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First Peoples Students in Higher Education

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Special thanks to Aboriginal Tourism, Fédération des cégeps, and Pierre Labelle (for Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire).



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> ISSUE

First Peoples and Accessibility to Cégeps and Universities

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) pointed out that reconciliation with First Peoples¹ is not an “Indigenous problem” but rather a societal phenomenon in which all players in society have a role, including postsecondary educational institutions. Also, “in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation,” the TRC made the following calls to action in relation to education (6 through 12) and to education for reconciliation (62 through 65). The Commission thus encourages players in these areas to follow its recommendations.²

In response to the TRC’s calls to action, in June 2017 Quebec’s Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones launched the Government Action Plan for the Social and Cultural Development of the First Nations and Inuit 2017–2022. Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur (MEES) is responsible for five higher education measures set out in the plan that target success and retention (see the Plan appendix).

These government initiatives reflect observations about the disparities experienced by First Peoples (FNQLHSSC, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2016; Posca, 2018), particularly in terms of postsecondary education (FNEC, 2009).

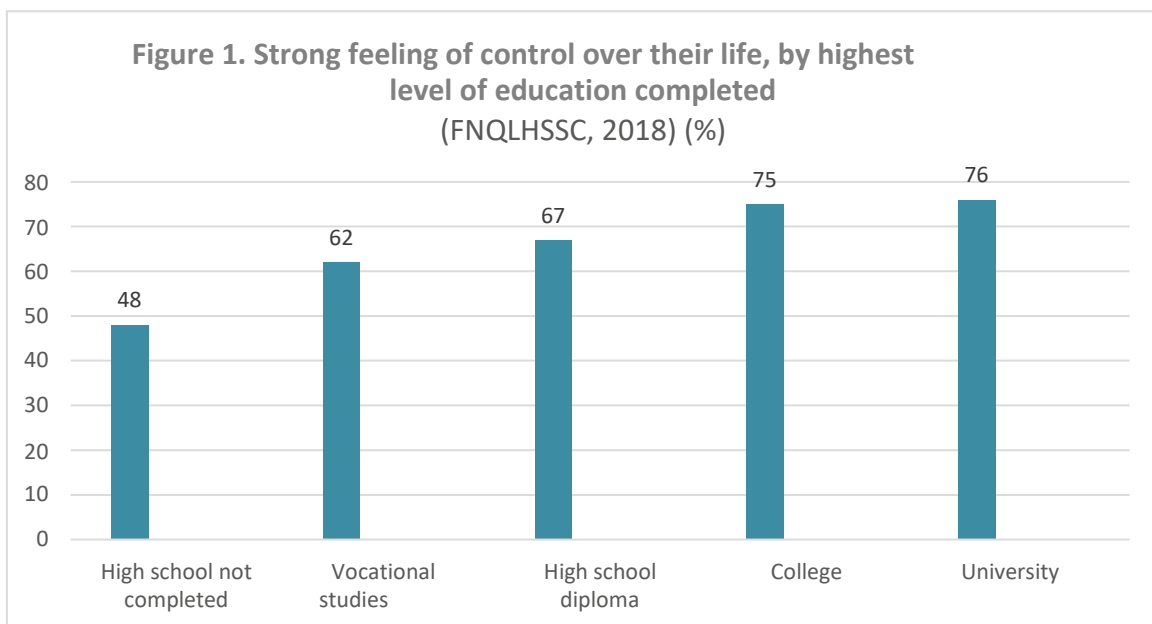
¹ In this document the term “First Peoples” refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (Gauthier and Blackburn, 2015).

² See [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#) (2012)



Differences in graduation rates at Cégeps and universities between non-Aboriginals³ and First Peoples persist (see Figure 3). Universities have the lowest level of First Peoples representation. The figures are better for colleges (Statistics Canada, cited by Joncas, 2018).

It has been recognized, however, that education provides access to better jobs and higher incomes (NCCA, 2017). The most recent First Nations Regional Health Survey, conducted by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC, 2018), shows that the percentage of adults who have a “strong feeling of control” over their lives seems to increase in line with the level of education completed, as shown in the figure below.



A little-known sociohistorical reality

The disparities facing First Peoples are the result of a colonial historical reality in which they were marginalized, stigmatized, and subjugated. For many years, the aim of educating First Peoples was to assimilate them by various means, including distancing them from their communities and world views (NCCA, 2017). For example, under the *Indian Act*, any member of a

³ The term “non-Aboriginal” refers to residents of a territory who are not descendants of First Peoples (Gauthier and Blackburn, 2015).



First Nation would lose their Indian status upon earning a university diploma, in a practice described as “compulsory enfranchisement” that targeted cultural assimilation.⁴

It is now agreed (CHRC, 2013; TRC, 2015; UN, 2007) that the “Indian residential schools” system and various assimilation policies led to intergenerational trauma that helped foster educational disparities.

In other words, gaps in access and graduation rates have structural roots. According to First Nations people, these gaps are reflected in the multiple obstacles that limit access to, and persistence in, completing postsecondary education (CMEC, 2010).

Residential schools for Aboriginal children, the last of which closed their doors in 1980 in Quebec and 1996 in the rest of Canada, aimed to assimilate young First Peoples into colonial Canadian society by erasing all traces of their cultural origins. These objectives were based on the assumption that their customs and cultures were inferior.⁵ There were about ten such institutions in Quebec (six residential schools and four hostels as well as the four federal hostels for recognized Inuit⁶) that are estimated to have housed some 13,000 children. In 2015 the then Supreme Court Chief Justice of Canada Beverley McLachlin stated in a public speech that the assimilation and subjugation system was the backbone of a “cultural genocide” policy that resulted in access disparities in several areas and whose consequences persist to this day.

In short, current challenges to educational accessibility are “intricately connected to historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism at individual, family, community, and systemic levels.” (NCCA, 2017). All Canadians share responsibility for correcting these wrongs (TRC, 2015).

⁴Canada’s *Indian Act* aimed to “enfranchise” Indians, i.e., to stop them from being legally Indians and to allow them to take on all the attributes of citizenship, as specified in Section 109. In 1880 an amendment automatically stripped anyone who earned a university diploma of their Indian status. Provisions addressing enfranchisement would not be repealed until 1985 (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act>).

⁵Seeking, as has been infamously said, “to kill the Indian in the child.” Ministère des Affaires autochtones et du Nord Canada, 2008.

⁶The invariable term *Inuit* is used throughout this report, except in references where the original title has been retained. To learn more: [Inuit, Inuk \(Linguistic recommendation from the Translation Bureau\)](#)



Sociodemographic portrait of First Peoples

According to the most recent Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2016), there are 1,673,785 First Peoples, 182,890 of whom live in Quebec. The population has risen sharply in the last ten years. Statistics Canada (2015) attributes this rapid growth in part to a high fertility rate. However, the population boom can also largely be explained by a greater tendency to identify as Aboriginal in the Canadian census or, in other words, what Statistics Canada refers to as “intergenerational ethnic mobility.”

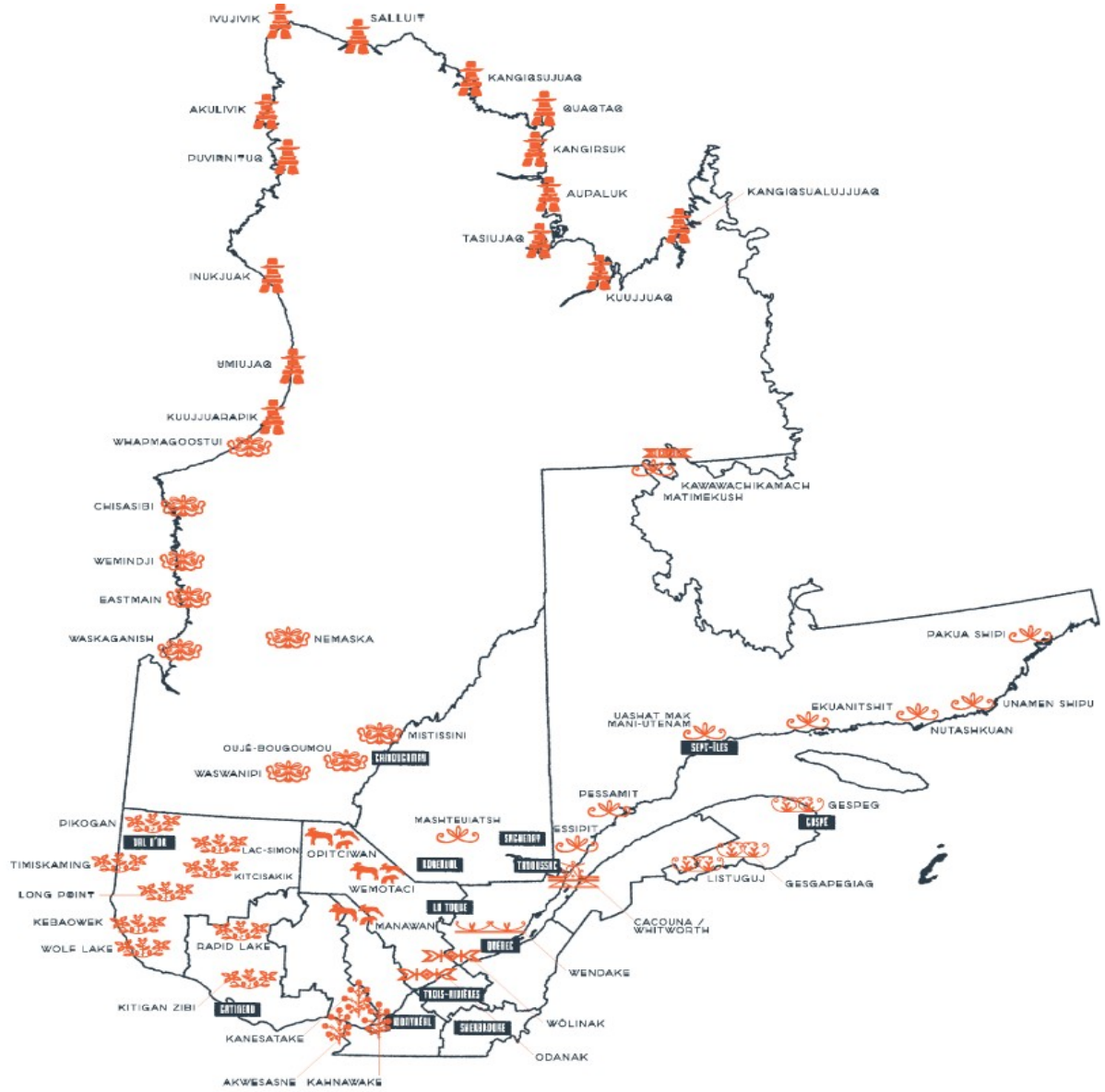
Overall, growth in the First Peoples population in Canada is four times (42.5%) the growth rate of the non-Aboriginal population. In Quebec, it is almost ten times higher (66%) than the growth rate for the province’s non-Aboriginal population (6.8%) between 2006 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Each Nation⁷ in Quebec is facing a specific reality (see map on next page), and socio-economic conditions are different for each community, family, and individual.

⁷ In Quebec, the First Nations are Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Cree, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Maliseet, Micmac, Mohawk, and Naskapi. Inuit are the 11th Aboriginal nation in the province, in terms of population.

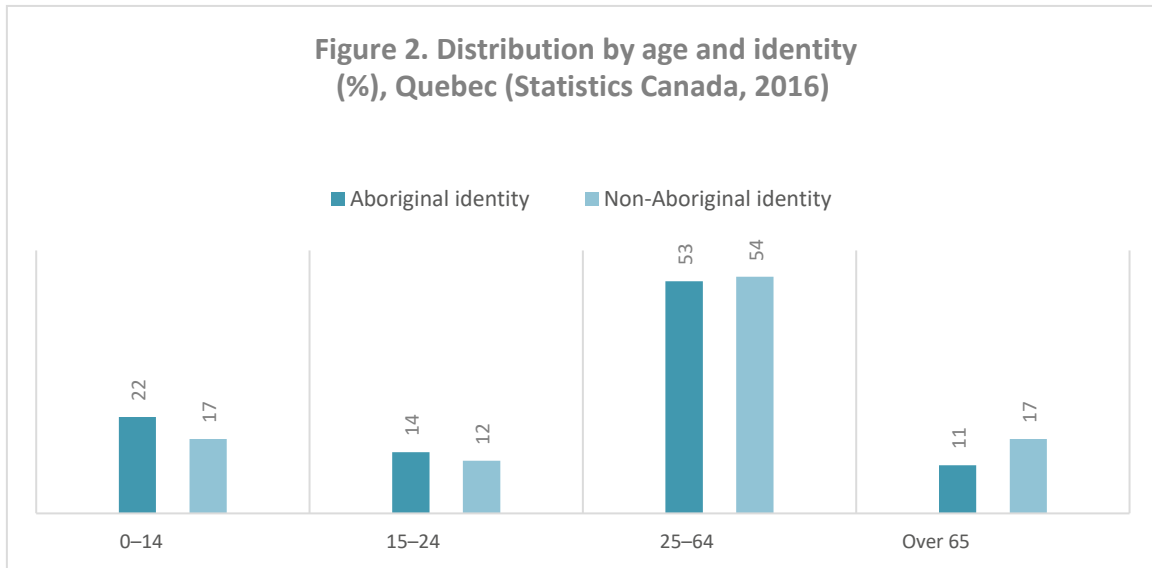


Quebec Aboriginal map, adapted from [Aboriginal Tourism](#), 2018



-
- 
Abénakis
 - 
Algonquins
 - 
Atikamekw
 - 
Cris
 - 
Hurons-Wendat
 - 
Innus
 - 
Inuit
 - 
Malécites
 - 
Micmacs
 - 
Mohawks
 - 
Naskapis

The First Peoples population is young. The average age in Quebec is 36.4 compared to 41.2 for the non-Aboriginal population. Inuit are the youngest community, with an average age of 26.7.



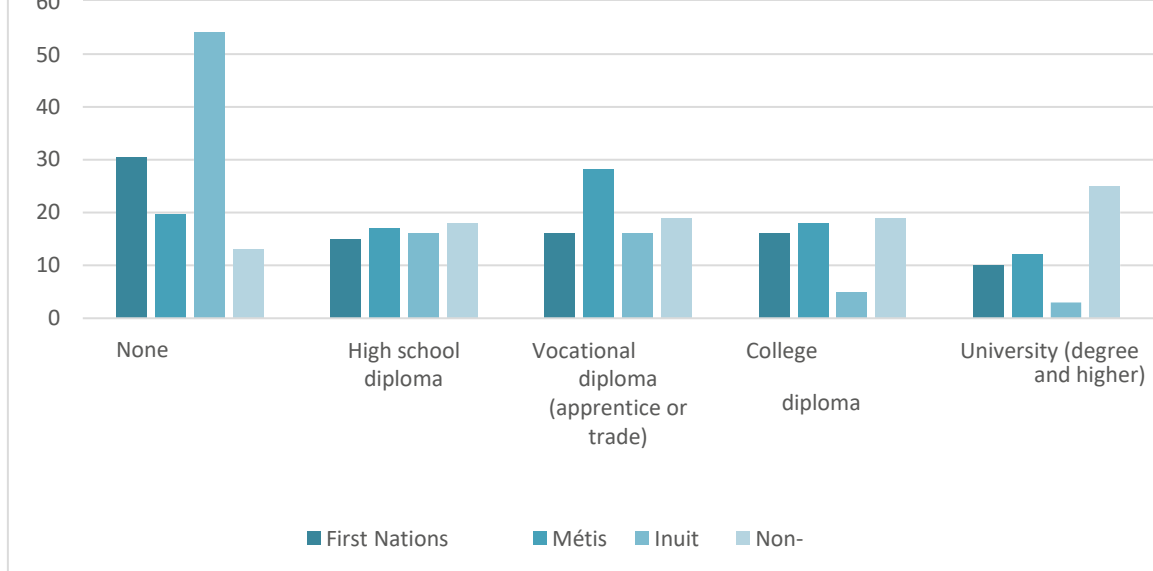
According to *Projections of the Aboriginal Population and Households in Canada, 2011 to 2036* published by Statistics Canada (2015), First Peoples will make up an increasingly large share of the young adult population in the near future. The “The Aboriginal identity population in Canada could increase to between 1,965,000 and 2,633,000 by 2036 under the projection scenarios developed” (*ibid.*).

This projected population increase shows the importance of immediately prioritizing a concerted approach to access to higher education, with an emphasis on cultural safety (see [Key Concept](#) in this report).

Discrepancies in postsecondary enrolment rates

Statistics for Canada and Quebec show that First Nations enrolment rates are lower than non-Aboriginal rates, and that “the most significant differences are in post-secondary education” (Statistics Canada, 2016; Blackburn, 2018; Joncas, 2018). As seen in the figure below, a smaller share of the First Peoples population have a college and university diploma, compared to the non-Aboriginal population.

Figure 3. Highest diploma earned (%), people age 25 to 64, Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2016; Posca, 2018)



The percentage of First Peoples who have a university diploma has clearly gone up in recent years (Blackburn, 2018). Rates among the non-Aboriginal population are also growing, but more quickly, so the gap between First Peoples and non-Aboriginal people is getting bigger, rising from 12% in 1996 to 14% in 2001 and 15% in 2006 (Aboriginal Peoples Survey, cited by Blackburn, 2018).

Although a number of institutions have added a self-identification box to their application forms, many First Peoples students are reluctant to self-identify for fear of being stigmatized, particularly when services are not tailored to them and when they have no supporting documents (Dufour, 2015).

At this time it is impossible to know exactly how many First Peoples students are enrolled in postsecondary education, due to the lack of a data collection strategy and effective, systematic methods (Lefevre-Radelli and Jérôme, 2017).

Barriers to accessibility


Because the goal of education policies for First Peoples has historically been assimilation, encouraging students to pursue postsecondary education is now a considerable challenge and a major historic reversal (Ratel, 2017). There are still plenty of barriers preventing access to higher education, especially for students raised in communities who are more vulnerable than those who grew up elsewhere (Lefevre-Radelli and Jérôme, 2017). Students from communities face a combination of multiple barriers⁸ and discriminatory factors within the postsecondary system (Dufour, 2015), including:

- **Geographical isolation:** About half of “future” Aboriginal students reside in communities far from the urban centers where colleges and universities are located (Loiselle and Legault, 2010). To access postsecondary education, they must be able to travel but significant economic constraints are an issue. For example, there are many expenses associated with further education: Expensive travel, high housing costs (in addition to profiling, credit report, lack of co-signers), etc. In its paper on education funding, the First Nations Education Council (FNEC, 2009) mentions that lack of funding is the main barrier to postsecondary education for youth living in communities. The FNEC has also shown that First Peoples students are significantly underfunded compared to non-Aboriginal students (cited in Joncas, 2018). One of the MEES measures under the government Plan referred to earlier involves two pilot housing projects (Sept-Îles and Trois-Rivières). In addition, practices and programs are being developed at a number of colleges and universities.

The socio-economic conditions in communities (endemic unemployment, unstable jobs, etc.)—resulting from a prolonged policy of assimilation and subjugation—ensure that “few First Nations students can rely on their family to help them pay for their studies” (Asselin and Basile, 2012).

⁸ Loiselle and Legault (2010) and Dufour (2015) produced a summary of the many discriminating factors and barriers to access and success. Lévesque et al. (2015) also wrote about this in *Synthèse des connaissances sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires des élèves autochtones au Québec et dans les autres provinces canadiennes*.



- 
- **Loss of identity and support:** In addition to the lack of financial support, because some young people have to leave their family home and community to pursue university studies, they also have to deal with being uprooted and losing their identity (see Key Concept: Cultural Safety: What is it?). This distance from family and friends is often associated with a loss of community support for students, who are dealing with family and financial responsibilities in addition to their studies (Rodon, 2008; Indspire, 2018). The proportion of teenage mothers is significantly higher among First Peoples than among non-Aboriginal women:⁹ Less than 6% of non-Aboriginal women aged 25 to 29 became mothers before the age of 20, while the figure is more than three times higher among First Peoples (Arriagada, 2016). Students who are also mothers must find affordable child care and schools for their children on top of managing their own postsecondary education, without the support that many of them would receive in their communities.

To meet the specific needs of First Peoples, the Kiuna College, located in the Abenaki community of Odanak, opened its doors in 2011. Students receive enhanced services that include personalized academic support, various types of housing assistance, and a daycare.

Kiuna puts a special emphasis on the perspectives, values, and aspirations of First Peoples while fostering a sense of pride and belonging (Kiuna, 2018). The school also aims to provide services that meet the specific needs of students, including those who are parents.

⁹ It is common for First Peoples to follow an atypical educational path. Mothers often put their studies on hold to raise a family and go back to school later on. According to the FNQLHSSC (2018), “the proportion of adults with a high school diploma is significantly higher among adults aged between 25 and 64. This could indicate that a good number of adults returned to school and completed their secondary studies at the age of 25 or older.” (p. 5).



- **Intergenerational shock:** Many parents, grandparents, and elders had a traumatic experience within the school system (NCCA, 2017), particularly at residential schools. As a result they distrust non-Aboriginal education. This distrust can be passed on to their descendants (Loiselle and Legault, 2010). Some participants in the Dufour study (2015) noted that postsecondary education, and university education in particular, project an image of inaccessibility.

One of the best practices that help build trust and enhance Aboriginal identity is the presence of elders on campus (see [Best Practices](#) in this report). First Peoples students can turn to them to talk about spiritual and cultural issues or to reconnect with the traditional knowledge of their communities.

Working toward structural change

One of today's biggest challenges for colleges and universities is creating space for First Peoples students, while most institutions have long ignored them (Pidgeon, 2016). It is not enough, however, to introduce measures or programs. Non-Aboriginal professionals, instructors, and students still need to be educated in order to demystify the realities experienced by First Peoples and to overcome the stubborn prejudices and stereotypes that hinder accommodations under the pretext of small numbers of Aboriginal students (Blackburn, 2018).

Sheila Cote-Meek, Associate Vice President of Academic and Indigenous Programs at Laurentian University in Ontario, recently said that for lasting transformation to occur, changes made in response to reconciliation must be embedded in administrative and academic structures. To ensure that structural changes in postsecondary institutions are sustained over time, she recommends strong policies and a long-term commitment to First Peoples education (Cote-Meek, 2018).

The [Indigenous Education Protocol for Colleges and Institutes](#), drawn up in 2015 by Colleges and Institutes Canada in cooperation with First Peoples communities and specialists, is one such long-term commitment.



Signatory institutions, including eight cégeps and colleges in Quebec, agree to:

1. Commit to making Indigenous education a priority
2. Ensure governance structures recognize and respect Indigenous peoples
3. Implement intellectual and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples through curriculum and learning approaches relevant to learners and communities
4. Support students and employees to increase understanding and reciprocity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples
5. Commit to increasing the number of Indigenous employees with ongoing appointments throughout the institution, including Indigenous senior administrators
6. Establish Indigenous-centred holistic services and learning environments for learner success
7. Build relationships and be accountable to Indigenous communities in support of self-determination through education, training and applied research

Accordingly, the indigenization of higher education (Pete, 2015; CACUSS, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016) is not about simply helping First Peoples adapt to the non-Aboriginal higher education system, but rather about changing existing structures and practices. Such an approach requires First Peoples' values, principles, and organizational methods to be respected and integrated into structures, services, and education. To this end, governance, hiring, knowledge assessment, and (co)management practices must be revised, in open collaboration with First Peoples (see Best Practices in this report). These are not cosmetic changes, but changes that are profound and authentic.



Indigenization means that “conscious efforts are underway to bring Indigenous people, philosophies, knowledge, and cultures into strategic plans, governance roles, curriculum development and review, research, and professional development” (CACUSS, 2018).

According to Pidgeon (2016), the Indigenization process must not be limited to the occasional speech or event on campus; it must be a meaningful and substantive change in the fabric of the institution.

In this report, CAPRES highlights examples of best practices that aim to strengthen cultural safety (see Key Concept) during First Peoples’ postsecondary education.



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To Cite this Report

CAPRES (2018). *First Peoples Students in Higher Education*. Available on the CAPRES website: <http://capres.ca/dossiers/etudiants-des-premiers-peuples-en-enseignement-superieur-dossier-capres>





Further Information

Tools and Websites

[Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador](#)

[Avataq Cultural Institute](#)

[CIÉRA – Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones](#)

[Colleges and Institutes Canada – Indigenous Education](#)

[Convention on Perseverance and Achievement for First Peoples](#)

[DIALOG – Réseau de recherche et de connaissances relatives aux peuples autochtones](#)

[First Nations Education Council \(FNEC\)](#)

[First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Social Services Commission \(FNQLHSSC\)](#)

[First Peoples Service – UQAT](#)

[Indigenous Education The National Centre for Collaboration](#)

[Kiuna Institute](#)

[Nikanite – Centre des Premières Nations de l'UQAC](#)

[Nunavik Sivunistavut](#)

[RéconciliAction Collèges Québec](#)

[Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec](#)

[Tshakapesh Institute](#)



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> KEY CONCEPT

Cultural safety: What is it?

Historically, the connection First Peoples have to education in general and postsecondary education in particular is characterized by assimilation.¹ Committing to higher education has long meant adapting to the values and cultural behaviors of the postsecondary institution attended (Gallop and Bastien, 2016). Pursuing postsecondary education was a type of “compulsory enfranchisement”² that resulted in loss of status (see The Issue in this report).

Research has identified expressions like “culture shock” and “cultural discontinuity” being used to describe the discomfort and difficulties students experience. As part of the reconciliation process, the cultural safety approach aims to lessen the detrimental effects by creating relationships of trust with First Peoples and making environments more welcoming and secure. This is an essential step to counter the cultural assimilation of First Peoples attending higher education institutions and to promote access, perseverance, and success.

A responsibility rather than an adaptation

The concept of cultural safety originated in the late 1980s in New Zealand, in response to the marginalization and discrimination Maoris experienced in the non-Aboriginal healthcare system (Ramsden, cited by Dufour, 2016). In Canada, the concept of cultural safety has also been used in the healthcare field (Baba, 2013).

Underlying this approach, which is central to the relationship between First Peoples and non-Aboriginal people, are:

¹ Education involved assimilation as a matter of course. At the primary and secondary levels (in residential schools), attending school was already an assimilation process that followed a continuous path from one type of instruction to another.

² The Canadian *Indian Act* sought to “enfranchise” Indians, as specified in Section 109. This meant they would no longer legally be Indians and would have all the attributes of citizenship. An amendment introduced in 1880 meant that anyone who earned a university diploma was automatically stripped of their Indian status. Provisions addressing enfranchisement would not be repealed until 1985 (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act>).



- consideration of the effects of colonization and the resulting trauma
- recognition of and respect for cultural and social differences
- an understanding of the issues First Peoples face today, whether they live in a remote community or an urban area
- a willingness to join forces with First Peoples in the development, delivery, and assessment of services or initiatives offered to them
- a commitment to adopt practices and service deployment models that take the values, cultures, and realities of First Peoples into account
- a collective or institutional willingness to change our perspective and our processes, to foster social justice and innovation.

A cultural safety approach is thus not limited to measures or processes for adapting education, services, or support for First Peoples students.

Rather, it is a shared responsibility that unites all members of postsecondary institutions in a process of individual and collective awareness, learning and transformation, in partnership with Aboriginal authorities and communities.

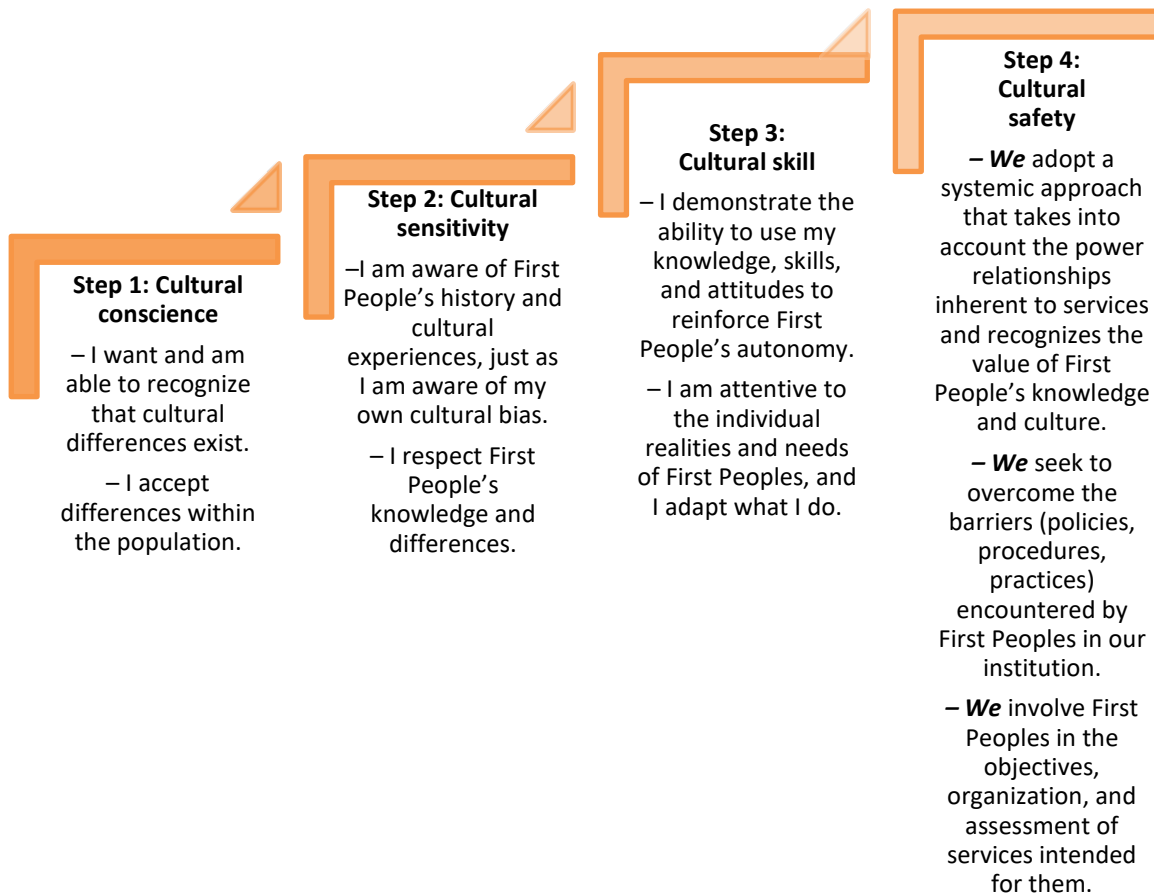
This process of raising awareness among non-Aboriginal people (the student community and teaching and support staff) of First People's cultural reality aims to highlight Aboriginal differences, contributions, and knowledge, and to recognize their history and rights.

A cultural safety approach is based on the principle of social justice and is part of a dynamic of affirmation, transformation, and reconciliation (Lévesque, 2017). It seeks meaningful social transformation by reviewing public policies targeting First Peoples and updating practices to foster decolonization and self-determination (Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, 2017). For Lévesque (2017), cultural safety is a tool for social justice, a vehicle for reconciliation, a driver of social change, and an opportunity for social innovation.



Steps towards cultural safety

Certain steps need to be taken in order to build a culturally safe environment that allows individuals and communities to reach their full potential.³ During this process, reflexivity starts at the individual level and then advances to the collective level, switching from *I* to *we*, as illustrated in the following table.



³ Inspired by the Val-d’Or [Native Friendship Centre](#) and Lévesque (2017).





Dedicated spaces

Research by Dufour (2016) suggests that providing culturally safe educational spaces within institutions promotes postsecondary retention and success among First Nations students in Quebec.

Creating spaces for social and cultural gatherings is a first step in this direction (see [Best Practices](#) in this report).

Learning content

One way to promote cultural safety is to study the history, cultures, and policies that have characterized the socio-economic evolution of First Peoples. Students are then able to better contextualize and address the issues facing their family and community (*ibid.*). In terms of cultural safety and continuity, Kiuna College, founded in 2011, is squarely in line with its predecessor, Manitou College in La Macaza (1973-1976) and with the Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) in the United States (Dufour, 2015). Kiuna's academic approach is based on adapting college programs focused on achieving universal skills and provincial educational benchmarks, while strongly emphasizing cultural reinforcement.

Kiuna's educational initiative thus turns a "tool of assimilation into an instrument of empowerment" (Stonechild, cited by Dufour, 2015).

Cultural activities

Another way to implement a cultural safety approach is to organize educational activities and field trips that give students access to the Aboriginal heritage, languages, and cultural practices some of them were deprived of due to the colonial context (Dufour, 2016).





NIVEAU DÉBUTANT

LES SAMEDIS

2019 9 février | 23 février
15 mars | 29 mars
De 9 h 30 à 16 h
(pause de 12 h à 13 h 30)

NIVEAU INTERMÉDIAIRE


LES DIMANCHES


2019 10 février | 24 février
16 mars | 30 mars
De 9 h 30 à 16 h
(pause de 12 h à 13 h 30)

Poster: @Centre des Premières nations de Nikanite (UQAC) – Facebook

These examples show the importance of promoting and funding structural changes that provide cultural safety for First Peoples students in all Quebec colleges and universities.

Safe attachment to culture and community can in turn serve as a launching pad for various levels of individual and collective success (Dufour, 2016).

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 **To Cite this Report**
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> INSPIRING PRACTICE

Nunavik Sivunitsavut: Having self-confidence as an Inuk

John Abbott College has a long history of cooperation with First Peoples, including Inuit.¹ The college has worked in partnership with the Kativik School Board for over 20 years to support Inuit students from Nunavik.²

In 2015, four Nunavik regional organizations—the Kativik Regional Government, Makivik Corporation, the Kativik School Board, and the Avataq Cultural Institute—asked John Abbott College to help with the design and delivery of culturally relevant and safe education for Nunavik youth (see Key Concept in this report).

Nunavik Sivunitsavut means “Nunavik, our future” in Inuktitut. This postsecondary education program is designed to prepare Nunavik youth to become political and cultural leaders in the region.

It takes one year to complete and is the first postsecondary Inuit program in Quebec. The credit courses were developed to prepare Inuit youth to pursue postsecondary education and develop workplace skills relevant to positions in Nunavik institutions.

Since the fall of 2017, young people have been studying their history, language, culture, and land claims. This approach is known as “inuguniq,” an Inuit education process that targets human development in its entirety and is based on a commitment to the environment and the community (Kativik, 2018).

¹ The invariable term *Inuit* is used throughout this report, except in references where the original title has been retained. To learn more: [Inuit, Inuk \(Linguistic recommendation from the Translation Bureau\)](#)

² Nunavik is the territory where the some 12,090 Inuit in Quebec live. It covers the land north of the 55th parallel in Quebec, which is about one-third of the province. Nunavimmiut live in 14 villages along the coastlines of Ungava Bay, Hudson Strait, and Hudson Bay.



Vision and founding principles

The program is based on a similar project for Nunavut youth that took place in Ottawa more than 30 years ago. More than 500 Inuit students have had a Nunavut Sivuniksavut education, and many of them now hold key positions in their communities, where they help reinforce cultural consolidation.³

Building on the strengths of the program, Nunavik Sivunitsavut aims to reflect the reality of Inuit and help them better understand where they come from and who they are. This gives young people an opportunity to understand the current cultural, socio-economic, and political context of Nunavik. It is the regional organizations themselves that have developed the vision of what they consider to be culturally relevant education.



Source: Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (Kativik School Board) – YouTube

Nunavik Sivunitsavut’s vision is ultimately to promote *isummaniq*, namely autonomy for young people. This vision is based on four main principles:

- Community engagement. Students at Nunavik Sivunitsavut research the political and economic organizations of Nunavik in an effort to understand how the region functions in Quebec, Canada, and the world. Students also design

³To find out more, a survey was conducted among alumni: <https://www.nunavutsivuniksavut.ca/2017-alumni-survey>.

and carry out social innovation projects that will directly contribute to the development of their home communities.

- Cultural confidence. Nunavik Sivunitsavut focuses largely on the development of cultural awareness and practice. For example, living in Montreal provides the students with the distance necessary to reflect on what it means to be an Inuk from Nunavik. Students have the opportunity to engage with and practice their culture in new, profound ways. They gain self-confidence as an Inuk.
- Academic development. Students at Nunavik Sivunitsavut have the opportunity to hone their academic skills and improve their understanding of postsecondary education. In addition, many of these skills are in high demand in Nunavik.
- *Imminik Illinianiq* (Learning about oneself). Students at Nunavik Sivunitsavut learn about themselves and their potential. John Abbott and the regional organizations work toward creating a college experience that acts as a rite of passage for students to help them become fully contributing adults.

Countering isolation

Inuit youth who wish to pursue college studies face many barriers and challenges, including isolation and culture shock (see [The Issue](#) in this report).

Nunavik Sivunitsavut aims to create an atmosphere where young people can work together to achieve their academic goals and gain self-confidence in a culturally safe environment (see [Key Concept: Cultural safety: What is it?](#)).

While graduation may be one of the objectives of Nunavik Sivunitsavut students, the program mainly seeks to develop a sense of pride among Nunavimmiut youth. For physical education classes, for example, students spend two weeks in Nunavik immersed in the great outdoors. This course encourages the use of traditional tools to build shelters, enhancing ancestral knowledge.

To sum up, Nunavik Sivunitsavut helps students:

- explore their Inuit identity, their connections to Nunavik communities, and their collective history
- earn credits towards a college-level diploma in the future
- enjoy a positive, culturally safe urban experience in Montreal
- develop the skills Nunavik employers are looking for
- strengthen their sense of identity and pride and their leadership skills





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Further Information

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[John Abbott College – Nunavik Sivunitsavut](#)

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> INSPIRING PRACTICE

The Dawson College First Peoples' Initiative

The Dawson College First Peoples' Initiative is a group of faculty, staff, and students working to explore ways of indigenizing the college (for a definition of the indigenization process, see [The Issue](#) in this report). The group is open to anyone in the college community who wants to get involved in the indigenization of structures, instruction, and learning. Currently, the group is made up of a coordinator of Mohawk descent (Tiawenti:non Canadian); an academic advisor (Michele Pallett); a Journeys coordinator (Michelle Smith); a campus life and leadership officer (Billi Jo Poirier); a French teacher (Francesca Roy); an English teacher (Pauline Morel); and an assistant dean (Wolfgang Krotter).

Main objectives

The First Peoples' Initiative seeks to:

- ensure that Dawson is responding to the interests, experiences, goals, and concerns of Indigenous students
- bring Indigenous history, culture, knowledge, and issues to the forefront in all aspects of college life
- maintain a First Peoples' Centre
- promote Indigenous Studies at Dawson

To this end, the First Peoples team is working to develop an Indigenous Studies Certificate, which should be available to students in 2019. In the meantime, [a variety of courses](#) in Indigenous studies are available. They are grouped into three main categories related to First Peoples:

1. Courses that deal with Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in part or all of the course (e.g., the Anthropology of Indigenous North America course)
2. Courses that deal with Indigenous peoples outside of Canada (e.g., the Introduction to Geography course)



3. Courses that deal with topics related to Indigenous culture or issues (e.g., the course on canoeing)

Journeys is another program that helps the college achieve its objectives. It is designed to provide First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students with a welcoming, holistic, supportive, and culturally relevant environment.

Journeys offers a series of general education credit courses that combine Indigenous knowledge, culture, traditions, and pedagogical approaches with the academic knowledge and study skills necessary for success at the postsecondary level.

The general education courses are taught by instructors who are culturally aware and who work closely with Indigenous communities to ensure content and approaches are culturally relevant.

The theme, content, and learning strategies of Journeys courses are related, fostering a tight-knit learning community that brings students, teachers, support staff, and community representatives together. This integrated approach to learning also includes academic, cultural, and spiritual support, in close partnership with communities.

The French language issue

Another First Peoples' Initiative project shares the same objectives mentioned above, particularly in terms of academic success at the college level in Quebec. The "*Contenus autochtones - Pour les cours de français langue seconde (FLS) au collégial*" project aims to "promote the use of Aboriginal content in FSL classes at the college level by providing teachers with engaging learning materials and information to help them use these materials," (Dawson College, 2018).

To this end, French-language teachers Francesca Roy and Claude Nicou have developed a website with Aboriginal content that teachers can adapt and use in the classroom. Resources are divided into four categories:

- Levels (progressing from levels 1 to 4)
- Types of material (plays, poems, novels, etc.)



- Topics (languages, territories, women, etc.)
- Other resources (activities, literary analysis, etc.)

The material is generally based on literature or other works by First Peoples of Quebec. The [site](#) contains informative documents on a variety of topics as well as tools to help teachers present and use the materials and topics in the classroom.

The importance of the First Peoples' Centre

The First Peoples' Centre offers a variety of services, such as academic, extracurricular, and cultural support. Students can come to get help and to find a peaceful and culturally safe environment where they can learn, study, socialize, and be part of a community. Cultural activities for students include potluck dinners, sharing circles, festivals, traditional art, and more.

Presenting:
Onkwaká:rá

**Leanne
Betasamosake Simpson**

Friday, September 28, 2018
10:00 am // Room 5B.16

Join the Dawson College First Peoples' Centre and Peace Centre in an extraordinary year long experience wherein every month we will host a member of the Métis, Inuit and Indigenous Nations who will graciously share a story. To book a class for this series please contact Tiawent:non Canadian or Diana Rice.

Dr. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a renowned Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist, who has been widely recognized as one of the most compelling Indigenous voices of her generation. Her work breaks open the intersections between politics, story and song— bringing audiences into a rich and layered world of sound, light, and sovereign creativity.

Working for over a decade an independent scholar using Nishnaabeg intellectual practices and Indigenous land based education. She holds a PhD from the University of Manitoba, is currently a Distinguished Visiting Scholar in the Faculty of Arts at Ryerson University and faculty at the Dechinta Centre for Research & Learning in Denendeh.

Leanne is Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and a member of Alderville First Nation.

An example of a cultural event held in September 2018, co-organized by the Dawson College First Peoples' Centre.

In collaboration with Student Services, the Centre offers workshops and individual assistance with an emphasis on information literacy skills and basic writing. Students have access to a computer laboratory and a study area where they can work alone or in groups.

The Centre also works with elders from various communities to support learning in specific cultural contexts.



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Further Information

[FSL Aboriginal content – Dawson College](#)

[Dawson College First Peoples' Centre – Facebook page](#)

[First Peoples' Initiative – Dawson College](#)



> INSPIRING PRACTICE

UQAT: The Importance of Ties to Communities

Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT)¹ and Centre des Premières Nations de Nikanite – UQAC are pioneers in Quebec in terms of helping First Peoples students access higher education. They are both breaking new ground in 1) the services offered, 2) learning and the transmission of Aboriginal knowledge, and 3) co-management with communities.



Logo of the First Peoples Service – UQAT

¹UQAT has three campuses (Rouyn-Noranda, Val-d'Or, and Amos), four regional centers (Abitibi-Ouest, Témiscamingue, Mont-Laurier, Montreal), and two service points (Chibougamau and Lebel-sur-Quévillon).

A holistic approach

The three components, namely, First Peoples Services, the School of Indigenous Studies, and the model for joint management with communities, are all based on a holistic approach.

This approach is centered on individuals and their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs. It fosters harmony between the physical, spiritual, rational, and emotional aspects and gives them equal importance (Mark, 2012).

A circle, symbolizing the principle of harmony or balance between all aspects of a person's life, is often used to show that the individual, family, community, and world cannot be separated.

In this approach, humans must be in harmony with their physical and social environment if they want to live and thrive. An imbalance may prevent someone from reaching their full potential as a human being (*ibid.*).

First component: The First Peoples Service

The holistic approach requires a high level of versatility on the part of the professionals who help and support students during their time at university. The First Peoples Service team offers personalized services to all students on the Val-d'Or campus, but has also developed expertise that meets the specific academic, family, social, and cultural needs of First Peoples students in a culturally safe environment (see Key Concept in this report).



First Peoples building, UQAT, Val-d'Or

To this end, bilingual services have been developed, including an Aboriginal student life committee and a womens group where students can share real-life experiences, create a support network, and relieve the stress of studying, while doing traditional crafts with elders. Practitioners and professionals are there to listen and offer advice to students experiencing personal, family or other difficulties. They also provide personalized academic support. Gathering spaces specifically for First Peoples students are one of the most effective and appreciated ways to help them succeed across the board, with some students often describing these spaces as a “home away from home” (Dufour and Bousquet, 2015).

First Peoples students are also given referrals to services offered in Val-d’Or (housing, daycare, etc.). The holistic approach allows them to regain control of their lives, (re)discover balance, and consider their lives as a whole.

Moreover, most cultural activities are organized through collaboration and partnership with communities. By maintaining relationships with neighboring communities and Aboriginal organizations, First People’s issues, realities, and cultures can be better understood and analyzed.

Second component: School of Indigenous Studies

With the creation of the School of Indigenous Studies (SIS) in June 2016, UQAT undertook to develop programs that take First People’s specific approaches to learning and knowledge transmission into account. It is currently the only university department in Quebec to consider Aboriginal studies from a holistic perspective.

One of the things discussed before the school was created was that universities often deal with Aboriginal issues in anthropology or ethnology programs for non-Aboriginal students learning about First Nations or, on the other hand, in programs offered exclusively to First Nations students (Asselin cited by Venne, 2016; SIS Action Plan, 2018).

UQAT wanted these two groups to coexist and develop knowledge jointly. The School also seeks to offer support and expertise to departments and services so they can integrate First People’s values and realities into the courses offered (UQAT, 2018). Professors, lecturers, and staff from the School of Indigenous Studies and the First Peoples Service approach academic success from a holistic perspective.



By affirming the identity of First Peoples and excluding no one, holistic programs and services can help First Peoples regain control of their lives and recover balance (Mark, 2012).

Outcome of a Synergy project

The goal of a 2015 project called *Cégep-University Synergy* was to equip faculty and student services employees at UQAT and the Abitibi-Témiscamingue Cégep with effective strategies for teaching First Peoples students (Bérubé and Cornellier, 2016).

Data collected from 36 professors, instructors, and lecturers was used to identify strategies they had implemented successfully with Aboriginal students. The 32 student participants described their realities and challenges, shared their strategies for success, and expressed their needs (*ibid.*)

Instructors mentioned the need to create more opportunities for discussion and sharing, which UQAT has undertaken to address by developing web tools. Video clips were created and distributed to the UQAT community for the purpose of:

- providing teachers and future teachers of First Nations students at the college and university levels with educational and awareness tools;
- providing a tool for sharing winning pedagogical practices and teaching strategies, for the benefit of First Nations students and to support their success;
- providing a tool to raise awareness of interculturality and the reality of First Nations students at the postsecondary level;
- presenting the services offered by the Abitibi-Témiscamingue Cégep and UQAT.

The videos cover various topics, including:

- First Peoples students and their realities: their history, challenges, and adaptation to a new environment and to the pace and demands of postsecondary education;
- pedagogical practices: approach and availability, winning strategies, learning and its challenges (particularly in terms of language), concept maps;
- interculturality: the perception of First Peoples students' education, the importance of family and community, the sense of belonging, and grieving (Bérubé and Cornellier, 2016).



The UQAT team is currently planning to distribute the videos more widely so teachers and practitioners in Quebec can benefit from this valuable tool and better understand, help, and support their First Peoples students.

Third component: the model for co-management with Inuit communities²

Since 1984, UQAT’s Educational Sciences Teaching and Research Unit has partnered with the Inuit³ communities of Ivujivik and Puvirnituk in Nunavik. The partnership is based on a co-management approach to programs⁴ that has become a model for maintaining a lasting relationship with these communities.

Today, this model is being used to help design, revise, and manage other programs offered by UQAT to Aboriginal communities. The goal is to:

- implement a training program centered on the needs of students and teachers in communities and tailored to the northern environment and culture (e.g., Inuit, Cree, Atikamekw, etc.);
- ensure that cultural safety (see [Key Concept](#) in this report) is incorporated into program management;
- promote the creation of groups and bring education stakeholders out of isolation, particularly in northern areas.

Implementation of the UQAT model in the communities of Ivujivik and Puvirnituk includes a program co-management committee to make sure activities for training Inuit teachers are carried out properly. The committee is composed of three members from the Ivujivik community, three from the Puvirnituk community, and three from UQAT. Committee meetings deal with the “co-design,” “co-revision,” and “co-management” of programs.

Inuit “colleagues” work with UQAT professors to verify that course content is relevant to students. This helps ensure respect for students’ culture and environment.

² The third component was co-developed with Vincent Rousson, director of UQAT’s Val-d’Or campus.

³ The invariable term *Inuit* is used throughout this report, except in references where the original title has been retained. To learn more: [Inuit, Inuk \(Linguistic recommendation from the Translation Bureau\)](#)

⁴ For example, the Certificate of Development of Teaching Practice in the North, the Certificate of Preschool and Primary Education in the North II, and the Certificate of Preschool and Primary Education in the North.



The committee holds monthly meetings by videoconference or telephone as well as in-person meetings lasting two days, twice a year. Committee members are in regular contact between these meetings.

Courses are taught by a team made up of a teacher (or lecturer) working with an Inuit co-teacher. The languages of instruction are Ivujivik and Puvirnituk, English, Inuktitut, and, increasingly, French. Students from these communities are thus receiving a bicultural and trilingual education.

This model requires active participation from UQAT professors, lecturers, and professional and support staff. URFDEMIA⁵ employees are front-line players in academic management, serving as facilitators between students and administrative services.

Outcome

Under this 35-year-old partnership, 28 students have graduated from the Certificate of Development of Teaching Practice in the North program and 12 have graduated with a Certificate of Teaching in Preschool and Primary Education in the North II.

The success of this UQAT co-management model depends on the recognition of the equal status and interdependence of both groups of partners, namely Inuit (or other Aboriginal partners) and university instructors (regular professors and lecturers).

Graduates are role models for the development of their communities, as evidenced when Siaja Mark Mangiuk, a UQAT graduate and member of the teacher training programs co-management group, won the prestigious 2017 Indspire 2017 “Guiding the Journey” award.⁶ This partnership has also supported educational projects in communities.



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⁵ The Unit for Research, Training and Development in Education in Inuit and First Nations Contexts (URFDEMIA) supports a variety of community-based education projects. Research professors lead teaching, research, and development activities targeting the school curriculum, teacher training, language contact, literacy development, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Aboriginal contexts.

⁶ Indigenous Educator award in the Culture, Language, and Traditions category.





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