The aims of this qualitative exploratory study is to describe, in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills, intercultural competence as perceived by seven directorates of public educational institutions in Abitibi-Témiscamingue to better determine their relation to learners and autochthonous cultures. A description of the study will follow a brief overview of the context and research objective definitions. Development prospects will then be proposed.

CONTEXT

Training for development of intercultural competence and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures is limited in school administration programs in Quebec. In 1998, the Quebec Ministry of Education published *École d’avenir: Policy of School Integration and Intercultural Education* (1998a) and the *Plan of Action for Educational Integration and intercultural Education* (1998b) to support school actors in the development of intercultural competence during educational activities. It targeted the training of all staff in educational institutions to ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious diversity and socialization of learners. In 2001, this ministry published the *Training Program for Quebec Schools* and proposed to incorporate a cultural dimension into the teaching/learning by exploiting significant cultural references drawn from societies of yesterday and today, here and elsewhere (2001). It is a fact that Aboriginal cultures are part of the cultural references drawn from societies here. Yet according to our analysis, it seems that intercultural education and Aboriginal cultural dimension is not clearly identified in the repository of the ten professional skills he Training in the Administration of an Educational Institution. Orientations and Professional Competencies ten professional skills repository, published 2008 for the school administration training offered in Quebec universities (Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec, 2008).

Furthermore, since the 1970s, the National Indian Brotherhood claims an educational system for the transmission of Aboriginal languages and cultures to the new generation to promote the inclusion and academic success of the latter (1972).

In 2010–2011, 1114 Aboriginal students were attending elementary and secondary schools in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region (Action Réussite, 2013). Of these, 801 were attending community schools. The region has six schools located in the Pikogan, Winneway, Kitcisakik, Timiskaming, and Lac-Simon communities; there are two in Lac-Simon (Observatoire de l’Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2012). The 313 other students were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools of the Quebec school network and integrated into regular clientele statistics (Action Réussite, 2013). These educational institutions of the Quebec school system are managed by non-Native administrators. Among these, many leave office because of a lack of knowledge on Aboriginal cultures and difficulties experienced (Secrétariat des commissions de l’Assemblée nationale du Québec, 2007). However, Sioui (2012) showed that Aboriginal students
succeed in school when their culture reflects in educational activities. Ghosh (2002) explains that abandonment was largely due to a lack of training in intercultural competence of educational institution administrators and, Gollnick and Chinn (2013), to a historical and cultural misconception on the learners’ part.

**OBJECTIVE**

This exploratory qualitative research has an objective: to describe, in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills, intercultural competence as perceived by seven public school administrations (elementary, secondary, adult, and vocational) in Abitibi-Temiscamingue to better determine their relation to learners and Aboriginal cultures.

For the Conseil de l’Europe, the main organization defending human rights on the European continent, universities need to strengthen intercultural dialogue and define their universality through the formation of “intercultural intellectuals” (2011). From this study will result two new courses to the DESS (diplôme d’études supérieures et spécialisées) program in educational administration at the Université du Québec in Abitibi-Temiscamingue (UQAT): one course in intercultural management and inclusion of diversity in an educational institution, and another on managing schools in an Aboriginal context. As a matter of fact, as mentioned previously, intercultural competence and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures development is limited with regard to training and in the field of research in educational administration in Quebec. The scientific relevance of this research lies in the production of knowledge to fill, in part, these weaknesses.
THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL SUPPORT

Theoretically, this research rests on the inclusive approach. This approach, used in the field of social and special education for years, now includes ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. According to it, school actors must understand the power relationships between majority and minority groups, which interact to generate discriminatory situations within the schools; then, they can take into account environmental, historical, familial, cultural and emotional factors affecting learning, identity, or the educational success of learners from minority groups (Potvin, 2013).

Contextually, intercultural competence is defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills” (Deardorff, 2006). It basically refers to interaction with people from different cultures in order to achieve mutual positive results. The development of intercultural competence facilitates relations between people of various backgrounds and cultures within heterogeneous groups, which must all learn to live together in peace (UNESCO, 2009).

Given the increasing diversity of the Quebec population and the province’s Aboriginal context, school administrators can benefit greatly from a course in intercultural competence (Gélinas-Proulx, 2014) and Aboriginal cultures. For this reason, Potvin (2013) defines intercultural competence as knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for school actors to work in a context of ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. According to the author, it is also these actors’ ability to acknowledge learners and educational community members as bearers of cultures and make the latter work for the benefit of these learners’ academic success. Intercultural competence encompasses government policies and school practices as it does values and behaviours of school actors.

As part of this research, multiple components are identified: conceptual knowledge (definition of intercultural, knowledge of politics and government documents on this) and cultural (definition of Aboriginal cultures, knowledge of politics, and government documents on this); openness attitudes towards learners and towards Aboriginal cultures, and openness to training in intercultural competence and Aboriginal cultures; skills definition of intercultural competence, self-assessment of one’s own sense of efficacy to develop intercultural competence and intercultural educational leadership practice (listening to Aboriginal learners, interaction with Aboriginal communities parents).

In 2009, to address the growing dropout rate of Aboriginal learners, the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) introduced the Holistic Model to Lifelong Learning for First Nations including several areas of knowledge: the human world, territory, language, traditions and cultures, and spirituality.

It recommends inclusion practices and the development of cultural competence in educational environments to meet individual and collective needs of Aboriginal learners. Despite these arguments, Lefevre-Radelli (2014) note that autochthonous organizations are still accusing government authorities in Quebec of promoting an educational system with an assimilationist agenda.

Moreover, in their 2010 study from eight school administrations outside Montreal on ethnocultural and intercultural school management practices, Boucharmama and Tardif (2012) conclude that these practices remain scattered and individual without pursuing an overall policy, although they tend to promote learner success.

However, no studies on these practices for Aboriginal learners exist in Quebec. In addition, studies conclude that Quebec school principals are generally not equipped to provide cultural management or to work in an ethnocultural context (Fall 2010).
STUDY DESCRIPTION

This type of interpretative qualitative research aims at understanding the meaning given by school administrations to intercultural competence based on their past management experience in institutions welcoming Aboriginal learners. It is also descriptive, since we want to explain the phenomenon under study, exploratory and pilot, since intercultural competence of public educational institution directions pertaining to Aboriginal cultures is not documented for learning purposes and in the field of research in educational administration in Quebec.

A semi-structured interview of one hour and thirty minutes was performed with each of the seven administrations previously mentioned: two from an elementary school, three from a secondary school, one from adult education, and one from vocational training, all from a school board in Abitibi-Temiscamingue. Regarding the construction of parts of the interview guide, intercultural competence components defined in the theoretical and conceptual support already mentioned have been operationalized. The participants (four women and three men) were chosen for their capacity to review intercultural competence through their field experience in managing institutions for Aboriginal learners. It is therefore a convenience sampling. The interviews were conducted from February 15 to April 30, 2016. They were recorded and transcribed in full, in order to facilitate a systematic and reliable analysis. The researcher used the thematic content analysis methods to bring out the respondents’ perceptions (Boutin, 2007). Using NVivo software has simplified the consolidation and analysis of some data.

According to preliminary data, which are limited to knowledge, there seems to be a variety of definitions of intercultural provided by the respondents: the

Figure 2: Holistic model to lifelong learning for First Nations
knowledge of others, communication with others, respect for the values and beliefs of others, people's and foreign cultures' approval, the ability to practise one's profession in a cultural diversity. There was consensus on the importance of intercultural competence in education; however, respondents gave a clear answer about their low awareness of politics and government documents on interculture in Quebec. In Quebec and elsewhere in Canada and around the world, educational institutions face the need to take into account ethnocultural, linguistic and religious diversity in their objectives and in their educational practices. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Québec intends, through its policy, to promote this consideration by highlighting the principles and guidelines for the successful integration of students from other cultures in Quebec schools and Quebec society, and for the appropriate education of all learners to intercultural relations. In their definition of Aboriginal cultures, the seven respondents refer to land, ancestral knowledge, oral tradition, spirituality, Elders, animals, communities, history, Aboriginal values and identity.

**CONCLUSION AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The objectives of this article were to present the progress of an interpretative qualitative research on the perception of intercultural competence of seven administrations of public educational institutions welcoming Aboriginal learners in Abitibi-Temiscamingue. Preliminary results inspire a broader reflection and a call to action. Training in school administration could further draw a substantial and broad corpus of knowledge highlighting cultural aspects of management in Aboriginal contexts. Although the field of this research confines to one single school board, it does not permit a generalization of the outcomes of the study, early results suggest the importance of raising awareness and train actors on the issue, since they remain those responsible to ensure the success and well-being of all students, whether they are Natives or non-Natives. Intercultural competence development is therefore, in our view, an important issue in any school administration training. ▶️
REFERENCES


