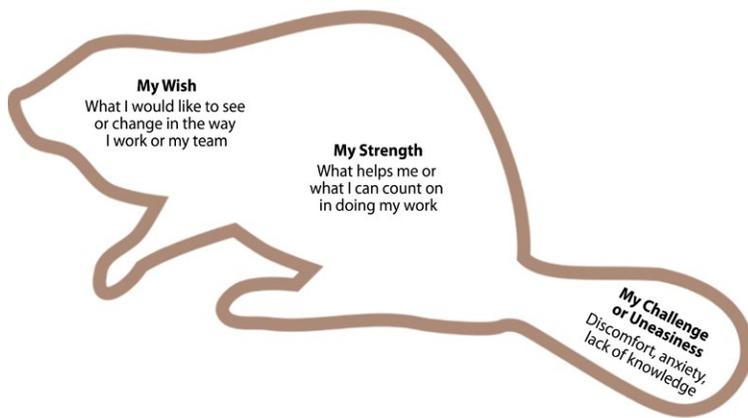


Figure 1. Using the beaver as a symbol of Indigenous knowledge and teaching.

In the belly of the beaver, participants were asked to place their strengths—their abilities in working with Indigenous students or promoting cultures and talking about Indigenous realities and history. Among some of the strengths mentioned were personal reflection, demonstrating flexibility and versatility, having a human-centred and caring touch, developing close relationships with parents and being passionate about their work. Others recognized their ability to listen, their spirituality, openness, ability to adapt or humility as being some of the qualities that guided them in their work. Some tipped their hats to community strengths in rallying around different situations, or Indigenous education initiatives that have been in place for over 50 years, primarily led by Indigenous friendship centres. For the participants, these initiatives are sources of inspiration, learning and cooperation.

In the tail of the beaver, participants had to place their challenges, uneasiness or discomforts. Topping this list were challenges linked to being a non-Indigenous ally: one of the participants was unsure on how to take this position without encroaching too much; a second mentioned being uncomfortable as a non-Indigenous person; a third lacked confidence. An Indigenous participant queried precisely about the place of non-Indigenous people. Another, likely a resource person for her co-workers, wondered how to behave as such without acting on Indigenous peoples’ behalf. This last conundrum also surfaces in the wish to consult First Nations and Inuit community members in developing projects while being aware of the fact of overburdening them. It merits mentioning here how crucial it is to use and promote authentic creations, that is, those produced by Indigenous authors. For many years now and particularly of late, there is a wealth of available content to help school staff incorporate and promote Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms, works that champion Indigenous voices. Providing students with the opportunity to watch, listen or read prepares them to learn about different Indigenous worldviews and works of fiction directly from those concerned—First Nations and Inuit people. A second discomfort mentioned revolved around the issue of decolonizing the institutional environment that some participants denounced for its status quo and rigid structures. What decolonizing or Indigenous means in concrete terms in mathematics, science or robotics programs, for example, continues to pose significant challenges. What exactly is intended here? one of the participants asked. Another said they felt uncomfortable and anxious at being the only person in their school having to defend the cause in an education context rife with challenges. One wrote that there were still people in their workplace harbouring prejudices making them feel uncomfortable.

Participants placed their wishes in the head of the beaver, and the kinds of wishes mentioned underscore the actions needed in our communities for setting short-, medium- and long-term goals. The first wishes here we surmise to be from Indigenous participants because of statements such as: *To be heard as an Indigenous person, Welcome me for who I am—an Innu woman, and Foster the transmission of intergenerational knowledge* (e.g., culture week or anything pertaining to land-based knowledge). Among many other wishes shared by participants were: maintaining nurturing relationships, welcoming and forging ties between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, overcoming imposter feelings, more collaboration between all kinds of educators, making room for territory-specific teaching including in cities, and more Indigenous people in education. Others asked for more Indigenous language, more culture in schools, that success be viewed from a variety of perspectives (cultural, educational and social), that prominence be given to concepts such as consensus, and that alternative forms of evaluation be developed. Many participants hoped for a world more attuned to and receptive of the Other and that teachers would ground their teaching methods in an approach to cultural safety. Some also spoke of the need for knowledgeable staff, more open to First Nations and Inuit cultures and realities, who could at times, slow down their pace to ours in prioritizing relations. One last wish included the creation of spaces where the questioning of our practices was welcomed.

At the completion of the exercise, participants were asked to sit in a circle for easier sharing and listening. Despite the rectangular shape of the room and rows of fixed desks, we wanted to give the workshop participants a non-hierarchical experience for them to see how the circle can elevate sharing and listening as taught in Indigenous communities with whom these training courses are developed.

The workshop then continued with an introduction to the works of several Indigenous authors, which were available on site.³ For the online Matinamagewin–Sharing course, a slot is reserved for participants to have time to peruse a compiled list of many resources available to use in their classrooms. Here are some of the suggestions:

- Research eminent Indigenous people in their different fields, and showcase them by displaying them around the school;
- Have available Indigenous language literature accessible to Indigenous students and parents through multilingual books from the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute (FNQLSDI);⁴
- Consider existing educational toolkits or guides, such as the Gabriel-Commanda Educational Kit produced by the Val-d’Or Native Friendship Centre;⁵
- Use the First Nations Education Council’s Parental and Community Involvement toolbox.⁶
- Screen TV series such as *Les Autochtones, tu connais?*⁷ to initiate discussion on the many aspects of Indigenous culture or short videos such as *Parole autochtone avec Mélissa Mollen-Dupuis*⁸ to broach topical issues.
- Draw on resources such the online magazine *Kayak in the Classroom*⁹ to talk about historical figures and why memorializing them is being called into question.

Cultural safety practices already adopted in schools are also covered during the course. This sharing makes it possible to spread proven instructive practices and inspiring projects and encourage building the spirit of a community of practice. Several examples are shown in Figure 2:

3 UQAT’s Continuing Education Service has recently published a list of recommended books, movies and podcasts in magazine format: AKI E KIKE TAMO8I . It can be downloaded at www.uqat.ca/formation-continue/autochtone

4 See <https://fnqlsdi.ca/multilingual-books>

5 See <http://en.caavd.ca/educationalkit.html>

6 See <https://cepn-fnec.ca/involved/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/toolbox-2018.pdf>

7 See www.tfo.org/serie/les-autochtones-tu-connaiss/002401605

8 See <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/espaces-autochtones/parole-autochtone-avec-melissa-mollen-dupuis>

9 See www.canadashistory.ca/education/kayak-in-the-classroom

Cultural Safety

Inspiring Examples From Your Schools

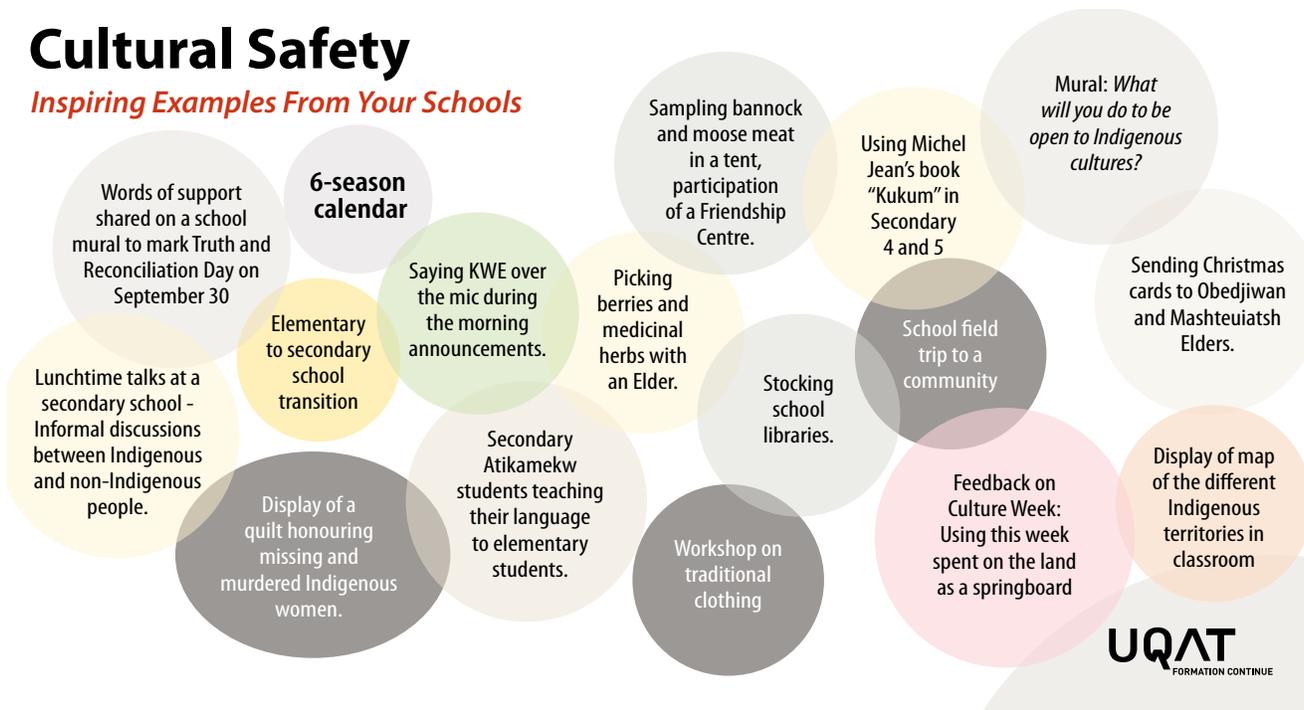


Figure 2. Examples of Cultural Safety Practices Compiled by UQAT Continuing Education

CONCLUSION

Matinamagewin—Sharing is an awareness training course that creates a guided space where all participants are invited to reflect on what they know about Indigenous realities as well as how to promote and incorporate Indigenous perspectives in their workplaces in the field of education.

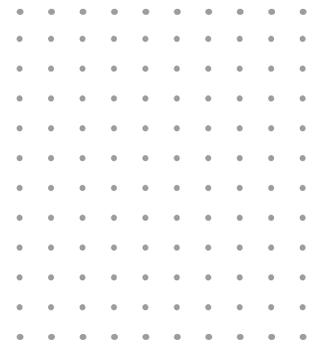
At the end of the course, participants leave feeling better informed, better equipped and with a greater understanding of what they need to change in their teaching practices and in their schools.

We are certain that this type of course is essential to support what is called for in the First Nations Education Council's Competency 15: "Value and promote Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, cultures and history" (CEPN/FNEC et al., 2020). Additionally, continued post-course support is imperative for teachers to be able to develop this competency as a group in incorporating, valuing and promoting Indigenous perspectives. We believe such support to be crucial for all to be able to continue to exchange and benefit from our reflections, inspiring practices and ideas and apply them in our respective lesson plans, classes and schools.

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Three Examples of Didactic Transposition in Bilingual Kali'na-French Classrooms in Awala-Yalimapo (French Guiana)



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INTRODUCTION

In French Guiana, five Indigenous languages (Kali'na, Parikwaki, Teko, Wayana, Wayãpi) have been employed over the past two decades in the creation of teaching resources. When these languages were finally able to gain currency in schools, they had to answer to a series of questions all pointing to the same issue:

If teaching in given a language predicates adapting oneself to its functioning and ways of being, of thinking and acting connected with it, how can pedagogy be adjusted to respect these rationales when the official curricula is founded on a single language–French, in this case—and on subject-specific knowledge expressed within the framework of a European model?

Indigenous teachers in French Guiana who have dedicated themselves to this thinking have turned it into a space of resilience, and an integral part of their professional identity, which we have encapsulated in the concept of *didactic transposition*. Non-Indigenous teachers, however, have greeted this way of teaching with some caution, and, accustomed to decades of unilingual education, a minority of school children's parents are still worried about splitting the time for teaching French into two.

We have chosen three examples of this approach aimed at instilling this cultural coherence at the heart of institutional learning as defined in directives issued by the Ministère de l'Éducation nationale (2020, 2021), which all public schools across mainland France and overseas are mandated to follow.

The first of the three examples falls under a disciplinary field called "Language in All its Dimensions" (in this case, oral language), the idea being to identify specifically the objectives of language related to space: placing oneself in relation to a place, situating an object in relation to another, for example. The second relates to "Numeral Systems," that is knowledge of numbers and how children learn them during the first few years of school (counting, comparing groups of objects, for example). The third covers the topic of "Introduction to Writing" in its graphomotor and semiological dimensions.

BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE POLICIES AND POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Indigenous students in French Guiana share several other similarities with their First Nations and Inuit counterparts in Québec, foremost among them being the burden of educational deficiencies borne by their parents and grandparents, who in their youth had been interned in “Indian homes”, France’s version of Canada’s Catholic residential schools (Ferrarini, 2022).

The schooling imposed on the Indigenous Peoples of French Guiana has been beset from its very beginning¹ by the deeply Jacobean (Launey, 2023) and linguicidal (Milin, 2022) character of French public education. The teaching of and in indigenous language(s) has only been allowed since 1998, tentatively at first, with a group of initial mother tongue educators up to a maximum of five hours out of the twenty-four-hour school week (Maurel, 2012). Then, starting in 2017, due to the assiduous work of the French Guiana parliamentary member Chantal Berthelot², bilingual classes with equal number of hours (12 hours of French and 12 hours of mother tongue) were established. Yet, despite this giant stride, Indigenous people are still unable to access the provisions set forth for the status of regional language³ in mainland France (e.g., Breton and Corsican) or in overseas departments (e.g., Creole) as a Bachelor option or specific examinations for primary school teacher.

THREE EXAMPLES OF DIDACTIC TRANSPOSITION

1. Expressing Space for Kali’na Preschool Pupils

The languages of the Carib family—of which the Kali’na *aulan* is part—make a distinction between static and dynamic predicates. In the example below, show how only one preposition is used in French, and two “postpositions” in Kali’na:

- ▶ Static: Awala *po* wa. (Je suis à Awala [I’m in Awala].)
- ▶ Dynamic: Awala *wa* wisa. . (Je vais à Awala [I’m going to Awala].)⁴

This linguistic characteristic demands that student be provided with learning situations that shake up somewhat the confines of subject areas stipulated in French public education. In fact, the institutional program assigns the work of spatial structuring of a 3- to 5-year-old pupil into one subject area which it calls “Exploring the World.” It appears nearly impossible for Kali’na-speaking pupils to build language skills related to spatial structuring if they are not provided with learning situations during which there is motion. The Kali’na teacher is consequently forced to dig in the field of physical education to enable their students to acquire and use vocabulary related to dynamic

location. In doing so, the teacher equally calls on another aspect of culture part of the Kali’na space: the ubiquity of the Amazon fauna, all verbs related to movement are built starting from the local animal locomotion: **opono wala**: literally “moving like a duck” (ducking) – **wayamɨ wala**: literally “moving like a turtle” (walking on all fours) – **katalu wala**: literally “moving like a sea turtle” (swimming the breaststroke) – **okoyu wala**: “moving like a snake” (slithering) – **pololu wala**: literally “moving like a toad” (jumping) – **meku wala**: literally “moving like a capuchin monkey” (squatting and then jumping with upraised arms).

2. Teaching Traditional Kali’na Numbers

Teaching the Kali’na numeral system (quinary and vigesimal) alongside French numerals (decimal) goes beyond the symbolic cultural openness. Understanding a number is knowing how to compare it with the others, evaluate it, transform it: in other words, expressing it in its composed and decomposed forms. From this angle, comparing how numbers are expressed in Kali’na and in French allows formalizing similarities (e.g., quatre-vingt or “four twenties” in French is expressed as 80) and differences (e.g., 900, which has no direct equivalent), and consequently building metalinguistic and metacultural skills, starting from two different world models, two ways of thinking it and expressing it.

Cardinal Number	Kali’na Equivalent	Translation
1-2-3-4	owɨin – oko – oluwa – okupaen	
5	ainatone	literally: <i>aina</i> (hand) and <i>atone</i> (on one side)
10	ainapatolo	literally: <i>aina</i> (hand) and <i>atone</i> (on two sides)
20	owɨin kali’na	literally: a man, i.e., the number of human fingers on hands and feet
80	okupaen kali’na	literally: 4 men (4 X 20), i.e., 4x the number of human fingers (hands and feet)
900	atone’pɨ poto owɨin kali’na itupo naka atone’pɨ atone’pɨ poto owɨin kali’na	literally: (15x20) + (15x20) + (15x20)

Table 1. Traditional Kali’na Numeral System

1 Attempts to school Native American children can be traced back to the early 18th century in Jesuit Kourou (Letter from Fr. Crossard (undated, circa 1718), Superior of the missions of the Society of Jesus on the Island of Cayenne to Fr. de la Neuville, Procurator of the Jesuit missions in America) and to the Tupi-Guarani on the Oyapock (Letter from Fr. Fauque, missionary for the Society of Jesus dated April 11, 1730 to Fr. Neuville of the same society, Procurator for the Jesuit missions in America).

2 Assemblée Nationale – 14th Legislative Session – 2015-2016 ordinary session – First Sitting of June 14 2016: Bilinguisme dans les écoles de Guyane [Bilingualism in French Guiana Schools].

3 Law No. 2021-641 of May 21, 2021, for the promotion and protection of regional languages, known as the “Molac” Law.

4 This language feature thus requires the Kali’na speakers know and use two lexemes for each spatial situation (e.g., on, under, front, behind, next).

Additionally, teaching of traditional numbers also calls into question the whole Kali'na community. Given the lengthy cardinal numbers and difficulties that they can pose when used for some activities (e.g., mental calculations), this system of counting is limited for the moment to the first four years of schooling. After that, mathematics is essentially taught in French. How can this limitation be squared with the resolve to Indigenize the school curriculum for Kali'na students? Similar to the Sikwani (Colombia) and the Shuar (Peru and Ecuador) who turned this into a core element of their language identity (Queixalós, 1986), the creation of a neo-numeral⁵ system had been contemplated, but this solution has not been met with consensus. Paradoxically, it is the traditional chiefs who are more favour of it, elected officials and other community activists less so.

3. Kali'na Graphic Identity and Learning to Write

Kali'na face and body paint convey a strong esthetical, social and symbolic significance. With cultural practices still playing a large part of everyday life, and especially during rituals related to death (vigils, end of mourning), we thought it would be fitting to link them with learning to write.

Linking pupils' home environment and the school setting through activities contribute in fact to continuity and is indeed an integral part of constructing meaning in this area of learning.

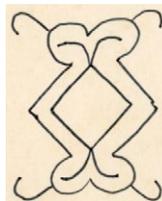


Figure 1. Kali'na men during an epekotono (end of the mourning period) ceremony

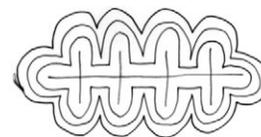
The traditional patterns used in lower school (children aged 3 to 6)⁶ are used to develop handwriting graphomotor skills and related lexical field (lines, dots, vertical, horizontal, slanted, waves, bridges, curls...).⁷ Once the graphomotor skills are acquired, the continuation of this learning falls under the field of semiology. From the early days of the colonization of the eastern Amazon region, Indigenous people instantly connected their graphic practices with European writing. To this day, in all Indigenous languages of Guiana, **writing and representing traditional patterns** are expressed with a single verb (**imelolɔ** in Kali'na). These traditional patterns are introduced as of the first year of CP (Grade 1, children aged 6 to 7) both for handwriting and symbolic reasons. This gives pupils the opportunity to recognize themselves in learning how to write and their graphic identity as a continuum:

“While models of children’s neurological functioning during learning are informative, they do not report on the context which is at the source. The school then organizes a workspace likely to accommodate the child learning not only the tracing of the letters, but also to take ownership of an historical, social and cultural object.” (Zerbato-Poudou, 2013, p. 5, free translation)

Two rationales underpin the choice of pattern/grapheme relation: either the name of the pattern is characteristic of the sound made by the letter being learned, or the shape of the pattern closely resembles the shape of the letter.⁸



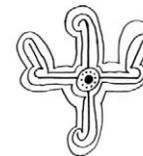
pi'pa meli (frog pattern), included in lessons for learning the p



tulutulu meli (wild orchid pattern), included in lessons for learning the u



kusali ekunali meli (deer knee), included in lessons for learning the w



palanpala enuli meli (butterfly eye), included in lessons for learning the i

Figure 2. Kali'na patterns/graphemes

5 Neo-numeral systems are the subject of a collective debate revolving around equipping languages with a number system that can compete against the dominant system (Spanish, Portuguese, and our case, French) and adapting to modern times. The guiding principles for this approach tend to gravitate toward the decimal system and maintaining (often partially) Indigenous cardinal numbers albeit in a shortened version. Some sort of creation (neologisms) appears inevitable.

6 In France, early childhood education is comprised of four levels for children aged 3 to 6: *toute petite section* (TPS), *petite section* (PS), *moyenne section* (MS) and *grande section* (GS), or Pre-K, Kindergarten and Grade 1.

7 See for example <https://langues-de-guyane.ins.ac-guyane.fr/Graphisme-ps-ms-gs-tirees-de-la-tradition-iconographique-kali-na.html>.

8 See <https://langues-de-guyane.ins.ac-guyane.fr/Parcours-d-apprentissage-de-la-lecture-ecriture-en-kali-na.html>.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Aiming to liberate ourselves from the simple cut-and-paste pedagogies that consist in translating learning content without considering student cultural identity, didactic transposition rests on a straightforward principle. Traditional knowledge, skills and being gain currency as teaching material and are discussed from a perspective of complementarity (similarities and differences) with the content of the French education program (in this article: the specific linguistic features of the Kali'na language, the traditional Kali'na numbering and Kali'na iconographic identity).

As representations are still too often belittled by Franco-Guianese education officials when developing teaching in/of Indigenous languages, schools that have embarked on this path intend to endorse evaluation protocols aimed at measuring the efficiencies.⁹

In addition to providing a wealth of data, these evaluations (first among these the role of metalinguistics and metacultural skills in education success), all concur in showing no drop in achievement in core subjects such as French and Mathematics.¹⁰

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⁹ “Plan—for experiments and structures for teaching regional and initial languages—a simple and robust administrative follow-up and evaluation tool developed in partnership with researchers (follow-up cohorts, outcomes of national evaluations), in order to gauge the quality of learning in **the local language and in French**.” (Recommendation 10 in the IGÉSR 2020-102 Report, see Inspection générale de l'éducation, du sport et de la recherche (2020), p.5, free translation).

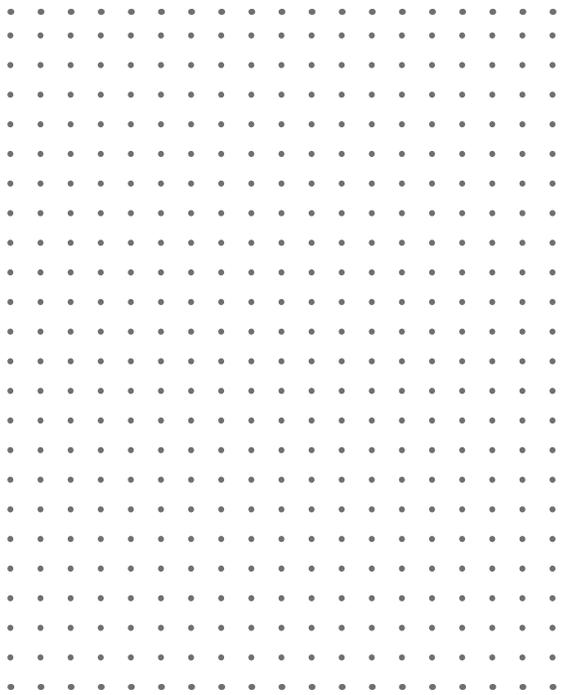
¹⁰ See pages 11 to 13 of the document *Éléments d'évaluation des classes bilingues à parité horaire 2022-2023*, available at <https://langues-de-guyane.ins.ac-guyane.fr/Elements-d-evaluation-des-classes-bilingues-a-parite-horaire-2022-2023.html>

FEEDBACK ON THE
5th CONVENTION ON PERSEVERANCE
AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
FOR FIRST PEOPLES



ASHTAM NTOTACINAN/COME AND LISTEN TO US, a live theatrical production by Université de Sherbrooke's Patricia-Anne Blanchet performed by four young Indigenous students from Cégep Garneau (Kananish Mckenzie, Hillary Nolin, India Neashish, William Bacon-Hervieux), told the story of what it means to be a young Indigenous person today, honouring justice for children, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

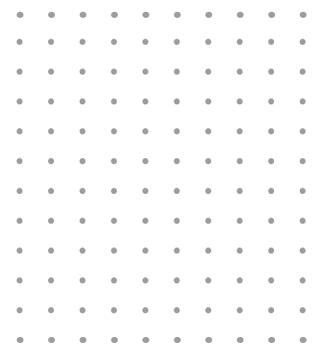


PART 2

Support Practices



Fostering Educational Success by Bolstering Empowerment and Cultural Identity



Catherine Savard, Education Advisor
Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

INTRODUCTION

The Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) has always viewed education as being a key sector for raising long-term living standards of urban Indigenous people (RCAAQ, 2016). Many studies have shown, furthermore, the importance of providing Indigenous students and learners with a culturally safe environment that respects their cultural identity, and further empowers them to succeed in their education (Ball, 2008; Blanchet Garneau & Pepin, 2012; Dufour, 2015; RCAAQ, 2020a).¹ The education paths of Indigenous learners are often disrupted by many school transitions riddled with challenges stemming from their socioeconomic circumstances. Indigenous people are also faced with intersecting systemic barriers (e.g., racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools and the effects of colonialist policies) unique to them that make their school reality markedly different compared to that of non-Indigenous learners or newcomers (RCAAQ, 2018, 2020a, 2022a).

Essential hubs in urban areas, the Native Friendship Centres complement schools in the Québec public education system by providing students, learners and their families with a continuum of tailored services to support them holistically, by considering their reality, needs and aspirations.

Given that the concept of education among Indigenous people extends well beyond classroom walls to encompass knowledge acquired throughout life both at home and in the community, these centres provide services mindful of the atypical educational paths and wide-ranging needs of Indigenous learners of all ages. In addition to supporting school perseverance and success, the people-centred services delivered are for this reason focused on strengthening cultural identity and bolstering empowerment of learners in all aspects of their lives.

¹ “Cultural safety is an approach to affirmation, transformation and reconciliation aimed at reducing the gaps and inequalities that exist between the Indigenous population and the rest of the Canadian and Québec population in healthcare and in other fields. Based on the foundational principle of social justice, it recognizes the legitimacy of the social and cultural differences of Indigenous people and provides a corrective response to the power imbalance between them and the dominant society” (Blanchet et al., 2019, free translation).

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Native Friendship Centres affiliated with the RCAAQ² adopted their first education strategy following a collective brainstorming exercise as part of the work developing the education component of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS).

From September 2020 to April 2021, the RCAAQ carried out an assessment of its strategy's implementation in the Friendship Centres to evaluate the efficacy and relevance of the services developed to ultimately increase the impact and quality of the services delivered to those who use the Centres. The RCAAQ grounded its entire process in knowledge produced by research (RCAAQ, 2020a; 2020b) to initiate discussions in the spirit of building on what we already know, research findings and current courses of action to move forward together and try to advance even further, as the Québec Native Friendship Centre Movement.³

Six provincial meetings were an opportunity for the Friendship Centres—each of which has a wealth of field expertise that should be leveraged more in the Movement—to exchange ideas on the implementation of the Education Strategy. Discussions during those meetings opened the door to administrators and actors from the Centres to learn about different approaches and practices and benefit from the trial and error of their counterparts. The Centres were also able to draw mutual inspiration by sharing best practices and by exploring some courses of action to tackle common issues.

Lastly, these meetings also provided the space necessary for exchange on the Movement's arising priorities in the area of educational success. The development of the new Education Strategy 2022-2027 by the Québec Native Friendship Centre Movement is the result of these group discussions stemming from the evaluation exercise.

NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE MOVEMENT EDUCATION STRATEGY 2022-2027

The goal of the Movement's new Education Strategy is to build up the development of integrated services to foster educational success among urban Indigenous people, from elementary and secondary schools to general adult education, up to and including college and university. Through this strategy the Friendship Centres and the RCAAQ will be able to jointly structure their actions and evaluate their impact in the forthcoming years (RCAAQ, 2022b).

The exercise of co-constructing this strategy enabled the RCAAQ and the Friendship Centres to develop as a Movement a shared vision of learning and educational success:

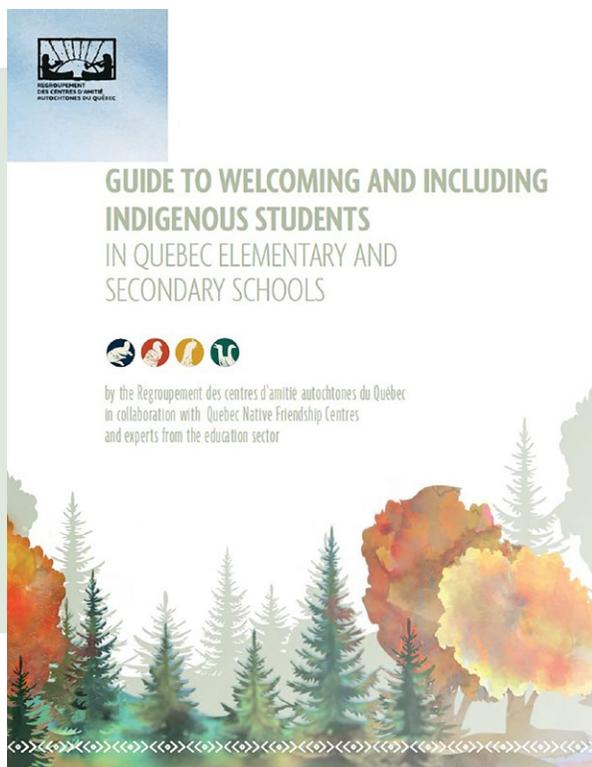
“Members of urban Indigenous communities are culturally strong and equipped to thrive according to their potential and aspirations. Friendship Centres holistically support Indigenous individuals and families in their learning journey to achieve a holistic, harmonious and balanced well-being. Valuing Indigenous cultures and languages is an integral part of lifelong learning initiatives. The Native Friendship Centre Movement forms a united community that invests in the continuous improvement of its practices, actively collaborates with its partners and fights against socio-economic barriers to the educational success of Indigenous people in cities.”

– Vision Statement, Native Friendship Centre Movement Education Strategy 2022-2027 (RCAAQ, 2022b, p.2)

The Education Strategy is divided into five areas of focus: Collaboration and Partnerships; Supporting Learners and their Families; Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge and Cultures; Social Transformation; and Continuous Improvement of Practices and Services. Specific targets and actions are connected to each of the areas of focus, and this facilitates approaching education beyond the walls of the classroom, capturing languages, cultures and history of First Peoples, who still tend to fall off the radar in cities. These five areas of focus are all interconnected and cannot be disentangled if we are to be effectively engaged in fostering the well-being of Indigenous learners, a well-being that is inextricably tied to their educational and academic success.

2 Hereinafter referred to as Friendship Centres or Centres. Those affiliated with the RCAAQ include: Chibougamau Eenu Friendship Centre, Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque, Native Montréal, Centre d'amitié autochtone de Sept-Îles, Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière, Maniwaki Native Friendship Centre, Senneterre Native Friendship Centre, Centre d'amitié autochtone de Trois-Rivières, and the Centre multi-services MAMUK.

3 Hereinafter referred to as the Movement, the Québec Native Friendship Centre Movement is comprised of the RCAAQ, its affiliated Friendship Centres and the Société immobilière du RCAAQ (SIRCAAQ).



GUIDE TO WELCOMING AND INCLUDING INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN QUÉBEC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Produced by the RCAAQ in partnership with the Native Friendship Centres and education experts, this guide can be used as a reference tool for welcoming and including Indigenous students and promoting their educational success in elementary and secondary schools across Québec. It provides relevant information on key issues associated with the educational success of Indigenous students, practical courses of action, examples of inspiring practices, tools and resources to advance further. Above all, it is a valuable source of fertile ideas to encourage cooperation between Friendship Centres and schools, school service centres and school boards.

Examples of Services Related to Lifelong Learning Provided by Native Friendship Centres

- ▶ Tutoring and homework help (elementary and secondary level)
- ▶ Support for students in post-secondary studies or in adult education
- ▶ Support for school transitions
- ▶ Guidance for parents in the area of schooling
- ▶ Cultural programs (crafts, language courses)
- ▶ Activities covering the transmission of land-based traditional knowledge
- ▶ Activities that foster closer ties between Peoples

Supporting Québec Indigenous Elementary and Secondary School Students

The RCAAQ has developed many tools to assist Friendship Centres in fulfilling their mission of supporting urban Indigenous learners in persevering and succeeding in school. Given that families and Friendships Centres view schools as crucial allies in closing the inequality gap, promoting harmonious coexistence in an urban setting and guiding Indigenous learners to reach their full potential, the RCAAQ has produced a guide for all actors in the Québec education sector (RCAAQ, 2022a). Available in English and French, the guide can be downloaded at the RCAAQ's website at www.rcaaq.info.

Living Communities That Meet the Needs of Post-secondary Indigenous Students

To tackle certain pressing needs of urban Indigenous students, the Société immobilière du Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (SIRCAAQ) is developing many housing projects and is currently building three living communities specifically designed for Indigenous students in Sept-Îles, Trois-Rivières and Québec City.

The services delivered in these new communities align neatly with the objectives of the Movement's new Education Strategy, specifically the one related to fostering the well-being of the post-secondary learners and their families in all aspects of their lives. Simply put, Indigenous students will have access to holistic support rooted in their cultures, based on their realities, needs and aspirations, not only for them but also for their families.

For example, each living community will have a designated Indigenous liaison officer to provide 360° student support. Liaison officers will also be responsible for engaging local partners, cultural and community events, acting as a bridge between Indigenous students and public services and guide them toward these services when needed. Given that the nearby Friendship Centres will be its main service providers, they will be also responsible for developing new services for these students as needs arise.

CONCLUSION AND MOVING FORWARD

By jointly developing the Education Strategy, the RCAAQ and the Friendship Centres have already seen a positive impact within the Movement, primarily by promoting exchanges between the Centres. The sharing of on-the-ground expertise has propelled creativity in planning education services, improved practices and striking new partnerships.

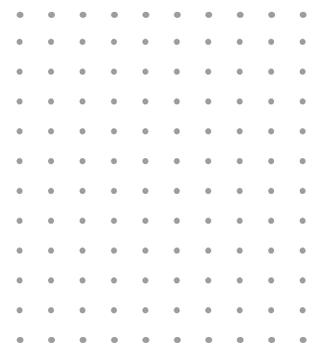
We must continue to be attentive to the needs of urban Indigenous learners of all ages so that we can keep on innovating our approaches, especially by steadily integrating and promoting culture across all services that impact educational success and by encouraging our allies in the Québec education system to do the same.

As a Movement we are comprised of organizations assiduously supporting Indigenous students to succeed and thrive in urban areas. We are convinced that it is done by working more collaboratively with partners and mutually inspiring one another that we can broaden the reach of our actions and attain our common goal: to bolster the retention and educational success of Indigenous learners in Québec.

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Six Dimensions to Better Support First Nations and Inuit Learners' Perseverance In a Mining Industry Vocational Program



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BACKGROUND AND RELEVANCE

Over the past decades, First Nations and Inuit (FNI) people have faced an economic, social and political context that is at once complex and evolving, particularly in job prospects in the mining sector. The labour market is currently booming, and its growth is unlocking all kinds of training and occupations opportunities, particularly for FNI people living near mining sites. There are many perks in working a trade job in this sector, including being able to work close to community and family, one of the reasons many decide to enrol in mining training programs.

This decision, however, is all too often accompanied by a radical shift in culture, language, social status and employment, moving away from an Indigenous community to a vocational training centre (VTC) in an unfamiliar and daunting urban setting. This situation is fraught with difficulties related to retention and demands a better understanding of the whys and wherefores of student perseverance in this specific context.

¹ See MEQ (2022); CDRHPNQ (2019); RCAAQ (2020); Deschênes (2022).

This in a nutshell is the main objective of the research study conducted by the Institut national des mines du Québec (INMQ)² briefly summarized in the present article. Six broad strategic dimensions of support for VTC instructors and staff are then outlined, including details on intercultural and holistic elements that should be considered in educational relationships in vocational training.

SIX BROAD STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS

1 Gain Awareness, Get Informed, Improve Knowledge and Understand Learners

The study findings suggest that instructors, many of whom are not very familiar with the cultural, social and linguistic realities and characteristics of FNI learners, are gradually taking steps to become more aware and choose teaching methods that are more effective depending on contextual elements. For those seeking to feel less ill-equipped in their teaching practices or to connect with learners there is an abundance of information available that can be found in multiple resources. For those instructors starting out to search and learn, it is best that they begin by learning about the Nation situated near their VTC, and about its territory and contexts (e.g., educational, social, economic). There are considerable differences from Nation to Nation and focusing on just one community may be a good option, so the net is not cast too wide and led to discouragement. This basic information can help instructors broaden their knowledge of FNI history, experience and characteristics, especially current cultural and linguistic realities. In other words, being more informed means better understanding FNI learners enrolled in a VTC. Additionally, given that their cultures and languages differ from the mainstream majority, their realities and history distinct, and that these learners who come from an environment often unfamiliar to the instructor with different visions and representations of education and learning, it is crucial to draw individualized profiles based on their distinctive characteristics. Knowing about and understanding learners, can in fact, help target interventions and identify educational practices that work and foster perseverance.

2 Engaging with Learners

Connecting with FNI learners means stepping out and reaching out to better understand them. To do this, the findings show the importance of adopting a mindset of cultural sensitivity and humility, being open-minded to their reality, including a good dose of self-awareness. A relationship is raised on quality interactions; in other words, developing a genuine connection on a human level beyond learning or a strictly educational relationship. The encounter itself becomes an experience where ties are forged and on which everything else can be built, and the development of other possible retention strategies be considered. The historical and contextual relations between FNI people and Quebeckers are such that a relationship of trust must first be established to arrive at a level of mutual esteem, followed by a desire to learn about the Other and their culture. Thus, establishing a fundamentally human relationship opens the door to creating learning environments where learners can feel welcomed and respected, where there is a holistic approach to life-long education, and where the dynamic relationship is neither short-lived nor instrumental for the duration of the training program, but rather formed over a solid base for the long term. Equally influenced by intercultural dynamics, it also entails taking into consideration the unique cultures of the FNI. To be positive and trusted, this learning from one another must rest on patience, interest in, respect and tolerance of differences.

2 The INMQ began this research project in 2022 as part of on-going partnership with Dr. Émilie Deschênes on occupational and social integration of FNI workers (see Deschênes, 2022), and as a follow-up on previous research on cultural safety of these workers (see INMQ, 2017).

3 FNI learners often tend to enroll in nearby VTCs located on their territory.

3 Supporting Learners on their Lifelong Paths

The lifelong paths of learners, of which education and employment plans and aspirations are an integral part, are pockmarked with many events impacting personal, physical, psychological, social, cultural economic and spiritual resources. The events themselves are considered a source of learning throughout life. Learners who are supported can take stock of their learning and continue to be committed to their plans. In a VTC, learners often need to start everything from scratch, navigating through an environment where cultural ties and reference points become harder to find. In such a context, the meaning given to their efforts may become increasingly detached from the original goal behind their education aspirations, and this can have an impact on their perseverance. People who participated in the study stressed supporting learners along their lifelong path by emphasizing the importance of:

- ▶ Defining together with learners what can have an impact on their perseverance;
- ▶ Finding strategies to counter these impacts;
- ▶ Supporting learners in their ongoing search to find meaning for their experiences, their choice of trade or relationships with others;
- ▶ Putting into perspective and anticipating possible eventualities together to reduce stress, based on lived experiences;
- ▶ Going over their current situation, progress and pursuing their goals;
- ▶ Developing their self-esteem by rechanneling negative thoughts to empowering ones and encouraging perseverance and success.

4 Adapting Educational Practices

This fourth dimension covers foundations and strategies for adapting educational practices, suggested by the instructors and learners we met. Thanks to the flexibility instructors have in exercising their profession—a useful asset when it comes to implementing successful educational strategies and practices related to student retention—the following are feasible:

- ▶ Learner characteristics (e.g., personal and cultural, views, needs, objectives);
- ▶ Instructor personal and professional characteristics (e.g., pedagogical and didactic knowledge, general and teaching experiences, representation of trades and skills to be developed, education values and beliefs, representations of teaching and learning);
- ▶ Education context and characteristics of the environment (e.g., number of FNI learners in the group, place and type of training or program, available human and material resources, support);
- ▶ Research and documented practices, known to be effective with FNI learners;
- ▶ FNI learning principles.

Some promising examples of education practices noted are in activity planning, choice of pedagogical strategies and delivery modes (content organization, methods, teaching material, teaching and educational resources), learning and skills evaluations, and classroom management. These include:

- ▶ Recognizing FNI expertise and using authentic content that is faithful to authoritative FNI sources;
- ▶ Ensuring from the outset to strike a balance in learners' cognitive, metacognitive, emotional and spiritual development;
- ▶ Timely planning for a range of program-long support measures for easing into a new cultural and linguistic environment;
- ▶ Paying closer attention to cultural relevance in all content, pedagogical and didactic materials;
- ▶ Including cultural knowledge and perspectives in instruction.

5 Guide Learners in Their Training

The study's findings bear out the argument that close support of learners can influence how they view their skills and increase their commitment. Among other things, this support provides the tools that can flip a change in education plan into a vector for motivation by tailoring services based on individual needs while strengthening knowledge beyond the academic, such as relational skills. This is based on an assessment of acquired learning, given that providing tailored support means evaluating learner needs first. It also consists in incorporating into the process the FNI vision of learning as a foundational value, which implies pushing the boundaries of school-based education. In that respect, instructors need to be cognizant of the impact of their stance and culture on that of their learners, by considering that for the latter, they are perhaps the only non-FNI model. Support that works does not simply rest on learner personal and education profile, but it also encompasses many other profiles: family (familial responsibilities, parental support), community (origins, needing to go back and forth) or vocational. Also, continuous checkups allow spotting changes in the learner's environment and undertaking any needed adjustments together. Lastly, support must rest on jointly established goals and expectations that are high yet realistic. Thus, an instructor demonstrates believing in a learner's abilities—even when these may be exhibited differently—in a way that is not always readily visible depending on their own cultural perspective.

6 Making Learners Culturally Safe

The study's findings also show that cultural safety translates into greater numbers of FNI learners persevering in school. For example, when FNI learners can identify with their vocational centre and their learning (cultural adaptation, promotion and inclusion of FNI perspectives in education strategy) they are more likely to stay on. Cultural safety is founded on a proactive and engaged effort on the part of the instructor and all VTC staff members in developing mindsets conducive to cultural awareness, sensitivity, humility and competency. The resulting relationships are balanced and anchored in respect and mutual "satisfaction" with the interactions. For example, learners are always included in any decisions that concern them. Successful strategies highlighted in the study cover different areas that must all be considered.

TEACHING

Recognizing and including the value of learner visions, representations and perspectives.

Using culturally relevant, FNI-adapted teaching and evaluation practices and teaching resources developed in partnership with FNI members.

PERSONAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Protecting and strengthening cultural identity and the sense of belonging in a classroom, trade, or vocational centre.

EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL

Contributing to developing a sense of educational and job ability, in a culturally different environment and in a trade often not very familiar to the learner or his/her communities.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Leveraging opportunities to create a bond in interacting with learners, their families and communities.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC

Incorporating cultural reference points, culturally and historically genuine content.

Organizing workshops, events and activities that promote cultures, and involving FNI people in organizing them.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Developing training programs that respect, recognize and incorporate FNI historical, cultural, political and socioeconomic determinants.

Creating familiar, warm and welcoming physical spaces that allow expressing emotions and spirituality.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the different situations, the ups and downs, hits and misses, along with the experiences of learners, players and on-the-ground partners helped to shed light on a reality that transcends all others for learners: cognitive and emotional regulation overload.

An analysis of the different situations, the ups and downs, hits and misses, along with the experiences of learners, players and on-the-ground partners helped to shed light on a reality that transcends all others for learners: cognitive and emotional regulation overload. In fact, information overload coming from every direction prevents learners from wanting to use the tools and adopt strategies needed for success, is harmful to their integration and becomes the reason for some to quit, drop out or fail. A surfeit of emotional demands, prompted chiefly by a perception of feeling different, has a direct impact on their physical and mental wellbeing, on perseverance, and even on their personal and cultural development. Learners are then on a “vigilant watch”, that is, always checking their own behaviours and attitudes to make sure that they are culturally adequate, thus triggering tensions, continual stress, and collateral effects detrimental to their perseverance, and ultimately their personal and cultural development.

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PRESENT & PERSEVERING

We're back to school!

Perseverance, success, support, collaboration, cohesion —just a few essential words to help you build the foundation for your work and contributions throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

The Institut Tshakapesh wishes all Innu students, parents and school staff the joy of learning and teaching in the months ahead.

Tshima mishta-minupaniek^u ume kau tshe tshitshipaniek^u e tshishkutamakauiek^u!
WELCOME BACK!



TATAU kassinu etashiak^u tshetshi minupaniht tshitauassiminuat aishkat! | ALL HERE for the future of our children!



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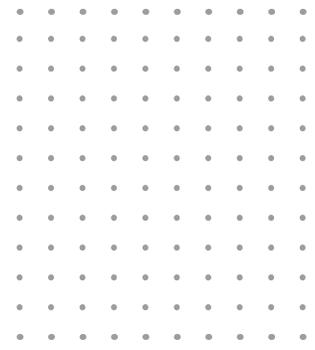


INSTITUT Tshakapesh

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Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Practices for Innu Students in French Courses from Elementary Cycle 3 Through Secondary School



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INTRODUCTION

Proposed to enhance Québec's *Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers*, Competency 15 calls on education to "Value and promote Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, cultures and history" (CEPN/FNEC et al., 2020). With this in mind and with the support of the Institut Tshakapesh, a community of professional practice (CPP) was created during the 2021-2022 academic year, bringing together teaching professionals in Côte-Nord Innu schools working in Elementary Cycle 3 through secondary education.

The goal of the CPP was and is to jointly develop and implement teaching practices in French courses that are more responsive to the cultural and linguistic realities of students from Innu communities

Initial discussions revolved around the types of writing activities that can engage students and the kinds of reading material teachers should concentrate on in the classroom, building on *Tracer un chemin*, an Indigenous anthology offering a diverse selection of literary works crafted by Indigenous authors (Dezutter et al., 2021). After briefly introducing how the CPP works, we will share different examples of classroom activities including insights from the educators on the impact these activities had on the students.

A COMMUNITY OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN ACTION

The call to get involved first came from Vanessa Ratté, Coordinator of Education Services at the Institut Tshakapesh. Ten individuals from the Kanatamat (Matimekush-Lac John), Teueikan (Ekuanitshit), Uauitshitun (Nutashkuan) and Manikanetish (Uashat mak Mani-utenam) schools promptly signed on board. The initial group included two elementary generalist teachers, six secondary school French teachers,

one instructor for the Ethics and Religious Culture course at the secondary level and one person providing group supervision for students in an individualized education plan (IEP). All members brought with them many years of teaching experience in an Indigenous context. Professor Olivier Dezutter, a former secondary school French teacher and an expert in French language instruction, served as lead of the CPP.

Over the course of the 2021-2022 academic year the CCP held seven remote group meetings each lasting around ninety minutes. A two-day in-person workshop also took place. During these meetings, CPP members shared with their counterparts the distinctive characteristics of their own teaching contexts and discussed common challenges. With regard to French skills, discussions revolved around how to consider student vocabulary, the best methods for demonstrating the ability to understand and interpret literary works, encouraging reading, and evaluation methods for written work. Participants shared their course preparation paperwork, pedagogical material, lists of books or youth literature series used in the classrooms and some examples of student work.

Supported by the Institut Tshakapesh, Professor Dezutter visited both Kanatamat and Uauitshitun schools to immerse himself for two weeks in each. During these trips, he helped test some of the activities created by the CPP with different groups of students and develop new ones as well. The section below presents four successful examples of these activities.

EXAMPLES OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Integrating Indigenous History and Culture in Teaching Poetry

Designed for a Secondary 5 class, the aim of this activity was to help students delve into Indigenous history and culture to acquire some of the basic rules of verse and develop their creative poetry writing skills. The activity was divided into four parts:

- ▶ Introduction to some of the basic rules of writing verse and appropriate poetry terms (e.g., verse, stanza, rhyme);
- ▶ Interactive reading of the lyrics to the song “Enfant de la terre”¹ by Samian;
- ▶ Analyzing it for vocabulary for words related to First Peoples’ history and culture: land, dispossession, roots, ways of life, etc.;
- ▶ Writing a short poem on one of the following themes: land dispossession, quest for justice, suffering, happiness or favourite season, following a set outline (e.g., number of stanzas, rhyme scheme).

The first part of the activity that covered the more theoretical aspects of writing poetry was perceived as too abstract by the students, who were reluctant to chime in at this stage. Samian’s lyrics however, piqued their interest and increased their participation during the writing part. Compared to earlier writing assignments, the teacher noted that words came much more readily to the students thanks to the work they had done on Samian’s source text, and they used a richer vocabulary when it came to Indigenous history and culture. The fact they could relate to their history and experience became a remarkable lever to get them excited about this work.

Acquiring New Vocabulary and Spelling Skills

In this activity the teacher has a daily routine with his 5th graders where he chooses 20 new words for a spelling dictation from a spelling list developed by the Ministère de l’Éducation for teachers to use in elementary schools. Students then prepare for an in-class dictation at home. During the dictation, the teacher is careful to pronounce those French words that that may be problematic due to the fact they sound markedly different than the Innu language. As Junker et al. point out, there are many French phonemes, e.g., *r*, nasal vowels (*on*, *in*, *un*, *an*), *u*, the semi-consonant [*ʃ*] like the *u* in “nuit”, that do not have an equivalent in Innu and need to be taught separately (Junker et al., 2016, p.11).

The word dictation is paired with a check for comprehension, with the teacher providing examples of usage when needed by including the word in a sentence containing local references. The correctly spelled words are then written on the board, and students correct their own copies of the words if necessary. Following the correction, easy strategies to remember the new words and how they are spelled are shared with the class.

At the end of the activity, each student gets to choose whether to do a search for synonyms or antonyms, or adjectives that could be added to the word list, or conjugate verbs, write sentences, or translate some of the words into Innu.

The teacher has been using this method for several years now in various educational contexts in Indigenous communities and has observed that students generally tend to engage well in this activity.

The focus is very much on encouraging independent learning, with students self-correcting their work. The students also love the fact that they get to choose what to do for the last part of the activity.

1 Dezutter et al., 2021, pp. 32-34.

Writing a Collaborative Short Etiological Tale

The diverse goals of this activity involving a group of Secondary 3 students included learning about the features of an etiological tale, honing writing skills and building confidence in their writing skills, learning about the components of the actantial model, and sparking a keen interest in local history and emblems of the Nations (also covered in the social universe curriculum). The etiological tale, also known as the “pourquoi story,” is a literary genre that is particularly suited to Indigenous culture, as each People and Nation has preserved a vibrant heritage of traditional storytelling.

Students were first asked to recall the different etiological tales they had heard or read in school or in some other setting. Afterwards, they learned about a new tale by reading “Le géant et les mouches noires”.² They were then asked to write together as group an etiological tale explaining how the eagle became the emblem of the Mingan village. A 150- to 200-word assignment, the story had to include a setting, a conflict, two trials and a resolution. A checklist adapted from a handbook was passed to the students to help them review the elements to be included before starting to write their tale. To prepare their story the students worked through their ideas in a brainstorming where they agreed on the major elements of the narrative schema and the story outline. They then got down to writing, revising and proofing the text, paying close attention to respecting syntax and linguistic processes to ensure they had not omitted anything.

The teacher found her students participated enthusiastically in the project and were very keen to contribute during the brainstorming. The choice of subject for the tale was, in her view, an important catalyst for this. Students said they were very proud of the final results. Creating this tale helped them to learn more about some aspects of their local history and especially about the current relations between the different Nations that visit their territory, much like the 2013 movie *Maïna* adapted from a novel by Dominique Demers.

This activity also leaves extra space for adding new dimensions to it, such as the students practicing reading their tale aloud or memorizing it to recite it to elementary school children.

Reading a Short Literary Work

Carried out in a Secondary 4 class, the goals of this activity were reading skills development, interpreting techniques and the ability to recognize some of the features of a short story and join the dots between the story content and the students’ own realities. The text that the students worked on was a short story called “Pendant ce temps, dans la ville avoisinante,” written by Wendat author Louis-Karl Picard Sioui.³ It tells the story of a young child and explores the many prejudices that “Whites”⁴ hold against First Peoples, an experience that many Indigenous students can easily relate to.

The story was first read aloud to the class by the teacher. Then it was read once again, this time paragraph by paragraph, making sure that the students understood the main parts of the plot, pausing at key passages to elicit student reactions or encourage them to share their interpretation of what the different characters felt or wanted to, for example.

The teacher noted that students had been very responsive in discovering literature that dealt with the realities of their community. He is confident that having more First Peoples authors included in his course would only encourage some students to take a greater interest in literature.

CONCLUSION

The experiences in the different classrooms all point to one essential argument: student motivation and engagement in writing and reading tasks improve when they recognize themselves and connect with their own realities. These hinge, however, on unpacking how French is being taught, by being more attentive to the specific linguistic and cultural context of Innu students.

Most members of the community of professional practice (CPP) have expressed interest in repeating this kind of project, believing that it can be an effective tool for their professional development. The CPP was therefore relaunched at the start of the 2022-2023 academic year and the group was expanded to include teachers from schools in Pessamit, Unamen Shipu and Pakua Shipi. We look forward to sharing on the web, at end of this project, a database of activities such as the ones discussed in this article.

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Transitions to Post-Secondary Education for Indigenous Students: Comparing Views of Students and Education Professionals



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BACKGROUND

In 2016, only 25% of Indigenous people in Canada held post-secondary diplomas (Statistique Canada, 2020), compared to 52% of the general population (RCAAQ, 2020). This gap in post-secondary graduation rates is clearly related to Indigenous student education paths, which are seen as more complex due to the number of transitions experienced (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021). Defined as “a change in status in a sphere of life or a fork in the road taken” (Doray et al., 2009, p.17, free translation), transitions refer to the point in time when students begin a new program of study or switch educational institutions; moments considered as pivotal in their paths. Research by Rodriguez & Mallinckrodt (2021) suggests that the first 6 to 8 weeks on campus can determine whether or not students will be able to adapt and persevere or decide to drop out. However, the concept of transition as defined by the Québec education system is not quite what

Indigenous people consider as standard, as the latter experience not only many more transitions because of frequent interruptions in school attendance, but also because of geographic movement that results in transitions between urban and community-based school settings (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021). Given the greater number of challenges faced during these pivotal times, there are support measures that can be put in place to help students with their transitions (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021). The findings highlighted in this article are drawn from a collaborative research project on documenting the welcome and support measures implemented in post-secondary institutions in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean in assisting Indigenous students with culturally safe transitions. The present article will outline the main challenges experienced by Indigenous students and education professionals supporting them and include possible solutions to assist with them.

METHODOLOGY

This collaborative research is based on a qualitative methodology using a knowledge co-creation approach (Desgagné, 1998). Two different sets of data were collected in Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean post-secondary institutions (Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Cégep de Jonquière, Cégep de Chicoutimi, Cégep de Saint-Félicien and Collège d'Alma). The first involved the participation of 29 Indigenous students enrolled in post-secondary studies. Five sharing circles based on a semi-structured interview method took place during February and March 2022. Topics covered included: 1) lived experiences at school; 2) the nature of the support received; 3) factors that either helped or hindered school transitions and 4) support needs during these transitions. A second set of data was gathered from 25 education professionals from the same institutions during two half-days on June 10 and 16, 2022. The goals of these two focus groups were to determine: 1) existing welcome and support measures related to transitions in these post-secondary institutions; 2) the major challenges in supporting Indigenous students; and 3) the needs associated with the challenges of the support. A data sheet of characteristics of both students and educational professionals was also created. The data were analyzed using content analysis comprised of: 1) full transcription of the interviews with the students and the professionals; 2) sorting and categorizing the data using QSR NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software.

RESULTS

In the section below, we will discuss six challenges that were identified in supporting Indigenous students in their transitions to post-secondary studies. These are introduced in descending order based on how often they were mentioned by the participants. These will be followed by seven courses of action to address these challenges and move forward on the path to self-determination.

Challenges

The first challenge relates to institutional ability to provide **tailored support** to Indigenous students in meeting their specific needs during transitions. Among others, this includes poor knowledge on the part of school staff about Indigenous realities—both personal and cultural—making it difficult to identify those students struggling. Also, working in silos can mean little collaboration between services, impeding the flow of the necessary information for adequate, responsive support. For their part, students mentioned that these obstacles are such that they did not think of using the available resources, either because school staff had little knowledge of them, or they feared being judged and stigmatized by education professionals.

The second challenge involves the difficulties encountered by Indigenous students in developing **a sense of belonging** in their institution and—in some cases—to the culture of this learning environment. On this topic, students said they found it hard to find their place in the new institution, feeling isolated because of it. This is often exacerbated by having to study in an urban setting far from family and community. Although

professionals recognize this reality, creating a sense of belonging and providing a place of culturally safe spaces remains a tall order.

The third challenge revolves around students' ability to develop **a sense of trust** toward the staff and the educational institution. For the professionals, building this trust can be hobbled by the lack of organizational flexibility (preferring setting appointments instead of less staid, friendlier and off-the-cuff get-togethers) which is less compatible with Indigenous ways of doing things. Consequently, it is a high bar to clear to reach Indigenous students who, for their part, said that approaches used by non-Indigenous people tend to be ill-suited to their culture or needs.

The fourth challenge relates to the ability of institutions and their staff to put **actions in place promoting Indigenous culture**. Some obstacles may make it difficult for educational professionals to attain this objective. These include, for example, the lack of staff training on Indigenous cultures and/or lack of access to Indigenous resources that could impart this knowledge. This state of things has the effect of producing a veritable cultural shock for Indigenous students who find themselves in a minority in post-secondary institutions—given that their reality is barely known or recognized (e.g., in course content)—and confronted with racism and social exclusion.

The fifth challenge lies in ensuring the **sustainability of resources** needed to create services adapted to Indigenous students. The professionals see this sustainability as threatened due to uncertainty swirling around budget renewals and staff turnovers. In the case of the students, this challenge is rather related to funding their studies, accessing some of the programs and even finding affordable housing.

Lastly, the sixth challenge relates to the institutional ability to see that students have acquired the necessary **learning to further their post-secondary education** and the skills development that goes with it. In fact, upgrading these skills can constitute significant hurdles when entering a post-secondary institution, especially when prior instruction has taken place in an Indigenous school. In situations such as this, it is not easy for professionals to know about the paths and skills of the students upon their arrival. This issue parallels the struggles Indigenous students mentioned in the area of language, study methods and using technologies.

Courses of Action

To mitigate the effects of these challenges and better support Indigenous students during their transitions, seven possible courses of action were raised: 1) *invest in hiring Indigenous resources and on partnering with communities* to build trust with Indigenous students so that support practices are better adapted to their reality and needs; 2) *focus on staff training and raising awareness of Indigenous culture among non-Indigenous students in institutions* to give everyone a common base of knowledge and diminish stereotypes and prejudice; 3) *foster intra- and inter-institutional cooperation* in pooling resources, knowledge and expertise; 4) *adapt support approaches* to reach the Indigenous student population more effectively; 5) *make Indigenous culture and history more visible*, especially in

Indigenous courses and programs as well as in the public sphere; 6) *make post-secondary studies more accessible* by adding a reserved place in programs or by adapting the admission process; and 7) *offer more activities that target skills development* in upgrading previous learning.

CONCLUSION AND THE PATH FORWARD

This research project is part of a growing trend in the number of Indigenous students pursuing their post-secondary studies and the recognition of the challenges they face in a non-Indigenous education system, specifically in an urban environment. Six major challenges encountered during transitions by Indigenous students and by professionals who are there to support them were identified as well as seven possible courses of action to address them. These are issues that align for the most part with findings of other Québec studies showing that despite a willingness on the part of educational actors and measures in place, the lack of ministerial directives poses a structural barrier to respecting and recognizing Indigenous knowledge (Mareschal & Denault, 2020; Ratel et al., 2021; Robert-Careau, 2019). The unequal colonialist power structures that persist must be reversed in favour of accountability, which is part of the education mission of these institutions—understanding how to be vectors of social change by being models of relationships with Indigenous people and thus train future professionals and citizens respectful of the Other (Mareschal & Denault, 2020). Long overdue in the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region, such change is needed to continue improving the initiatives in place and thus boost the graduation rates of post-secondary Indigenous students. The fact that Indigenous communities can count on highly skilled members is moreover foundational to Indigenous self-determination. This allows them to provide their members with a living community that is respectful and reflective of their needs and aspirations while ensuring that everyone can thrive. These qualified members are then essential pillars in the development of Indigenous communities in Québec (CCNSA, 2017).

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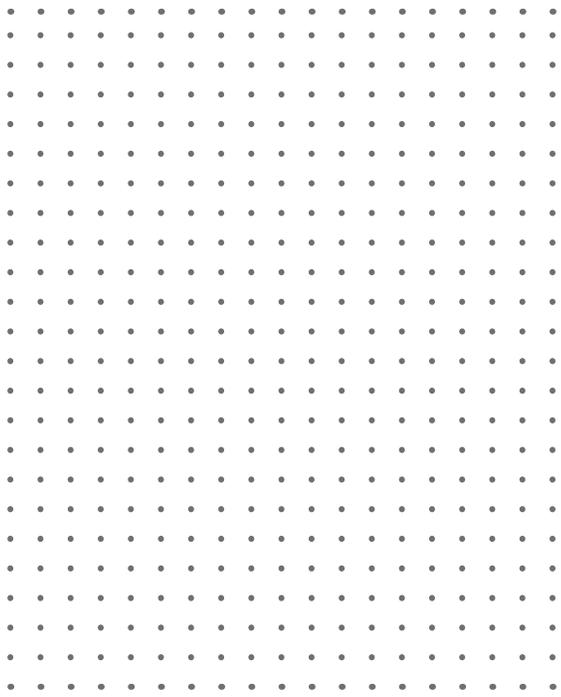
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FEEDBACK ON THE 5th CONVENTION ON PERSEVERANCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR FIRST PEOPLES



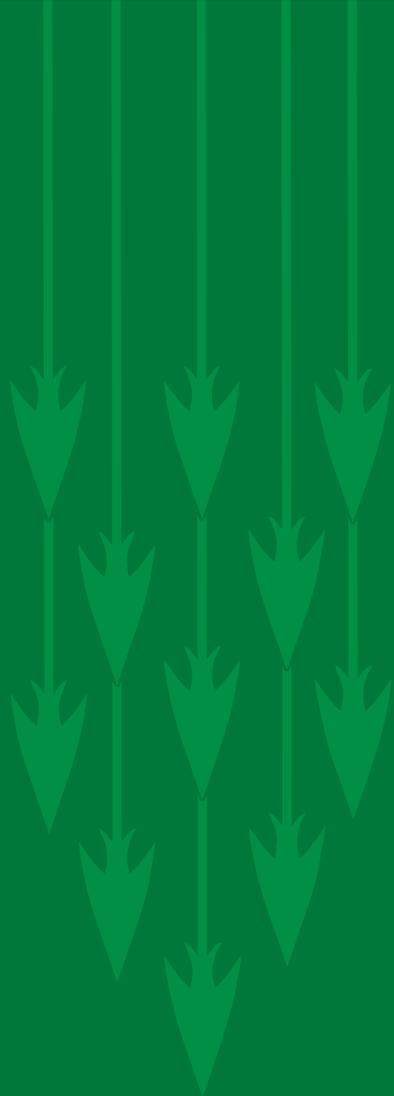
Charlène Jérôme, Jessie Lepage, Kananish Mckenzie, Jovan Ottawa-Quitich and Sylvia Petiquay, five First Peoples youth attended presentations and conferences and shared their impressions and their experiences with the audience at the closing of the Convention, together with Senator Michèle Audette, senior adviser for reconciliation and Indigenous education at Université Laval.

Photograph: Kim Kowtaluk

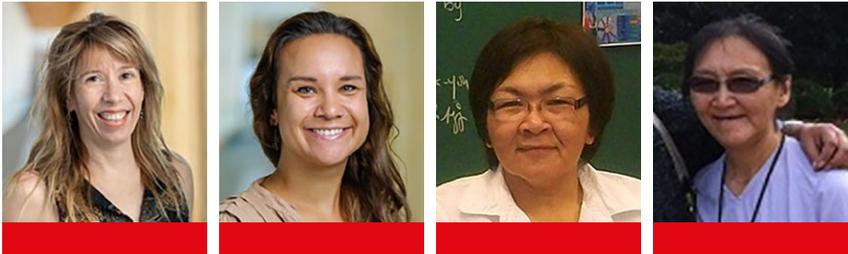
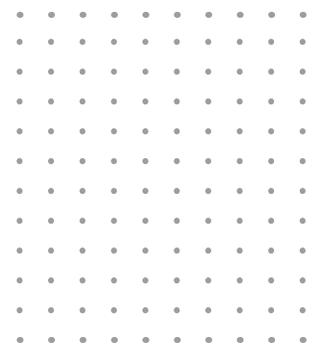


PART 3

**Collaborative
Practices**



The Establishment of Educational Institutions in Nunavik by Ivujivik and Puvirnitug Inuit: Collaborative Ownership



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BACKGROUND

Starting from the 1950s, the Inuit way of life in Nunavik was drastically changed with the arrival of educational institutions on their land, harbingers of an assimilation policy (Lévesque et al., 2016). These changes impacted the transgenerational identity and culture of Inuit society. A historiographical study was conducted in partnership with the Inuit communities of Ivujivik and Puvirnitug to gain an insight into the context of education development in these two communities and their partnership with Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) (Paul, 2020). The aim of the present article is to outline the origins, methods, and core areas of co-management by the Ivujivik-Puvirnitug-UQAT Group. We will show how the trajectory of the Ivujivimmiut and Puvirnitummiut falls under a movement of Inuit resistance to foreign institutions, and how their actions materialized in taking local ownership of education so that any development done is consistent with their own reality.

ORIGINS OF THE IVUJIVIK AND PUVIRNITUQ WHOLE SCHOOL PROJECT

The two communities featured in this article are located on the west shore of Nunavik. Ivujivik faces the Hudson Strait and has around 500 inhabitants, while Puvirnitug, near the mouth of the river of the same name, has on average 2,000 inhabitants (Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation, 2022).

Inuit children traditionally learned from their parents by imitating the words and actions of collective knowledge passed on orally (Nunavik Educational Task Force, 1992). Starting around 1850, there were a few instances of missionaries making their way to the north to teach, but it was only starting between 1950 and 1960 that Inuit children were forced to start attending school and their families made to permanently settle near these schools.

The Nunavik Inuit experienced their first colonial trauma with the opening of federal day schools starting in 1958 in Puvirnitug and two years later in Ivujivik. In these schools, northern education was modeled after curriculum from the south, with no consideration for Inuit culture or first languages. The 1960s

thus ushered in not only the dawn of Inuit political resistance to an imposed system, but also a movement of economic solidarity: the Inuit way of life was reorganized around the creation of the Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ) movement. While the Inuit began to sell soapstone sculptures through these cooperatives to tackle the economic fallout caused by hasty settlement, they also saw in this movement a means to manage all aspects of their lives: community, social, cultural, political and economic (Qumaq, 2010).

In 1970, a second colonial trauma occurred when the province of Québec took the reins of education in Nunavik, a change that nevertheless presented some fresh opportunities: opening new schools and introducing the teaching of the Inuktitut language in elementary school. In fact, regulations governing Inuktitut in schools—still enforced today—grant it full rights from preschool to second grade. As of Grade 3, English and French are taught as second languages half of the time so that by Grade 4, one of the two becomes the language of instruction, depending on parental choice, for the remainder of the child’s school years. Leaders, parents, and other members of the Ivujivik and Puvirnituk communities took charge of their schools through new services available through the Québec education system such as educational committees, as well as unions and teacher training provided by the Commission scolaire du Nouveau-Québec, in which many of them ended up joining (Paul, 2020).

At the same time, the Québec Liberal government began its flagship hydroelectric development project, which eventually led to the negotiation of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA). Together with the cooperatives and the Inuit Tungavivat Nunavini (ITN) political group, the Ivujivimmiut and Puvirnitummiut rejected the agreement as well as the institutions it created—including a centralized school board for all of Nunavik—as this conflicted with the already established ideals of locally managing schools. Instead, they obtained a delegation of powers together with the Kativik School Board, and from that moment on, they were able to develop their own educational services committee: IPUIT.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

In 1984, looking for a French-speaking university with expertise in education development in remote regions with low population density, IPUIT invited representatives from Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) to Puvirnituk to discuss a collaborative partnership. As of this first meeting, a long process of establishing a working method for the partnership began, a method that is still relevant today (Pellerin et al., 2020). From the outset, IPUIT members stipulated their condition that this partnership take the form of working in “co-management” where community education leaders were as equally involved as the university. This was to ensure respecting the Inuit partners’ resolve for a “whole school project” developed around community needs. The UQAT professors agreed and based their action on the social constructivist notion of knowledge, which created *ab ovo* an environment conducive to intercultural dialogue (Amittu et al., 1988). The conversation structure between the two partners

on decision-making revolved around four core areas: 1) Inuit teacher training; 2) curriculum development (Maheux, 2018); 3) links between the school and the community; and 4) collaborative research. Work was at first carried out through monthly remote meetings, bi-annual in person meetings and community-based courses. Through subsequent exchanges between the new partners, foundational principles for the collaborative relationship were laid out.

The recognition of equal status, the interdependence of the two teams of partners and the right to self-determination of the Peoples guided actions by anchoring them in the landmark initiative these communities had launched in taking local ownership of education. This method of working in partnership formed the basis that the Ivujivik-Puvirnituk-UQAT co-management group has been providing since 1984.

FOUR CORE AREAS OF CO-MANAGEMENT

The Ivujivik-Puvirnituk-UQAT Group’s current activities continue to be steeped in the co-management approach developed in partnership in the second half of the 20th century. In line with this approach and following exchanges steered by themes established within the Group and needs at the time, organizational projects were realized and continue to be developed to this day.

1. Inuit Teacher Training

The Ivujivik-Puvirnituk-UQAT Group has developed a part-time, community-based teacher training program for elementary Inuit teachers. The courses method of teaching is to be jointly taught by University professors (experts in academic knowledge) alongside Inuit co-teachers (experts in the Inuktitut language and knowledge of Inuit culture). The Teacher Training programs were developed and revised in partnership with the Group. Today, four certificate programs are offered, allowing the acquisition of up to 120 credits in preschool and elementary education in Inuktitut.

2. Curriculum Development

Developing an Inuktitut curriculum is an essential commitment of the Group. Inuit partners expressed from the start the need to have an education program that would include a learning progression of Inuktitut instruction. This work was undertaken in 1986 with the drafting of the first Inuktitut preschool education curriculum. The program for Grades 1 to 3 was developed between 1991 and 1996.

As of 2020, curriculum development weeks have been held in both communities to reflect on and update what has already been done. During these workshops, all preschool and elementary teachers take part in the further development of this tool.

3. Links between School and Community

Firstly, activities with the community are jointly organized around gatherings such as student graduations, which allows staging a communal celebration open to friends and family. This type of event provides a fitting opportunity to reaffirm the enduring resolve for developing school projects, strengthening intercommunity partnerships with the university, and instilling a sense of pride in graduating teachers succeeding in their program of study. Secondly, relationships are strengthened through the public dissemination of the activities carried out in co-management mode. For example, a book and teaching materials on the history of the development of education is currently underway. Developing these tools requested by Inuit partners can certainly help maintain the relationship of trust forged by the two teams of partners.

4. Collaborative Research

Jointly developed research projects bring both deeper insight and new paths to meet the challenges faced by northern schools. Given that knowledge co-construction is woven deep into the Group's practices, the involvement of all partners—Inuit and university—is tangible at every phase of these projects, from identifying the issue to disseminating the results. It is in this perspective that funded research projects are carried out. Inuit and university partners are committed to a scientific approach to research from the first steps to the end by initiating projects, contributing to the studies reflections, and by disseminating the knowledge produced, for example through the presentation of conference papers.

CONCLUSION

The ideal approach to school that the Inuit have adopted from the very start of the Ivujivik and Puvirnitq Whole School Project has been to integrate and develop Inuit culture in education and at the same time prepare Inuit children to live in a western culture (Puvirnitq & Ivujivik, 1995). As research concepts and theories in an Indigenous context continue to evolve, they are folded into the Ivujivik-Puvirnitq-UQAT Group's considerations, enabling it to move forward and meet challenges that arise. Thus, achieving their objectives first set in resistance to foreign ownership of Inuit education continues to motivate the co-management work of the Group, and it appears crucial that this work continues to be rooted in an approach of knowledge co-construction as originally defined.

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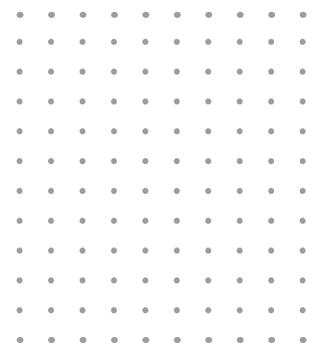
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An Innovative Partnership Approach Between Indigenous Communities and Vocational Training Centres



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VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN AN INDIGENOUS CONTEXT: SUCCESSFUL CONDITIONS

Since 2006, the Conseil scolaire des Premières Nations en éducation aux adultes/First Nations Adult Education School Council Québec (CSPNEA/FNAESC),¹ an organization recognized by Québec's Ministère de l'Éducation, has been providing

leadership in adult general education across Indigenous communities without treaty agreements across Québec. Starting in 2012, several Regional Adult Education Centres (RAECs) have been established in Indigenous communities in an effort to facilitate the adult education sector to represent the communities served.

¹ See www.conseilscolaire-schoolcouncil.com

Today, there are ten RAECs administering adult general education programs in five Québec regions: Montréal (Kahnawà:ke, Kanasatake, Montréal); Mauricie (Wemotaci); Abitibi-Témiscamingue (Lac-Simon, Pikogan, Val d'Or), Gaspé (Listuguj, Gesgapegiag) and the Côte-Nord (Pessamit). In recent years, the RAECs and CSPNEA/FNAESC have been exploring different options to expand access to vocational training (VT) for Indigenous community members, including training programs relocated to the communities. The CSPNEA/FNAESC has identified a number of conditions to successfully implement these VT programs and promote Indigenous student success:

- ▶ **Budgetary measures:** Albeit not well-known and under-utilized, the use of ministerial budgetary measures earmarked for promoting education in an Indigenous context (Gouvernement du Québec, 2022) is a top condition for success. In fact, there are three distinct measures (15061, 15062 and 15063) available for allocating funding to projects that create awareness of Indigenous realities, Indigenous student success, and Indigenous education in the network.
- ▶ **Practice-focused training:** Classroom courses that lean heavily on theory are not a particularly good fit for Indigenous students. As a result, practice-focused training, whether on the shop floor or during intensive internships, is more likely to bolster student success.
- ▶ **Values-based training:** In addition to developing the required skills in the different programs of study, it is essential that Indigenous language, history and culture be embedded in curricula.
- ▶ **Local human resources:** Hiring local human resources, such as teaching staff, guidance counsellors, psychosocial support professionals to oversee and deliver the community-centred VT programs can only foster the success of projects.

These successful conditions laid out by CSPNEA/FNAESC have served as an inspiration for the research and development project outlined below.

PROMOTING VT IN AN INDIGENOUS CONTEXT PROJECT

While there is scant Québec data available on VT among the Indigenous population, international scholarship shows that VT can be a proactive way to address the challenges of skills development among Indigenous people (Bandias et al., 2011; Cameron et al., 2017; Joncas et al., 2022). Additionally, consideration of Indigenous realities in education has generated positive outcomes in Indigenous student perseverance and success (CAPRES, 2018). Yet, some Canadian studies on Indigenous people in VT (Hodgkins, 2013; Taylor, 2006) reveal rifts related to both governance and partnerships between educational institutions, Indigenous communities and industry, marring, for example, long-term development in the communities

involved. Indeed, Hodgkins (2013) found that VT partnerships are often negotiated around contested areas of interest, resulting in asymmetric power relations between the different partners, particularly when the training is delivered by a private enterprise acting as an employer.

The goal of the Promoting Indigenous Vocational Training in an Indigenous Context project, funded by the Ministère de l'Économie et de l'Innovation (Joncas, Gagné and Bourdon, 2022-2025), is to primarily document and provide a model of the partnerships between educational organizations during the implementation of VT projects in Indigenous communities.

Using semi-structured interviews with actors in partner school service centres (SSCs) and school board (SBs)—including recipient Regional Adult Education Centres (RAECs)—sets of data were collected on the various phases involved in creating a partnership, partners and students, characteristics of the programs relocated in the community and types of effect these programs have. These data are being analyzed will be used in developing training programs intended not just for current partners, but also for other SSCs and SBs wishing to come on board with the RAECs. This initiative seeks to promote the delivery of VT in Indigenous communities, thus improving access to workforce training and skills development as well as community empowerment and social and economic development. As an example, RAEC stakeholders said that delocalizing VT eliminates the need for students to travel, making it easier to access local daycare services and thus boosting enrolment in training programs. They noted too that access to local pedagogical and psychosocial resources, a more efficient match of training and cultural events, and proximity to local employers can also lead to optimized and more practical on-the-job training. Based on these data, these factors appear to foster Indigenous student perseverance and success in vocational programs.

PATHS AND VIEWS OF STUDENTS IN VT: VALUES, HISTORY AND CULTURAL SAFETY PROJECT

The research and development project is supplemented by a second study conducted by the project's lead investigator as part of her Master's thesis. The general objective of this study is to determine the impacts that initiatives to relocate VT to Indigenous communities have on student paths. Research has shown how education has a long history of being used as a tool to assimilate Indigenous people and the subsequent harmful intergenerational traumas endured by those who were subjected to it (Bourdaleix-Manin & Loiselle, 2011; Lepage, 2002). Nevertheless, Indigenous people in Canada do continue to value education (CVR/TRC, 2015). VT is at top of the list for the highest level of educational attainment by this population (Statistique Canada, 2017). Among other things, VT enables Indigenous students to acquire skills in settings that better reflect their traditional ways of learning (Maheux et al., 2020).

Yet despite vocational training representing a great graduation potential for these students (Joncas et al., 2022), very few studies (Cameron et al., 2017) have focused on their educational paths in the vocational sector. This study project thus seeks to answer the following research question: What effect does VT have on the life courses of Indigenous students?

The life course of a person is composed of intersecting events connected to multiple spheres—education, work, family—which the individual moves through over time (Picard et al., 2020). Mannigham et al.'s Systemic Model (2011), which “attempts to encompass all aspects of the history of Indigenous people in Québec” (p.12, free translation) and considers the realities (values, community, family and teacher) influencing Indigenous students, appears to be a particularly apt framework for this study. This framework allows to document the effects of vocational training programs relocated into Indigenous communities and gain a better understanding of the life courses of these students.

Using a phenomenological approach, qualitative research is being carried out concurrently with broader research to arrive at a raw definition of the experience as felt and described by Indigenous students themselves. This approach trains its lens on the relationship the participants have with what constitutes their experiences (Meyor, 2005), and more specifically from the perspective of their VT experience, on how this experience influences their life courses. Out of regard for Indigenous people and respect for the guiding principles of research involving Indigenous people (Herman, 2018; Kovach, 2021), a decolonizing approach was also employed, to summon self-reflection and open mind to restoring Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, beliefs and values. Abiding by these principles, we can certainly play our part in putting an end to belittling, ignoring and discriminating against their knowledge (Tremblay, 2022).

Data are currently being collected from diverse cohorts of Indigenous students both in French-speaking and English-speaking sectors and from four Nations and communities: the Innu community of Pessamit, the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation, the Kanien'Kehà:ka Nation from Kahnawà:ke and the Nation Anishnabe from Lac-Simon. Out of respect for the oral tradition of Indigenous people, semi-structured interviews inspired by the sharing circle were chosen. Sharing circles are spaces where facts, opinions and answers can be expressed without interruption or opposition (Lathoud, 2016). Data collection will be followed by an analysis, which will serve to gain insight into partnerships created between Indigenous communities and VT centres and the impact of these partnerships on students. Some of the expected benefits include both the emergence of factors associated with VT that influence the life courses of these students but also how important it is for them to feel culturally safe in their VT program.

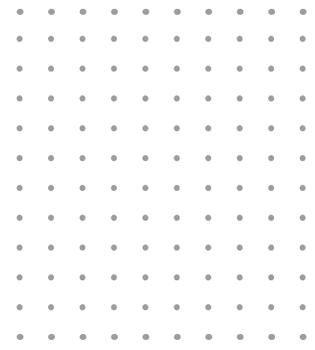
CONCLUSION

The outcomes of these studies will help advance knowledge in innovative partnerships between educational bodies, Regional Adult Education Centres and Indigenous communities. These partnerships appear particularly promising not only when offering vocational training programs that meet the needs of Indigenous students and communities, but also for all education players coming on board and working closely in these contexts.

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Indigenous Knowledge and Education Partnership: Findings and Courses of Action to Improve School Education in Indigenous Contexts



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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1972 policy statement *Indian Control of Indian Education* by the National Indian Brotherhood (today the Assembly of First Nations or AFN), several commissions and policy statements have advocated for Indigenous self-determination in matters related to education. Similar to the AFN, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ONU/UN, 2007) (which enshrines the rights of Indigenous people to develop and take control of their own educational networks and institutions), the *Action Plan on Racism and Discrimination* (APNQL/AFNLQ, 2020) and the recent *2022-2027 Government Action Plan for the Social and Cultural Wellness of the First Nations and Inuit* (SAA, 2022) all emphasize the importance for members of Indigenous communities to adapt education programs and approaches to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

These policy statements and calls for action resonate strongly with Indigenous communities and organizations around the globe, who are rolling out a variety of innovative educational initiatives aimed at modifying pedagogical approaches and content in schools across Indigenous communities. It has become abundantly clear that there is a need to promote and share these initiatives among Indigenous people with the goal of developing many newer educational programs and forging alliances between Peoples. It is against this backdrop that the Indigenous Knowledge and Education Partnership (IKEP)—a project bringing together some 40 Indigenous experts and academic researchers from Canada, Mexico and Chile—was created in 2021. All IKEP members share a commitment to mapping out methods and approaches to decolonizing and Indigenous education. In practical terms, this means that

participating nations can have a space to share their specific educational and school contexts and spotlight the wider impact of colonialist policies in education, including the effects of extractivism, cultural assimilation and systemic racism on accessing, applying and transmitting Indigenous knowledge. This short article outlines the objectives and activities of the IKEP project and sheds light on several findings and recommendations proposed by Indigenous experts during two international gatherings held in Québec and Chile in 2022.¹

THE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT: DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The chief goal of the Indigenous Knowledge and Education Partnership (IKEP) is to develop an international alliance bringing together researchers and members of Indigenous organizations working to promote, produce, share and use Indigenous knowledge in the school curricula and pedagogical approaches in educational institutions in Indigenous communities, specifically in Canada and Latin America, with three key objectives:

- ▶ Create a network of researchers and Indigenous organizations working in the field of Indigenous education in Canada, Chile and Mexico (Networking).
- ▶ Catalog, develop and assess how decolonization practices and Indigenous knowledge and pedagogical practices are promoted in partner schools in Indigenous communities (R&D).
- ▶ Disseminate in different Indigenous languages tools, programs and pedagogical approaches developed by and for partner Indigenous communities (Knowledge dissemination).

In all, seven Indigenous Nations are participating in the IKEP project: 1) Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok; 2) Nunavik Inuit; 3) Anishinaabe of Abitibi-Témiscamingue; 4) Mapuche of Araucanía; 5) Maya of Yucatán; 6) Purépecha of Michoacán; and 7) Nahua of Veracruz. (See Figure 1) The general objective of the project is designed to address a) identity affirmation and culture and language revitalization in many Indigenous nations; b) calls to action by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which underscore the need for developing Indigenous education programs that mobilize Indigenous knowledge and pedagogical approaches with an eye to student perseverance and identity affirmation; (c) needs identified by Indigenous communities to develop new educational approaches and tools adapted to their reality; (d) Indigenous Peoples' approaches to self-determination, specifically in education and in the transmission of cultural knowledge.

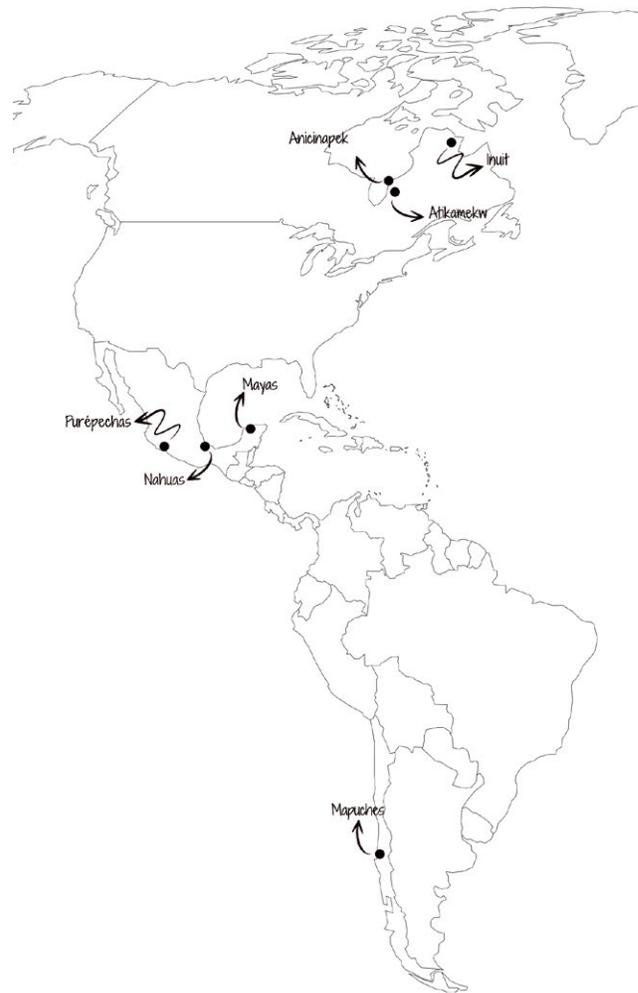


Figure 1. Map of IKEP Participating Nations

In 2022, IKEP held two international gatherings. The first, in a hybrid format, took place from June 15-17 at Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (Val-d'Or, Québec) and the second was in person from October 24-28 on Mapuche land in Monkul Lof Mapu (Araucanía, Chile). Bringing together Indigenous experts, teachers and students, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics in the fields of Indigenous education and knowledge transmission, these events provided attendees with an opportunity to connect and share educational initiatives for decolonizing and Indigenizing school curricula underway in different communities. These events were also useful for singling out common issues and challenges in school education and transmission of Indigenous knowledge in different cultural contexts. The section below will discuss some of these challenges, courses of action and recommendations to improve education practices and curricula by and for members of Indigenous communities.

¹ More information on IKEP's activities is available on its website (<https://educpsea.ca/en>). The project was made possible thanks to funding provided by the Conseil de Recherches en Sciences Humaines du Canada/Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (CRSH/SSHRC)'s Partnership Development Grant 2021-2024. Two more gatherings are planned for September 2023 in Nitaskinan (Wemotaci, Québec) and in February 2024 in Yucatán (Mexico).



Figure 2. Some IKEP members in Monkul Lof Mapu (Chile), October 2022. Photograph: Kévin Papatie

COMMON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our two gatherings brought to the fore major gaps in formal education systems in Chile, Mexico and Canada. Seen through the eyes of Indigenous nations in these three countries, teaching content and methods developed by colonial governments do not consider Indigenous worldviews, languages, values or traditional practices. Instead, targeted public education policies for Indigenous people are primarily focused on cultural assimilation and justifying land dispossession. Members of Indigenous communities consider that compulsory public education has resulted in serious social and cultural consequences.

Today, the tangible effects of these education policies are manifested in the loss of Indigenous languages, stigmatized cultural identity and a rejection of time-honoured ways of transmitting knowledge in schools. Yet despite these historical headwinds, there are increasingly more teachers, students, and community leaders in the Americas cognizant of the need to reverse course by reclaiming their own traditional methods of acquiring and passing knowledge on to younger generations. From their perspective, it has become critical to work towards bolstering Indigenous identity among the younger generations and move beyond the role of mere educators so families and communities can be included in building other models of society.

As one of the Mayan students from Universidad de Oriente (Yucatán, Mexico) said during our June 2022 gathering:

“We came to the realization [in our discussions during the gathering] that different Indigenous nations have one problem in common: Indigenous languages and people are relegated to second place. We don’t need to go university or school to learn how to solve this problem. Our own communities, families and societies have the responsibility to safeguard our Indigenous languages. But first we need to begin with ourselves, but partnerships such as IKEP are needed here. We’ve got everything in our villages—we don’t need to wait for someone to come tell us that our culture is important [...] We need to work alongside members of our communities to raise awareness and show them we don’t need to wait for a great big event to wear our traditional clothes. Our regional regalia represents who we are and gives us our identity as a people, and we need to promote this among younger generations”

(Magana Canul et al., 2022, free translation)

Families, teachers and community leaders committed to building relevant and independent education in Indigenous territories are thus faced with a daunting task. Teachers need to be creative in incorporating their communities' knowledge and practices into school programs. While they may enjoy a certain leeway, they are not paid for the extra hours nor the expenses that it takes to do this. Despite an emerging discourse on intercultural education (in Latin America) and Indigenizing curricula (in Canada), governments have not been supportive of Indigenous educators teaching their language and their cultures in schools. Any work done is instead contingent on personal determination and convictions. In addition to having to fulfil the requirements set by official curricula, teachers devote a good chunk of their time maintaining ties with their communities and planning extracurricular activities. In light of these common findings, IKEP's Indigenous stakeholders issued eight key recommendations to improve school education for the youth in their communities:

- ▶ Provide Indigenous teachers with more time to work together and in close partnership with members of the communities to develop appropriate pedagogical material. Today this is essentially work done during uncompensated overtime. Because of a lack of time most teachers are unable to develop content adapted for their communities.
 - ▶ Promote education in the community instruction, the traditional place for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. In the government's approach, education is restricted to knowledge transmitted only in the classroom.
 - ▶ Partner with teachers from other Indigenous contexts or nations in drafting proposals for gaining educational autonomy by Indigenous regions or nations. The challenge here lies in co-constructing a system developed by and for each Indigenous nation and not simply settling for government-regulated curricula.
 - ▶ Forge stronger ties not only between teachers, but also between teachers and Indigenous families. As long as there is separation of school and family, education built on racism and colonialism will continue to prevail.
 - ▶ Establish alternative learning evaluation criteria more aligned with Indigenous cultures and languages. As it stands, the Indigenous standards, values and knowledge that teachers incorporate in their courses need to be converted into official criteria in terms of objectives, duration and specific products. In other words, learning is measured by standardized assessments. In contrast to this institutional scenario, in an Indigenous approach, education is planned for community life, in harmony with nature.
 - ▶ Reduce discontinuities in Indigenous contexts between education at school and education at home: content selection, fixed timetables, learning patterns, cultural meaning and education goal. The common misconception of Indigenous cultural knowledge not contributing much to education in schools woefully persists.
- ▶ Create culturally relevant educational material. Official instructional materials are lacking in quality and in many cases outdated, and only partially reflect Indigenous perspectives and realities. Indigenous history, language and land-based knowledge are too often absent from these instructional materials and curricula.
 - ▶ Train and decolonize non-Indigenous teachers who work in Indigenous or intercultural schools. Most of them are barely informed that in Indigenous contexts, there are different structures for comprehension than the ones they learned during their teacher training. As an example, in the specialist understanding of some teachers, water is reduced to H₂O, while in an Indigenous approach, water is also life, part of who we are and in constant motion.

CONCLUSION

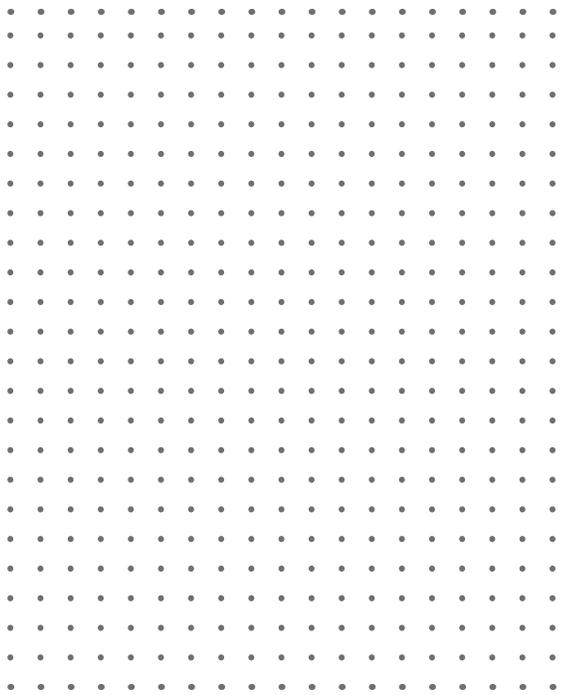
It is important to note that despite the varied cultural, geographical and policy contexts of the different Indigenous nations who participated in IKEP's activities, there is a concordance in the challenges posed by education and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. In the view of some of the Indigenous teachers and students involved in our knowledge mobilization activities, there is an undisputed lack of human and material resources for the transmission of Indigenous languages and knowledge. Education professionals in Indigenous contexts are required to work with public education programs that allow very little room for Indigenous content and pedagogical approaches, and whenever there is leeway, it is rife with cultural stereotypes and images of Indigenous cultures stuck in the past. Nevertheless, some Indigenous teachers—especially those involved in IKEP—are developing educational content and activities themselves that promote Indigenous knowledge, work that today is unpaid and undervalued by the public education system. The recommendations made by Indigenous practitioners and students who took part in our mobilization activities are meant not only to advance educational and school policies and Indigenous rights at national and international levels, but also to enrich practices in local and regional schools, communities, and families. The IKEP project is one example of many alliances fostering dialog and solidarity between Peoples. Our gatherings themselves generate new ideas and energize community leaders dedicated to promoting and transmitting their knowledge. This promotion of Indigenous approaches and knowledge also helps better train future education professionals and consequently provide services for and by First Peoples that are truly adapted to their needs and realities. As Sofia Rojas, a student from Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural in Mexico put it so eloquently:

“It was very important to have these gatherings where we were able share what we know and learn what’s being done in other parts of the Americas. It’s an exchange of knowledge— I was able to see that members of the Partnership are striving to conduct work for ensure that Indigenous students can learn more about their culture and traditions and can once again value their cultural practices and history. Teachers aren’t the only ones working towards promoting cultural practices, though. We too, as students through our connections and the groundwork we’re doing, we’re putting into practice what we’ve learned in our schools, so that we can join forces and support our communities. I agree in saying that the loss of Indigenous languages is a problem we all share, but it’s also very comforting to know that the work to strengthen and promote these languages continues everywhere, as we saw in the work presented by Indigenous women of Canada, Chile and Yucatán.”

(Magana Canul et al., 2022, free translation)

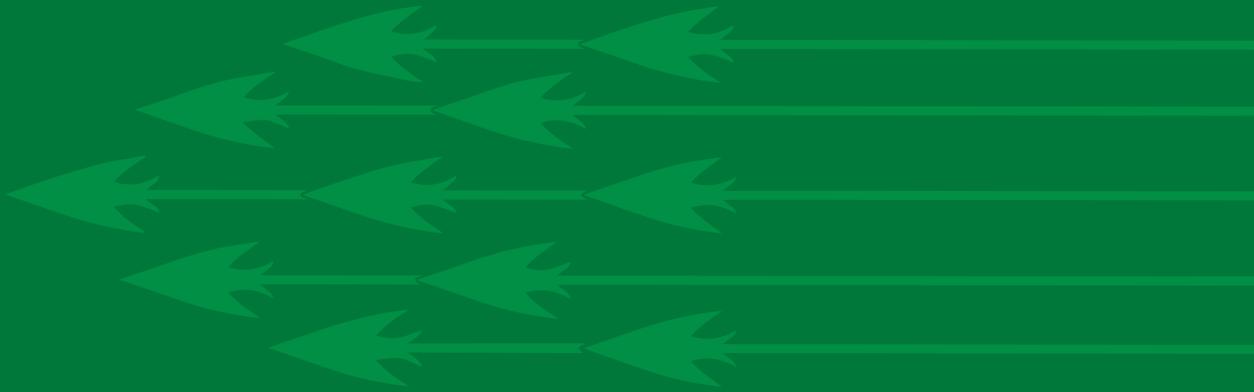
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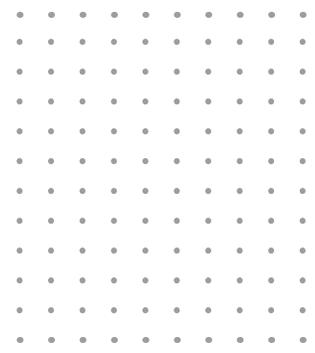


PART 4

Cultural Safety Practices



Transforming Leadership Practices in the Decolonization of Schools: A Vision in Four Dimensions



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INTRODUCTION

Defined as the process of dismantling colonialist ideologies that prioritize the supremacy of Western ideas and approaches, decolonizing education is vast and ambitious project, and one that is much needed (Battiste, 2013). On the one hand, it demands breaking up structures that perpetuate the status quo and fighting the dynamics of unequal power. On the other, it promotes and revitalizes First Nations and Inuit (FNI) knowledge and approaches, at the same time purging prejudices that have been passed down since colonial times (Battiste, 2013; Wilson, 2018).

The calls for action by commissions of public inquiry (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Viens Commission, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) emphasize specifically the importance of decolonizing schools, not only for fostering success among First Nations and Inuit learners, but also to rectify historical facts. The concept of decolonizing schools has gained traction and is considered central to righting historical, social and cultural imbalances, and creating awareness of and including FNI cultures. However, while decolonization is fast making strides in other Canadian provinces (e.g., Saskatchewan and British Columbia), and in other countries (e.g., New Zealand), it is lagging in Québec.

If schools, through their choice of pedagogical models or knowledge transmitted, play a part in perpetuating colonialist traditions, I would argue that its role today is, on the contrary, to contribute to decolonization—through education. Yet how does one concretely achieve this, when the objectives of decolonization are not as clear-cut or well defined: Do they cover, for example, knowledge, curricula, ongoing teacher professional development, pedagogy, or evaluation? School principals, faced with these new needs that necessitate a change of culture within the school itself, play a major role through the exercise of different practices, leading the school team in its reflections and implementing initiatives to decolonize the school. A cultural institution and a good place to start or continue decolonization (CVR/TRC, 2015), the latter remains dependant on the vision and leadership of school principals. As things stand, not many of these principals are equipped to do this and the practices or strategies in place for carrying out such a monumental project are still undefined in many schools and require wholesale change in ways of doing things, in knowledge and how it is transmitted, in interventions and in pedagogical and management practices (Battiste, 2013; Kanu, 2005; Orr et al., 2002; Paul et al., 2020).

It is against this backdrop that I wish to present an approach to decolonization that is scalable to each individual or school in supporting school principals through these current changes.

It is built on a number of my reflections over many years of practice, particularly during the time I spent managing schools in Cree and Inuit Nations or training school principals under Université de Sherbrooke's diploma in higher specialized studies in Education Management in Indigenous Context Program. These ideas are also part of my research interests, including my Ph.D. thesis (Deschênes, 2020), and a current research study funded by Fonds de recherche du Québec – Society and Culture (2022-2025). For the latter, I am presently working with school principals of Québec schools outside Indigenous communities with the goal of chiefly developing approaches to foster decolonizing their practices and their schools. These ideas have been supported over the years by many gatherings and conversations with FNI members, partners, colleagues and friends.

In this article I will introduce four key dimensions (tree, rain, beaver and eagle) to illustrate these approaches, supported by various flexible and adaptable ideas. Opting for dimensions allows me to emphasize the non-linearity of the decolonization process, as it needs to acknowledge, for example, iterations and switching between the dimensions, which are both complementary and interdependent (one requires the other to progress). The names of the dimensions are metaphorical, as we will see, but they are also deliberate: I chose to use neutral elements found in nature to fully represent their interrelated characteristics. A summary of these four dimensions is presented below.

THE TREE DIMENSION

Well-rooted, sturdy and capable of adaptation to the changing environment.

SELF: EMBARKING ON A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY

This first dimension is centred around a commitment to a transformational process. To support a decolonizing project in their schools, principals need to be receptive to new perspectives, even if this entails upending what they are familiar with or used to doing. This calls for self-assessment, including identifying their own needs in terms of furthering personal knowledge, skills or attitudes.

In this dimension, school principals examine decolonization and where they stand in terms of their own beliefs and values, which also means pinpointing their own resistance and looking inward to deconstruct it. This also demands an introspection of firstly their own cultural identity (as members of a society with established explicit and implicit social norms), and secondly as a professional (working in the education system and as a manager of a structured school guided by societal standards).

As a result, through awareness of their own cultural and professional identity, and personal values (Khalifa et al., 2016), this process assists school principals in recognizing the multiplicity of worldviews—in addition to the one of mainstream society—a crucial recognition prior to embarking on necessary social, structural (Atleo, 2022; Dallaire, 2012) and educational (Deschênes, 2023) change. This process also helps them to ask themselves what decolonizing the institution—which the school (and ultimately education) is—means, and the practices that make it possible (Singleton, 2012; Terrell & Lindsey, 2008).

This personal development requires school principals engage in a critical reflection about their own role and management practices, chiefly in terms of their awareness of cultural and linguistic differences, something that ought to be seen as a must and precede any action. However, this simply cannot be done alone (Atleo, 2022; Deschênes, 2020; Gooden & Dantley, 2012), particularly since it calls on school principals to have a stance on decolonization and its implications for the school, its professional teams and its students.

Lastly, this process is part of an ongoing, complex and nuanced journey, and not simply a binary choice (colonization vs. decolonization). Indeed, it is a lifelong approach.

THE RAIN DIMENSION

Slowly absorbed by the ground as it falls, rain nourishes the tree, cleanses the environment and varies in intensity and accumulation.

ACQUIRING, ABSORBING AND ADOPTING NEW KNOWLEDGE AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

The second dimension encompasses two stages. The first is when knowledge is acquired varying on individual needs (following personal self-assessment) and is gradually absorbed according to personal characteristics and abilities and adopted and then concretely applied to management practices. The knowledge in question can be general or specific and is mainly related to First Nations and Inuit (FNI) people living near the school. School principals must seek to learn about and connect with the Nations or communities with whom the school shares territory. More importantly, this does not simply consist of knowledge of or about FNI people; it also includes FNI knowledge, ways of thinking, doing and producing things, educating and transmitting knowledge. In other words, this comprises all forms of knowledge, characteristics and other perspectives: cultural (including values), linguistic, identity, historical, social, spiritual, political, demographic, philosophical, epistemological and methodological. At this point school principals can learn more about the realities, strengths, challenges and barriers faced by FNI people at all levels, be they cultural, social, political or educational.

This second stage requires deep critical reflection, firstly on individual knowledge, and secondly on knowledge disseminated in mainstream society, including that in curricula taught to students and in education programs, so that teachers and school principals ask: *What do we know about FNI people? What are we teaching about them?* This is a courageous undertaking that confronts the erasures, negations and omissions of histories, identities, representations, culture and practices by mainstream society and educational institutions (Deschênes, 2020, 2023; Sefa Dei, 2014). This also means calling into question things such as asymmetric colonialist power dynamics (CVR/TRC, 2015), and implies not simply adapting but breaking down and transforming familiar models to rebuild them starting with a new foundation and new knowledge (Battiste, 2013; Deschênes, 2020; Kermoal, 2018). In doing so school principals advance toward greater relativism and are in a position to challenge the commonly accepted views of knowledge erroneously considered as all-knowing, learned or even indisputable.

THE BEAVER DIMENSION

Skillful, agile and hardworking and able to tear down and re-build, chiefly by using the tree.

DEVELOPING SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

Feelings of professional incompetence when it comes to carrying out decolonizing actions can deter many education players, including school principals, who may be reluctant to take steps or resist changing their practices by arguing that they do not know how to go about it, or that they might make mistakes, or lack cultural sensitivity. Also, examining alternative perspectives, identifying and dissecting internal resistance, acquiring new knowledge, and engaging in critical reflection and self-criticism lead school principals to get ready for the changes of this other dimension which focuses on developing new skills and attitudes.

Topping the list, cultural sensitivity, open-mindedness and cultural humility are prerequisites, both for the individual (tree and beaver dimension), and the team (eagle dimension). Together, these strategies equip school principals to uproot systemic bias that impacts FNI people. Cultural sensitivity and humility also imply that school principals see themselves as learners (instead of “a learned one”) when it comes time to recognize or understand the FNI experience. This is about being able to visualize the ways in which their own culture behaves, thinks, educates or pass down knowledge as being one among many other ways in other cultures; that their own culture is neither superior nor better—it simply works following its own logic and system of formal or informal social norms and standards. In short, it is about defining, maintaining and encouraging mutual and relationships on an equal footing.

Among school principals, ongoing transformation also implies a gradual change in their mindset, and this means being able to consider other perspectives and getting out of their comfort zone. To produce different results, new practices are in order. For this to happen, a decentering of culture—placing oneself outside one’s own culture and looking at it through FNI eyes, trying to grasp their point of view—is one effective strategy. School principals are then able to acknowledge there are other ways of thinking, talking or doing things that are indeed just as feasible and desirable as their own (Deschênes, 2022).

In addition to these strategies that increase cultural awareness, understanding and managing internal biases—chiefly cultural—school principals develop their ability to recognize FNI cultural and linguistic specificities, and promote and include them in the school. In fact, the act of decolonization demands change that must be anchored in recognizing FNI specificities, cultures and languages, and in promoting FNI cultures, languages, territories and knowledge and understanding of their realities in education (CEPN/FNEC et al. (2020); CERP, 2019; CRPA/RCAP, 1996; CVR/TRC, 2015; ONU/UN, 2007). To do this, in addition to transforming their own practices and strategies, school principals must be mindful to incorporate FNI tools, methods and processes. Last but not least, the ability to ensure FNI cultural safety (e.g., partners, collaborators, students, staff members) must also be included in the skills and attitudes development of school principals.

THE EAGLE DIMENSION

Astute, insightful, strategic, keen-sighted, bold and effective.

COMMITTED, BOLD AND VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

The fourth and final dimension involves engaged, forward-thinking, bold and visionary leaders who are always moving forward over the course of their personal and professional transformation, initiate the work of educating and transforming their environment, i.e., their school, team, and educational practices. In this role, school principals are the facilitators of the cultural leap between habits, beliefs, values or practices and connect people and ideas, capitalizing on similarities and complementarities. When leaders can embody the change required, they can then become transformational leaders who guide innovative practices and strategies jointly developed with their team. As they give meaning to the approach for themselves and their school and demonstrate unwavering confidence in the change's potential and feasibility, their team will believe in it too. School principals also lead their team members in taking stock of the school's collective capability: *What do we have that can help us initiate or continue with our decolonizing project? If not, what are we missing?*

As leaders of change in the decolonizing project, school principals propose actions and interventions for their teams to adopt and incorporate, in steering the conversion of classroom and school practices, with an eye to transforming the whole system, which they support and believe possible. This undertaking calls for courage given that it demands *rethinking everything*: source, nature and transmission of knowledge: all needs to be well mapped out (Jacob et al., 2020, Kovach, 2005; Smith, 2016). For this to succeed, the teams must be guided by school principals, whose leadership role is fundamental in this collective change that needs to happen in a partnership that rests on a steady stream of actions including collective mobilisation (Deschênes, 2018). A decolonized school undergoes radical change to its core, in how it operates and how it considers knowledge and its transmission. The school team draws inspiration, then adopts dimensions of both FNI cultures and mainstream cultures, moving toward relationships between the different cultural groups that have become more just and equal (Deschênes, 2020).

CONCLUSION

These four dimensions are but a starting point for school principals in undertaking the task of decolonizing their schools, as this requires much more than simple will and good intentions: it demands decisive action by a transformational leader (Deschênes, 2023; Deschênes & Sasseville-Quoquochi, 2023; Villella et al., 2023), demonstrating engagement and becoming a source of inspiration for the whole school by showing great cultural humility and embodying the change. Adopting this transformative perspective can also allow to target positive and sustainable systemic change (Atleo, 2022; Deschênes & Sasseville-Quoquochi, 2023). Lastly, the need to have FNI people at the table throughout to ensure the transformed practices stand against colonialist, post colonialist or paternalistic practices cannot be stressed enough.

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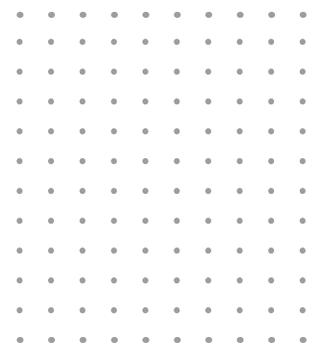
Finding better ways

At Rio Tinto, we work hard to leave a lasting and positive legacy everywhere we operate. This is why we have been a proud partner of the Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples since its beginnings, helping create a brighter future for Indigenous students.

"Every time a student finds his or her way back to academic success, the whole society benefits."



Acokanikew: Building a Bridge – A Cultural Safety Project to Support Perseverance Among Secondary 4 and 5 Nikanik Students in Wemotaci



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BACKGROUND

For many youth from Indigenous communities, pursuing post-secondary studies means having to leave their home community for the city and losing the support of family, community and important social and cultural reference points (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2021; Robert-Careau, 2019). The adjustment this demands from these young Indigenous students is huge and multidimensional, and resources are not always accessible or adapted for them. Many youth leave before completing their studies. Precisely to fill this void, École Secondaire Nikanik, Coop Nitaskinan and Cap Campus—part of Université de Montréal (UdeM)—have co-developed the *Acokanikew: Building a Bridge* project, with the common goal of motivating students not to give up and stay in school.

The mission of Cap Campus is to give Montréal youth with disadvantaged or multi-cultural backgrounds the chance to discover different fields of study and help them see that education is within their reach. Seeking to develop projects jointly with Indigenous partners, Cap Campus joined forces with Coop Nitaskinan, an Indigenous cooperative with expertise in Indigenous social and cultural development. This partnership allowed them to advance ideas and lay the foundation for a genuine, co-developed project.

École Secondaire Nikanik came on board the project's pilot intending to ease the post-graduation transition of its Secondary 4 and 5 students out of their community to pursue their studies. The school set the following goals: better prepare its students for their experience outside the community, encourage and improve Indigenous cultural safety with actors at the provincial level, and give its students the opportunity to discover the wide range of fields in post-secondary studies.

The aim of this article is to share the process of developing this pilot, its implementation, conditions favoring success, benefits and challenges, as well as next steps.

THE STORY OF BUILDING A BRIDGE

Co-Developing the Pilot

In the fall of 2021, École Secondaire Nikanik, Coop Nitaskinan and Cap Campus agreed to the cocreation that responds to the jointly identified needs. Multiple meetings were organized among the partners implying the building of relations and trust needed to arrive at a pilot project meetings the local needs. The original program of Cap Campus, implying presentations, workshops and visits of the University campus had to be adapted and transformed into an immersive game. Between meetings, partners developed project components which were then shared in the group and decided upon together. Now called “*Acokanikew*,” the project was reconfigured from a week’s worth of activities into a two-day immersive event, thus allowing us to better comply with the community’s local customs and educational requirements.

As a bonus, *Acokanikew* was able to enlist the participation of three Indigenous role models, in the form of past or current post-secondary students. With the aid of these role models, the participating students could then see themselves pursuing post-secondary education in their future. The intercultural aspect of the meeting was evident in the initiative itself: the inclusion of a diverse group of people (35 secondary students from Wemotaci aged 15 to 18, 3 Indigenous role models from the Atikamekw, Innu and Anishinaabe nations, and 6 non-Indigenous UdeM facilitators) facilitated cultural encounter and exchange, and the cultural bridge was given a concrete expression through the introduction to fields of study.

In essence, the immersive game, with workshops for each of the different fields of study, forms the core of the project.

The idea behind choosing a game as a format was to let students have fun while imagining themselves in fields of study, with the goal of delivering an interactive experience of these fields instead of someone simply introducing them. Promoting teamwork, developing leadership and self-confidence guided the joint planning of the activities.

A great deal of work was also put into preparing the non-Indigenous facilitators to lead the activities, both to help them learn about Indigenous realities and prepare them for their stay in an Indigenous community. A rehearsal day was organized jointly with Coop Nitaskinan to fine-tune the workshops and practice facilitating the event. Team-building activities for facilitators and Indigenous role models were also organized prior to the visit to Wemotaci.

Some of the successful factors in this pilot stage of co-developing the project included the respect for the pace of local resources, true mutual understanding and the process of bonding that allowed the construction of a real cultural bridge. Having fun was singled out as the essential building block of the project from the word go to its completion.

Phase 1: Scheduled Activities and the Pilot Experience

The immersive game took place over two days in Wemotaci in October 2022. During the event secondary 4 and 5 students joined in activities such as: 1) baking bagels and learning related concepts in chemistry, 2) creating mock-ups to learn about environmental planning and design, 3) triaging ER patients, and 4) exploring cultures around the world by delving into anthropological concepts. Non-Indigenous UdeM students moderated the games under the guidance of professionals from Coop Nitaskinan.

To encourage students to pursue post-secondary education, Indigenous role models were on hand to guide students through the games and also share their story about their own experiences with post-secondary studies. An Indigenous student life facilitator from Collège Ahuntsic was invited to speak, and the Nikanik students enjoyed listening to him retrace his own journey in the Atikamekw language.

The trip to Wemotaci enriched the cultural exchange between the participants. For example, the students learned more about Montréal and its multicultural character. They got to sample Indian food (butter chicken, naan bread and dhal) prepared by a restaurant in Montréal. They made Montréal-style bagels using the traditional recipe. The UdeM facilitators also created and displayed a scale model of Mount-Royal’s Beaver Lake to show the students the city’s green space. As for the non-Indigenous facilitators and Indigenous role models, they learned first-hand about Atikamekw culture by going to a sweat lodge and sharing a local traditional meal from the land.

Phase 2: Planning a Trip to Montréal

In the fall of 2023, it will be the turn of the students from the Nikanik High school to go to Montréal, for a five-day immersive trip. To help them discover the city, a host of activities and visits are being planned at Université de Montréal and Collège Ahuntsic. Coop Nitaskinan’s involvement will ensure that favourable conditions are in place to welcome the students.

KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

Successful Conditions

One key finding of note is that gradual and on-going collaboration enabled a genuine co-development combining and balancing the vision of each partner. The playful aspect of the activities allowed a chemistry to develop between the facilitators, role models and students, enabling the latter to join in the best possible way.

Good preparation for the facilitators was key, and their ease in leading the activities was crucial to ensure the students fully experienced the immersive nature of the event and had fun. Learning about different professions let students broaden the number of possibilities for their future. The cultural exchange enriched to the experience for all participants, offering a tangible way for them to have an open mind and good will toward the Other.

Benefits

In addition to the goal of encouraging the students to pursue their studies, co-developing the project has had a positive impact for all participants. The experience allowed Indigenous role models to reconnect with their culture (as opportunities to go back to their communities since moving to the city are rare) and share it with others or learn about another Indigenous culture. Some said that participating in this project helped them gain self-confidence to become a role model for young people:

“We were able to speak in our language and I shared with them that I had gone through a difficult period when I was their age, that I’ve had an atypical career and changed paths more than once [...] the Atikamekw youth of Wemotaci are smart kids and they should believe in their potential. I hope I encouraged them to stay in school and to believe there is a future in store for them, despite the obstacles placed on their paths.”

– *Gilbert Niquay, Indigenous role model from the Manawan community (Lasalle, 2002, free translation)*

“For me, what motivated me the most to participate in this project was wanting to serve as an inspiration for young people. Coming myself from a First Nation community, I would have loved when I was growing up to be able to identify with an Indigenous role model and be inspired by them. I grew up in my community, but also away from it in a more urban area, so I have had a few identity issues growing up. So I honestly think that having an Indigenous role model has been good for my motivation, my will to persevere and has also helped shape my identity. I wanted to show that you don’t need to have a linear or perfect path, and I had the chance to share and talk about my personal and work experiences as well as my journey. This project is close to my heart because it represents one more step in addressing the under-representation of Indigenous people in education. I was really excited at the idea of taking part in this project on the inclusion of First Peoples and for the first time I had the opportunity to be part of something that opens up to the reality of First Nations, rather than the other way around.”

– *Janel Poulin, Indigenous role model from the Kitigan Zibi community (LOJIQ, 2022, free translation)*

As for the non-Indigenous facilitators, this project gave them a chance to educate themselves and experience the Atikamekw culture in a truly immersive way and at the same time contribute to a need identified by the community. Many of the facilitators plan to keep going in the hope of becoming allies—working with and not for Indigenous people:

“I believe that my involvement fits in with the beginning of a personal journey to (re)educate myself to Indigenous realities and can also help me raise awareness around me. Since I came back, I’ve already had the chance to talk with my family and friends about my experience and start a conversation about the project with a broader scope of perseverance, cultural safety and encounters. The experience also made me want to continue to get involved in future projects specific to the Indigenous world.”

– *Élodie Sabourin, non-Indigenous facilitator (LOJIQ, 2022, free translation)*

It is worthy to note: participants in the pilot received the Civic Engagement Award from Les Offices jeunesse internationaux du Québec (LOJIQ) in June 2023 (UdeMNouvelles, 2023).

CHALLENGES

One challenge worth noting is the cultural training of the facilitators. Raising awareness of Indigenous realities is fundamental to generate a better understanding among non-Indigenous facilitators. The participation of Professor Jrène Rahm, from Université de Montréal’s Department of Psychopedagogy and Andragogy, proved valuable. Her involvement in training the facilitators was useful in preparing them for the experience. Professor Rahm also took charge of documenting the project and the collaborative process of co-development.

A second challenge stems from the fact that a year will have passed between the two phases of the project. Maintaining contact between the Nikanik students and the Cap Campus team (role models and facilitators) has been in preparation for the students’ Montréal visit. Opportunities for getting together and maintaining a private Facebook page were planned to this end.

CONCLUSION

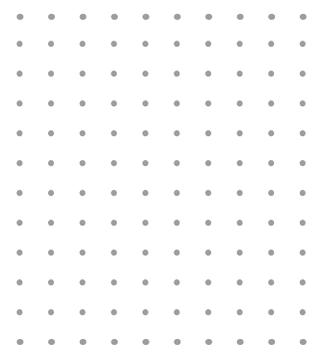
The partners presented in this report are hoping to create more projects tailored to address the challenges faced by youth from Indigenous communities in pursuing and succeeding in post-secondary studies. Other initiatives are currently underway in other communities.

Setting up and executing these kinds of projects requires a considerable investment in relationships and time. We sincerely hope that the outreach approach introduced by this project and the process of co-development become models for future community-university sponsored projects. We believe that this calls for better communication among stakeholders of higher education, the decolonization of higher education and working in partnership with humility, an open mind, reciprocity, good will and respect.

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Concerted Action in Cultural Safety: Forward-Looking Ideas for Teacher Education



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BACKGROUND

This article presents some forward-looking ideas for teacher training based on the results of a concerted action project¹ on cultural safety connected to elements of Competency 15 proposed by the Conseil en éducation des Premières Nations/ First Nations Education Council, the Institut Tshakapesh and the Centre de développement de la formation et de la main-d'œuvre huron-wendat (CEPN/FNEC et al., 2020) to expand on the *Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers* issued by Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ, 2020). First-hand accounts from 20 students and 80 stakeholders involved in supporting the perseverance and success of First Peoples children, students and learners north of the 49th Parallel and the St. Lawrence River in Côte Nord were collected during some 50 sharing meetings and focus groups held between March 2021 and June 2022. The goal of this project was to highlight what the different education and community actors are doing and to document inspiring examples of cultural safety practices for the benefit of all who work in the educational sector.

CULTURAL SAFETY, ILLUSTRATED

The concept of cultural safety was captured in an image (Figure 1) created by two Innu artists, Jean and Shanna Saint-Onge of Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam, using participants' own words and foundational principles drawn from literature (Ball, 2019; Blanchet Garneau & Pépin, 2012; Brascoupé & Waters, 2009; Curtis et al., 2019; Koptie, 2009; Lévesque et al., 2015), in the course of concerted action project as part of research work done by the UNESCO Chair, Transmission of First Peoples' Culture to Foster Well-Being and Empowerment at Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC). Jean Saint-Onge (a member of the Chair's Elders Committee) and his daughter Shana were inspired by ideas shared by participants in the project presented during a Chair meeting, headed at the time by the late Élisabeth Kaine. The image represents intercultural relations (hands), which inevitably entails individual and collective transformation of practices, structures and organizations (school, staff) to ensure the cultural safety of children, students, learners and families (canoe), founded on egalitarian relationships respectful of identity, values, languages and cultures (teweikan, tent, harvesting). Placed at the centre of the image are: **E MINU-UTINITUNANUT** (welcome), **MINUTEIEUN** (care), **ISHPITENITAMUN** (respect), and **INNU AIMUN MAK INNU AITUN** (language and culture).



Figure 1. Cultural Safety by Innu artists Jean Saint-Onge and Shanna Saint-Onge.

¹ Funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) 2020-2023.

EXAMPLES OF FORWARD-LOOKING PRACTICES AND IDEAS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

The left column of Table 1 contains examples of practices shared by participants during the project related to the elements (in gray) of Competency 15. These examples are cross-referenced in the right column with suggested ideas for inclusion in teacher education.

COMPETENCY 15 Value and promote Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, cultures and history.	
EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES DOCUMENTED BY RESEARCH (Concerted Action)	TYPES OF COURSES THAT CAN DRAW ON DOCUMENTED PRACTICES (Ideas for Teacher Education)
Create respectful and welcoming learning environments that connect and reflect to the holistic lifelong vision of education.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting surroundings, living environments • Creating opportunities to meet and share culture through activities • Promoting languages and cultures • Supporting children, students, learners, families, staff 	<p>School and society; school, family and community partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce examples of accommodations that promote languages and cultures as well as culturally safe activities for meeting and sharing culture <p>Foundations of learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study a holistic model of learning
Actively engage in cultural security practices including cultural consciousness, awareness and competence.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toolkits for non-Indigenous actors • Availability of Indigenous liaison officers, assistants, guidance and counselling professionals, actors • Workshops on combatting prejudice and stereotypes • National Truth and Reconciliation Day • Orange Shirt Day 	<p>Introduction to the teaching practice, internships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite Indigenous partners to lead outreach activities to raise awareness and educate against prejudice and stereotypes • Provide examples of cultural safety practices
Value Indigenous culture, language, land and knowledge in the classroom and in relations with families and the community.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses on language and culture • Sensory outdoor activities: the outdoor as a classroom • Indigenous literature (children's and adult) • French-Innu glossary (Cégep de Baie-Comeau) • Phonological awareness toolkit 	<p>Holistic development (emotional, social, language cognitive), early childhood education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the bilingual approach, a global approach valuing languages and cultures <p>Children's literature, reading and writing, arts, educational technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Indigenous literary works and resources
Provide culturally responsive Indigenous instruction and assessment.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing practice before theory • Workshops on specific learning (observation, touch) • Varying evaluation methods 	<p>Pedagogical Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiment with Indigenous pedagogies in partnership with experts <p>Learning assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show examples of feedback and follow-up in supporting learning

COMPETENCY 15 (continued)

Value and promote Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, cultures and history.

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES DOCUMENTED BY RESEARCH (Concerted Action)

TYPES OF COURSES THAT CAN DRAW ON DOCUMENTED PRACTICES (Ideas for Teacher Education)

**Develop respectful professional relationships
with Indigenous learners, parents and community.**

- Bonds of trust
- Availability of Indigenous liaison officers and advisors
- Welcome and integration committees
- Interprofessional and intercultural collaborations

- Integrative activities, seminars, internships**
- Invite Indigenous partners when considering different kinds of professional engagement and collaboration

**Incorporate Indigenous ways of learning and teaching in
the classroom and of those on the land.**

- Cultural experts (e.g., Elders, authors)
- Land-based learning
- Cultural objects, unstructured and symbolic play
- Stories

- Multicultural approaches, Indigenous perspectives,
teaching and early childhood education**
- Introduce cultural-centric teaching practices jointly with Indigenous partners

**Recognize that each learner is part of a greater and wider family and community
that contribute to his/her lifelong learning journey.**

- Cultural Weeks
- Support groups
- Building or having a Shaputuan
- Support from band councils

- Class management, heterogeneity, inclusive education,
school-family-community collaboration, early childhood
education**
- Provide examples of differentiated instruction and class management that recognize cultural anchors

**Participate in opportunities that involve establishing connections with students, colleagues,
parents, the community and its members as well as connections to place.**

- Pre-camp, welcome back to school dinners
- Pedagogical days
- Indigenous-non-Indigenous collaborations
- Cultural activities

- Integrative activities, seminars, internships**
- Participate in activities for getting together and sharing culture, meet with Indigenous partners

Know how to select authentic material to address Indigenous culture and history.

- Indigenous poetry and literature in French language class
- Optional courses in Humanities
- Culture in art courses
- Local history

- Teaching approaches**
- Incorporate cultural knowledge when planning learning situations, introduce history told by First Peoples

Engage in a continuous learning process and see yourself a learner, not an expert.

- Seminars
- Collaborations

- Courses and internships**
- Take part in presentations, consult Indigenous resources



Figure 2. Building a Shaputuan.
Photograph: Institut d'enseignement de Sept-Îles.

Forward-looking ideas for teacher education do not stop at simply sprinkling Indigenous content into courses. Indeed, we need to modify ways to explore this content “with” and “by” First Peoples partners.

As Battiste (2013) points out, incorporating such content into courses is not enough. It is essential that First Peoples' voices be heard in a genuine spirit of acknowledgement and respect before there is any talk about “content.” This poses a challenge as it demands rethinking training practices to be consistent with principles of cultural safety (Ball, 2019; Blanchet Garneau et al., 2012, 2019; Brascoupé & Waters, 2009; Curtis et al., 2019; Koptie, 2009; Lévesque et al., 2015). Only then can new collaborative ways be considered in full recognition of Indigenous partners' expertise. Ultimately this means hiring Indigenous professors, lecturers and internship supervisors. Cultural experts could also advise on modules and courses in developing and providing training activities for enhancing teacher professional competencies to include Competency 15.

SEEKING POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

Are there not, beyond the oft-cited incongruent Indigenous and Eurocentric visions of education, approaches that at some point converge and are able to incorporate and promote Indigenous perspectives into teacher training? Let us consider, for example, proactive learner-centric approaches, outdoor education, observation, touch, collaboration, differentiated instruction, holistic development and inclusive education for a school enriched by all its students (CSE, 2017). The foundations of these approaches all offer points of convergence with the principles set out by First Peoples (FNESC, 2021) including reflective, thoughtful, experiential and relational learning without losing the specificities of Indigenous perspectives. It is imperative that we take the time to look at what brings us together, what enriches us and connects us all. Welcoming, listening to the message on education that First Peoples bring

to teacher education is an essential on-ramp to the road to reconciliation, if we are indeed seeking to provide fairer educational services that are more respectful of values, language and cultures.

A CALL FOR RETHINKING TEACHER EDUCATION

Whether in the name of cultural safety, Indigenizing or incorporating Indigenous perspectives, the call to recognize Competency 15 in teacher education is clear. Our partners at Institut Tshakapesh made a compelling case for it at 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples in November 2022. Although this competency has yet to be included in the list of professional standards, the promotion of Indigenous perspectives in teacher education is an explicit expectation by the Ministère de l'éducation in its implementation plan (MEQ, 2021) for the new *Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers* (MEQ, 2020) which emphasizes the importance of specifically considering Indigenous realities. In this regard, elements of Competency 15 provide some leads that are well rooted in the experience of First Peoples organizations with a long history of developing culturally meaningful educational services. Is this not the best starting point to begin our reflections? When cross-referenced with practical examples from those on the frontline working daily to support the perseverance and success of First Peoples children, students and learners, concrete actions can be envisioned. This is a proposal we are sharing with the teacher education community in heeding Calls for Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR/ TRC, 2015).

Finally, we wish to thank our partners from the UNESCO Chair, Transmission of First Peoples' Culture to Foster Well-Being and Empowerment, the Centre des Premières Nations Nikanite at UQAC, La Boîte Rouge VIF and all those who took part in the project by sharing their practices in supporting First Nations children, students and learners in Côte-Nord to succeed. We are also grateful to Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) for funding this concerted action project in cultural safety. Lastly, we mourn the loss of Élisabeth Kaine and thank her for her valuable guidance throughout the project.

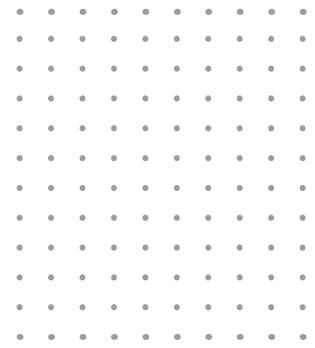
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Figure 3. École Uashkaikan in Pessamit: collective mural. Photograph: Jean-François Vachon, Boîte Rouge Vif.

First Peoples' Perspectives in Québec Education: A Collaborative Pilot Project on the Cultural Safety of Urban Indigenous Students



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INTRODUCTION

The pilot project First Peoples' Perspectives in Québec Education saw the light of day in 2017, following a request for support from a school services centre (SSC) in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean interested in fostering the well-being and success of urban Indigenous students. Seeking the best strategies to address this need, a pedagogical team from La Boîte Rouge VIF (BRV) was closely involved in developing a scalable multimedia digital platform that could reach the greatest number possible of actors in the education field. The present article traces this collaborative project from its inception to the creation of the 3PEQ website¹, which was officially launched at the 5th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples held in November 2022.



Figure 1. Raconter le territoire [Telling the Story of the Land].
Illustration by Fabienne Théorêt-Jérôme

¹ See <https://3peq.com>

MISSION OF LA BOÎTE ROUGE VIF

As a not-for-profit Indigenous cultural organization, La Boîte Rouge VIF (BRV) has as a mission to promote identity affirmation through the transmission and dissemination of Indigenous cultures in all their vibrancy. To produce innovative and creative projects chiefly in the field of education, the BRV relies on collaborative methods steeped in Indigenous approaches and knowledge. This is how many of its tools available to support the education community in valuing Indigenous knowledge and cultures in schools are created.

PROMOTING THE PERSPECTIVES OF FIRST PEOPLES IN TEACHING PRACTICES

The mission of the Québec education system since the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s has been to democratize school and boost the education levels of future generations, a mission that would bring benefit to all, while naturally foregrounding Québec culture (Charland, 2005). Yet Indigenous cultures still have a muted presence in the Québec Education Program (QEP), opening the door to disinformation about and invisibility of Indigenous realities both historical and current. For example: “[...] in the social sciences curriculum under the QEP, Indigenous people disappear with the advent of New France, to reappear only at the end of the 20th century” (Lévesque 2018, p. 48, free translation). Indigenous students living in either communities or in urban centres can scarcely identify with requirements set in the QEP (Potvin, 2021). Promoting school retention and success among these students—a fast-growing demographic—begs questioning the practices in place in schools (CTREQ, 2022). As teachers “play an indispensable role in the process of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples” (MEQ, 2020, p. 14), they need authentic and up-to-date sources of information about First Peoples as well as relevant pedagogical tools. The momentum driving Indigenous perspectives through learning content and teaching practices raises a number of issues for teachers who must first understand the challenges facing these young people in the interest of cultural and social safety (Ball & Beazley, 2017; Brascoupé & Waters, 2009; Curtis et al., 2019; Lévesque, 2015). The latter is defined as an approach to transformation founded on the principle of social justice (Lévesque, 2017). The goals of cultural and social safety are to ensure an inclusive environment free of stigma, discrimination and prejudice while acknowledging current and historical realities as well as the knowledge produced by Indigenous cultures (CAPRES, 2018; Blanchet et al., 2019). The entire education system therefore has an obligation to consider the power structures inherent in education and institutional barriers (policies, protocols, practices) faced by First Peoples, and recognize the values and expertise the latter bring to the table, where they should be when discussing the direction, organization and evaluation of services delivered to them.

ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

Following the 2nd Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples in 2017, one of the school services centres in Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean contacted the BRV in order to explore options in developing pedagogical tools for both elementary and secondary schools using the BRV’s own resources, consistent with the QEP (MEQ, 2001, 2006, 2007), in supporting teachers who wanted to promote Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms in providing cultural safety for their Indigenous students (Baba, 2013; Brascoupé & Waters, 2009; Lévesque, 2015). After several rounds of consultation, the project gathered speed in 2019.

The project’s main objective was then for the BRV and the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean SSC to jointly develop examples of culturally relevant and safe practices starting with what was already being done in the classroom, to adjust teaching practices (Couture et al., 2012; Savoie-Zajc, 1993). In the second phase of the project these practices were to be tested in the field to assess both the pedagogical relevance of the tools developed by the BRV in a school setting and/or consider any possible any need for adjustments. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, swiftly dictated shifting the project’s focus. Faced with the discombobulating effect of this global social and health crisis and its impact on education—primarily in the form of sudden school closures and the switch to online learning—the education community began redirecting its efforts to providing learning continuity in an exceptional context rife with challenges (Issaieva et al., 2020). The project was then recalibrated to jointly develop lesson plans for specific topics (e.g., art, languages, sciences, social sciences) with volunteer Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers.

METHODOLOGY

Founded on consultation and co-creation, the BRV’s methodology is designed to adopt a decolonizing, collaborative and most respectful of all involved in the project approach (Kaine, 2021). This produces an equal power relationship that nurtures collegiality, operationalized in common goals arrived at through dialogue and agreement. It is also mindful of communities whose cultural identity is underrepresented in the curricula and mainstream society—the reality of those Indigenous communities in Québec and across Canada with whom the BRV works.

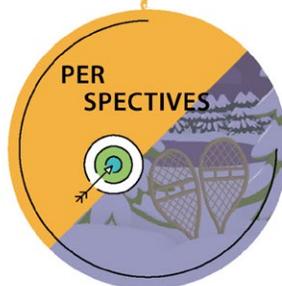
In the original setup of the project, semi-structured interviews (Savoie-Zajc, 2009) would have allowed capturing the needs of the participants (principals, teachers and professional staff, students) and developing together with teachers diverse resources to ensure the cultural safety of Indigenous students (Ball & Beazley, 2017; Curtis et al., 2019; Lévesque, 2015). To maintain this perspective top of mind during the shift in the project’s direction, a committee of Indigenous cultural experts was tasked with validating the lesson plans, which were tested in the classroom using a continuous improvement approach (Couture et al., 2012; Van Der Maren, 1995) to better serve teachers’ needs before uploading them onto a digital platform.

The three thematic areas of the www.3peq.com website

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES IN QUÉBEC EDUCATION



- **To encounter** is to make contact.
- **Encounters** is in the plural form because life leads to many encounters that can influence personal development.
- Information for understanding what encounters are all about.



- **Perspectives** is primarily intended for teachers.
- Tips on how teaching practices can be adjusted to support school perseverance among Indigenous students.



- **Activities** pool helpful resources for educators in learning more about First Peoples.
- Up-to-date and authentic Indigenous cultural resources and content.

Illustrations by Fabienne Théorêt-Jérôme

THE 3PEQ WEBSITE

The Perspectives des Premiers Peuples en éducation au Québec (3PEQ) website² is a virtual toolbox containing relevant resources and information that can help teachers in promoting Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms. The diverse tools available on this digital platform are designed to be concrete, useful and practical, and attentive to being authentic and respectful of Indigenous cultural knowledge. They are based on the stories, accounts, words and practices that members of different Nations across Québec have very generously shared with the BRV, mainly during meetings, interviews and working sessions. The many videos posted on the website are taken from the BRV's own library, and the ideas expressed in them are solely the responsibility of their authors. The purpose of the 3PEQ website is to drive cultural awareness and increase openness to First Peoples by making it easier to access authentic content covering Indigenous specificities and cultural knowledge.

The format of the website itself was conceived during one of the consultation workshops with the BRV team and Atikamekw and Innu partners. Through these workshops three (3) core thematic areas were chosen to build the website around: Encounters, Perspectives and Activities.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND MOVING FORWARD

Following the launch of the 3PEQ website, its diverse pedagogical tools are now being road-tested in schools in an approach of continuous improvement. Content is likely to be updated as the social and political context of First Peoples' governance and self-determination in Québec continues to evolve.

Through the transmission of authentic knowledge, stories and practices, we hope that this virtual toolbox will help those who work in education become allies of First Peoples and encourage them to keep on the path of decolonizing education for the sake of Indigenous students, one of the core missions of La Boîte Rouge VIF and a mission that will ultimately bring benefit to all!

² See www.3peq.com

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kg CO₂

8,035 km driven by car



54
GJ

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10
kg NMVOC

9,916 km driven by car



An event not to be missed!

NEXT CONVENTION

The 6th Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples will be held at Palais des Congrès in Montréal from November 6-8, 2024.

Organized by the Bureau de la réussite et de l'inclusion étudiante,
Université du Québec à Montréal (BIRÉ-UQAM).

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