

# INTRODUCTION



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It is under the sign of spirituality that was launched the third edition of the Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples. Mr. Oney Maher, President of the *Cercle des sages de la nation huronne-wendate* and host of the event, introduced participants to a purification ritual of burning sage and dispersing the smoke in the room with an eagle feather, "the Creator's messenger bird," he told us. He added that he was purifying our hearts and minds and removing the negative energies from our gathering. This teaching will guide our discussions, through sharing and mutual aid. The tone was set. The theme of the Convention could not be better introduced: *Gathering for success*. The cultural heterogeneity of the participants was obvious, and all Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors of the field of education came to discuss and reflect on the academic success conditions of First Peoples youth.

But what is the meaning of "succeeding" for a First Peoples child in today's school reality? Since Indigenous people began to take charge of their formal education system, a period historically attested by the application initiating proceedings for the "Indian Control of Indian Education" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), one can state with certainty that a fundamental movement has been initiated. Despite coordination and cohesion difficulties in some communities, many of them relating to financial issues, First Nations manage most of their elementary and secondary schools and control their curricula. Teaching material adapted to the historical and cultural reality of the First Peoples is increasing and well-trained Indigenous teachers are emerging in large numbers from Quebec universities (Maheux and Gauthier, 2013). Statistically speaking, it is obvious that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in terms of academic success and perseverance remains significant at all levels of education. However, as rightly stated by Bergeron and Rioux (2007): "Academic success (among Indigenous people) is not solely measured by a score. [...] It is defined more by parents, young people and teachers, in terms of perseverance, ability to make enough effort to obtain passing grades. The notion of perseverance becomes an important dimension of academic success [...] When the matter of discussion is the educational situation of Indigenous people, the accounting vision of success must be set aside for a holistic approach" (p. 12). It is precisely "a holistic approach to evaluating success" that the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) proposes in *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*. More and more researchers involved with Indigenous people are adopting this perspective (Commission de l'éducation du Québec, 2007; Montgomery, Minville, Winterowd, Jeffries, & Baysden, 2000; Vinette, 1996; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998; Gauthier, 2005). According to them, the fundamental change that is occurring in the academic achievement of Indigenous youth is in the transformation of their relationship to school, to formal education—a relationship that has become much more positive, less reactive, less resistive.

It is in the spirit of incitement to governance and of the progress observed, but also because of important challenges, that the Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples was created and will soon be in its fourth edition. Let us remember that the first edition of the Convention in 2014 was organized from a general interest, which made it possible to cover a wide variety of fields and to realize the extent to which this event was expected among the actors involved directly and indirectly in First Peoples' education. The second edition, in 2015, in response to the suggestion of several participants, focused on field concerns and invited to discuss on *What Is Done in Schools*. The resulting spirit of collaboration inspired the choice of the theme of the next edition, precisely the subject of this journal - *Gathering for Success* - which, moreover, was most appropriately part of the current social movement emerging as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accordingly, this issue of the eponymous journal attempts to transpose as faithfully as possible, in a style accessible to all, the content of activities and presentations held during the third edition of the Convention.

In concrete terms, elements covering a wide spectrum of fields, are found in four sections. Firstly, most of the journal renders the content of the various workshops and presentations featured at the Convention, with topics ranging from the integration of cultural content into educational materials to the specificities of second-language acquisition, and the implementation of strategies promoting the First Peoples' holistic learning model. These articles are presented into three subsections: teaching practices, support practices, and collaborative practices. There is also the *Report on School Perseverance*, which presents the recipients for the 2017-2018 School Perseverance Scholarships, while highlighting their determination, resilience and willpower. In addition, a new section

entitled *Resources to Discover* will feature many tools and resources, presented during the Convention, that can be used to teach or work with Indigenous learners. Finally, two reports on institutional initiatives are presented: one concerning the pedagogical and identity scope of activities and resources implemented by the Kiuna Institution, and the other highlighting the development potential of collaborative initiatives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions, in this case the *Centre régional d'éducation pour adultes de Uashat* and the *Centre de formation professionnelle du Fjord*.

We hope that this journal reflects both the great synergy that has developed throughout the third edition of the Convention and that there is now greater awareness on the fact that Indigenous education is everyone's responsibility. The fundamental purpose of this publication is to share best practices and winning local initiatives with the largest number of actors in all spheres.

The growing popularity of the Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples among Indigenous education actors is a clear indication of its importance. It is now an event that is rooted in time. As proof, the fourth edition, which will be held in October 16-18, 2019, at the Palais des congrès in Montreal, is already under preparation. An event not to be missed!

Winds of change are blowing on Indigenous education and the articles in this journal bear witness to this.

Allow yourself to be inspired!

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