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CULTURAL SECURITY IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE KIUNA INSTITUTION

Can cultural adaptation of a curriculum and post-secondary services contribute to the anchoring of identity of First Nations students? If so, can this anchoring bolster post-secondary perseverance and academic success?

Research conducted as part of my Master's project¹ tends to show that the development of culturally appropriate educational spaces promotes retention and post-secondary achievement of First Nations students in Quebec. The thesis resulting therefrom examines two existing formulas: 1) hospitality and support services adapted within provincial post-secondary institutions; 2) customized post-secondary programs and services offered by an institution affiliated with and for First Nations. The analysis of the first formula was accomplished following a field research conducted between 2013 and 2015² from various specialized educational bodies³. The second formula, this article's main object of research, was examined through the testimonies of eight students or graduates and six members of the Kiuna Institution staff. Qualitative data from individual interviews and sharing circles met the quantitative results gathered through a written questionnaire, developed in collaboration with Université de Montréal's Jeunes autochtones du Projet SEUR team⁴. 25 of the 33 students of the Institute's Human Sciences, First Nation Stream program's French Cohort and nearly sixty adult Aboriginal students from the Huron-Wendat *Centre de développement de la formation et de la main-d'œuvre* (CDFM) or participants in the Project SEUR university studies familiarization visit participated (n=83). The purpose of this article is to draw a portrait of the impact of introducing *cultural security* at the

heart of the curriculum and post-secondary services, based specifically on the Kiuna Institution model.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

What do we mean by cultural security in academia? In the late 1980s, a nurse and Maori educator from New Zealand, Irihapeti Ramsden, developed the concept in response to marginalization and discrimination experienced by the indigenous people in the non-indigenous health systems (Blanchet, Garneau & Pepin, 2012). While some criticize the concept's ambiguity and the interpretative nature, we define it here as the result of a potential offer of services and programs developed in respect and recognition of historical, cultural, socioeconomic, political, and epistemological determinants of target populations (Dufour, 2015). The establishment of a certain cultural security within post-secondary institutions not only requires the creation and implementation of culturally sensitive measures in the framework of concerted action; we must also consider the experience and response of students in order to evaluate its effectiveness (Colomb, 2012).

The vast majority (71%) of students who answered our survey shows considerable interest in post-secondary education (Dufour, 2015). This data echoes the ratio obtained by the Survey of First Nations Peoples Living On-Reserve (EKOS, 2006) which estimated, over 10 years ago, that 70% of First Nations communities' youth aspired to post-graduation. Yet, less than 19% of the Aboriginal population aged from 25 to 34 years-old in Quebec will get at least a col-

lege degree (Canada, 2008). Numerous obstacles to Aboriginal graduation are documented in the literature. However, the fear of not succeeding is the main obstacle mentioned by over half of respondents (see table below, data derived from Dufour, 2015)⁵.

This finding comes as no surprise. Many participants stressed that post-secondary education, more specifically university studies, project an image of inaccessibility. Those from the Kiuna Institution, for their part, seem to have a confidence level twofold higher than that of their counterparts in terms of their academic and professional success. This analysis, which is not solely founded on quantitative basis, nevertheless appears reinforced by the testimonies collected. Thus, if we subtract the answers provided by the 25 Kiuna students, we find that the proportion of Aboriginal students who identified fear of failing as a potential obstacle to success reaches a comfortable majority of 68%. However, students surveyed selected components that can contribute to their post-secondary success, such as personal motivation, financial assistance, the idea of being part of the betterment of their community, etc. A certain number of them correspond to particular cultural security criteria within the post-secondary project. Participants generally aspire to a school environment that recognizes their special needs and schooling that takes greater account of the role and contributions of autochthonous peoples from yesterday to today. These results agree with those published by Joncas (2013) whereby a

substantial proportion of persevering academics participating in his study at the *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi* (UQAC) were in favour of: 1) attending a post-secondary institution created by and for native people; 2) benefiting from more opportunities and networking spaces with other Aboriginal students of the university (2013, p. 153). In recent years, Hospitality and support services, as well as autochthonous curriculum or customized to the needs of communities, have been growing in demand in CEGEPs and Quebec universities. Now, the Kiuna Institution remains to this day the only Quebec post-secondary⁶ institution designed by and for First Nations.

KIUNA INSTITUTION: "A SCHOOL MADE FOR US"⁷

Kiuna Institution presents curricula and teaching approaches adapted to the cultures and realities of First Nations. The bilingual Human Sciences-First Nation Stream program in which were registered, in 2014, 51 Atikamekw, Innu and Mohawk students, but also Huron-Wendats, Abenakis, Anicinabes, Crees, Maliseets and others, leads to a college diploma issued by the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* (MEES). It fosters a secure attachment through the exploration of three key themes: identity, community, and society. Cultural security therefore irrigates all aspects of the post-secondary education project.

ANTICIPATED OBSTACLES (%)



