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INNU CULTURE RECOGNITION IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*The passage from yesterday to tomorrow /
becomes today /
the unique word / of my sister/ the Earth.
Only thunder absolves / a life lived.
"The North Calls Me"*
Joséphine Bacon, Innu Poet

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Youth from Aboriginal communities are experiencing a loss of identity (Poirier, 2009), since all too often, their schools are copies of Quebec public schools with values and ways of doing things not reflecting theirs. According to Canck (2008), this results in low perseverance and completion rates. It then becomes difficult for a child to feel integrated in both his home community and in the mainstream Western society. For Poirier (2009), young Aboriginals on reserves are subject to a double stigma: the loss of traditional transfer of knowledge modes and the high rate of school failure hampering their integration into the labour market. However, this observation on failure rates can partly be related to educational or pedagogical approaches used. If academic success is defined as "the way students develop their "being in the world" while learning, socializing, and by obtaining qualifications" (Boyer & Guillemette, 2015, p. 37), it also results from the linkage between social expectations and practices, and this, holistically to live and participate actively within their community (Picard, 2012).

Battiste (2002) and Kanu (2007) emphasize the importance of the relation between autochthonous cultural educational traditions and contemporary

educational practices. Kanu (2007) adds that school results are better when the program and the teaching-learning process become compatible with the students' own culture and socialization concepts. According to Castellano (2014), it seems that linkage of cultural and educational practices becomes an important issue to foster Aboriginal youth success. Then, thought must be given to the contribution of Aboriginal cultural dimensions within our schools.

Johnny-Pilot Elementary School is located in the Innu community of Uashat mak Mani Utenam. The clientele is steadily increasing and we find 258 students and a team of 30 staff members of which 50% are Innu and are teachers (42%): four at the preschool level, one who teaches the Innu language, and three at the elementary level.

Considering each Innu's footprint within his community, we find it important for us to take ownership of the words below sometimes using "I", sometimes "we".

As principal of an Innu school, I wonder specifically about the place of the cultural component in the school that I manage. How to support success and perseverance of young Innus from my school to offer them the means to master the skills valued by the majority society in a contemporary context while providing the means to participate in the maintenance, enhan-



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The process implementation requires a close collaboration with the entire staff from the Johnny-Pilot School. A school participatory council (SPC), consisting of representatives of each preschool and elementary cycle and the direction, already existed within the school. The SPC mandate is to reflect on the school's educational and teaching practices¹, it became a privileged venue for sharing and thinking. From a consultation process and with SPC members' openness on this project, we thought about the place of Innu culture in our school. To do this, we questioned the way to meet the learning profiles of students attending our environment. We made an inventory of our current cultural practices while identifying those that we would like to see emerge. Finally, we characterized the desired practices as whether they are Innu educational practices, *Innu Aitun*, or pedagogical practices in response

to student profiles. Table 1 shows some examples of the benefits of this approach for each cycle.

The inventory of *Innu Aitun* practices and of pedagogical practices was formulated and integrated into the institution's success plan according to three axes and converted into objectives:

Axis 1: Clientele knowledge and pedagogical interventions

Objective: Adapting pedagogical interventions of teaching staff based on specific clientele characteristics.

Axis 5: School retention

Objective: To develop and implement specific ways to promote Innu identity.

Axis 6: Interdependence

Objective: Realize and accept that we all need each other.

CHART 1 : Inventory of our current cultural practices and those that are plausible

EXAMPLES OF WHAT WE ARE ALREADY DOING		
Cultural Week, <i>Shipit</i> outings, Innu themes during discussions or various work, Innu music, alphabet with cultural images, etc.		
EXAMPLES OF WHAT WE COULD DO		
Cycles	Pedagogical Practices	Educational Practices <i>Innu Aitun</i>
Preschool	Pre-reading and pre-writing in Innu language in preschool / exchanges with CAA (<i>Innu Aimun</i>)	Meetings with Elders and artists for knowledge transmission, Programming schedule of cultural activities, Activities promoting the sense of belonging at school and in the community (traditional meals, Innu music streaming), Transmission of Innu values (respect, sharing, interdependence, etc.), Cultural activities with staff for transmission to students
1 st cycle	Daily usage of simple Innu words (keyword posters)	
	Reading and writing situations dealing with Innu culture (keywords, vocabulary word association, etc.)	
2 nd cycle	Activities on the history of Uashat (for example, visit to the old post)	
	Use of second language teaching approach	
3 rd cycle	Communication in Innu language as soon as possible	
	Activities and sports competitions imbued with Innu culture	

