

A space for the co-construction and sharing of Indigenization methods

1. Contextualising the creation of this space

The engagement of Indigenous education at Collège Ahuntsic is not a novelty. In fact, in August 1974, our institution aligned itself with Collège Manitu¹ (1973-1976), a post-secondary institution dedicated to the protection, the valorisation and the reappropriation of Indigenous cultures.

The experience of recent years and the skills developed through projects promoting the Indigenization of Collège Ahuntsic² have guided our institution towards an acute awareness of the need and the necessity to continue along this path. As a result of this reflection and of the work accomplished, as of January 2021 we have implemented a centre for documentation and for the sharing of Indigenization methods in education. This space will be co-constructed together with the Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) collaborators who have walked this path beside us since the beginning, along with those who have only recently joined us for this institutional project. Strengthened by the combined skills of its Indigenous collaborators, by the presence of an Indigenous Student Life Facilitator, as well as its diverse, inclusive, equitable service and the support of executive management, this sustained process of Indigenizing Collège Ahuntsic is aligned with our commitment to shed light on the incredible diversity of our student body. This space is therefore intrinsic to the approach through which we are creating and maintaining a responsible and compassionate environment.

Indigenization is not theoretical, nor is it exclusory. At Collège Ahuntsic, the process we engage with is guided by our Indigenous partners. As we wish for this process to be active, flexible and grounded in the realities within which we can position ourselves, we have chosen to adopt a vision that is willfully open to the concept of Indigenization, all the while respecting its unique character.

To Indigenize is to hand a pedagogical, cultural or linguistic territory back to the learner- a territory that has long been occupied by an oppressive system whose repercussions are perhaps unconsciously but nonetheless damaging to certain populations. The spirit of Indigenization at Collège Ahuntsic could not therefore be understood as completely independent of these colonial foundations. We have spent many years exploring the intentions that guide the

¹ Dufour, Emanuelle (2017) "Du Collège Manitu de La Macaza à l'Institution Kiuna d'Odanak : la genèse des établissements postsecondaires par et pour les Premières Nations au Québec". *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 70, no. 4. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/haf/2017-v70-n4-haf03137/1040572ar/>

² Some examples: *Indigenous Exchange Opiticiwan*, an immersive community visit (since 2009), official engagement and institutional investment in the development of the Indigenization process (since 2017), updating of the name and logo of the Collège's sports teams (2018-2021), the presence of an Indigenous Student Life Facilitator (since 2019), *Nikickotatowin* - intercultural gatherings (2015-2019), hosting Cultural Safety Day for First Nations and Inuit college students, organised by the Fédération des cégeps (May 15th 2019).

process of addressing delicate questions in relation to how we wish to actively participate in a movement towards Indigenization, and, in a larger sense, towards decolonization.

How must we avoid the colonial reflex to take the place of Indigenous peoples as we work through this process, knowing that only those who are part of those communities can lend any true legitimacy to the process itself? No path towards Indigenization can be travelled without this. With this in mind, what roles and positions should be occupied by individuals and organisations that identify as allies? How are we to Indigenize if we, ourselves, have benefitted from this colonial heritage? As non-Indigenous descendants of settlers, do we even have the right to be on this path? And if we choose this path, how do we address the snares and blindspots along the way? In other words, how can we avoid simply being beneficiaries of this system who have found a 'cause'?

The Indigenization of the education system is likely to take the shape of and will generally be embodied by transformations that implicate a willful and conscious distancing from the practices of an inherited colonial past- practices that tend to be invisible to the eyes of groups and individuals that are privileged by that system. The process seeks an understanding and an integration of concepts, requires cohesion and aspires to make sustainable systemic improvements. At the core of this approach, Indigenization is above all an introspective and relational movement that seeks the progressive transformation of our educational spaces.

This document serves to define the main motivations and mile-markers of this institutional process.

2. Towards a better understanding of colonial heritage

In Quebec, our social, cultural, political, financial and educational structures are built upon the foundation of the colonization of Indigenous peoples. To recognize the failures of an educational system that feeds on secular inequities, within which many voices, including those of Indigenous people, are unheard, is to acknowledge the injustice perpetuated by that system, that there is much room for improvement and to accept the existence of a systemic racism in the ways in which it manifests itself. In order to understand what Indigenization comprises, especially in our participation as a non-Indigenous institution, it is of primary importance to us to expose and address, in the most honest way possible, the colonial remains that have become systemic.

At Collège Ahuntsic, we believe in the benefits of the careful use of the term “Indigenizing” so that our actions and their breadth are represented in such a way that is honest and just.³ As this term allows for considerable freedom of interpretation and application, we have also chosen to

³ Sheoran Appleton, Nayantara (2019) *Do Not 'Decolonize' . . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding*. “Critical Ethnic Studies – University of Minnesota Press” <http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/blog/2019/1/21/do-not-decolonize-if-you-are-not-decolonizing-alternate-language-to-navigate-desires-for-progressive-academia-6y5sg> [accessed December 28th 2020]

use it to illustrate the actions and initiatives that pave the way to Indigenization, all the while remaining realistic, humble and invested in the needs and realities of the Indigenous people that accompany us on this journey.

What follows are some examples of Indigenization at work in the context of education:

- Diversifying course content and gradually moving beyond the literary canon;
- Taking stock of the ways in which the knowledge that we choose to teach has been constructed;
- De-centering that knowledge in a cultural context;
- Interrogating the hierarchies to which we are accustomed;
- Minimizing the importance of certain perspectives in favor of magnifying others

It is important to note that currently, there are no non-Indigenous educational institutions that are truly Indigenized, and thus no examples upon which we can base and inform our actions.

Therefore, it may not be entirely possible to completely Indigenize CEGEPs and universities, but we believe that, through our actions and resources, we can support our Indigenous partners as they work to achieve this.

3. The benefits of creating a centre of this kind, rooted within a CEGEP

The implementation of such a space is made possible by the relatively flexible structures and evolutionary environments that constitute collegial teaching institutions. Over the course of the next few years, Collège Ahuntsic looks to achieve the following objectives:

- **To offer** a space within which connections can be created, developed, perpetuated and reinforced, by offering concrete and diverse opportunities for engagement and exchange;
- **To initiate, support and accompany** the development of viable collaborative projects in co-construction with Indigenous partners, and to develop resources that can be provided to non-Indigenous organizations that wish to familiarise themselves with or take steps towards Indigenization;
- **To nurture** knowledge and research, and **to document and share** the outcome of this process with other organizations and institutions.

Given that Indigenization constitutes a process rather than a means to an end, the overall goal of the implementation of this space is bifurcated, and grounded in an individual and collective⁴ reflexivity for both students and staff:

- To achieve increased cultural safety through the development and refinement of our consciousness, our sensitivity and our cultural awareness;
- To deploy an enhanced cultural intelligence across our institution.

The need for cultural safety implicitly evokes a state of cultural insecurity that is experienced by members of marginalised groups.⁵ Aside from theoretical knowledge transmission and proficiency, the main role of non-Indigenous allies regarding Indigenous cultural safety⁶ would concentrate on the adoption of attitudes that encourage respect and introspection, and on guiding the transformation of practices. We also believe that this awareness and these concerted actions present a transversal opportunity to enrich pedagogical approaches and methods that are aimed at the student population in all its diversity, allowing for deeper roots in a decolonial perspective. Furthermore, regardless of the size of the Indigenous student population in any given institution, a culturally sensitive and aware environment should be intrinsic to the educational ecosystem.⁷

Cultural intelligence⁸ is characterised by the measurable capacity of an individual to navigate the subtleties of the human cultural environments that make up an educational space like a CEGEP, and to acknowledge, modestly, and with clarity, the existence of power relations that affect these spaces and that are, at times, the origin of resistance to certain concepts. Cultural intelligence is therefore elemental to the reinvention of our ways of doing. In some ways, we can understand cultural intelligence as the fruit of a relationship between social and cultural anthropology and management sciences.

In order to achieve this, to learn from this journey and to engage the transfer of these skills to other collegial institutions, it appears essential to work with our Indigenous partners to define what constitutes a successful collaboration, as well as to reinforce our common bases. To do so, we will determine our 'territories', we will accept that we must adjust our rapport when deadlines loom, and to reflect the culture of the results, we will dispatch the necessary resources to

⁴ Dufour, Emanuelle [forthcoming] "Des histoires à raconter : d'Ani Kuni à Kiuna. Les mémoires graphiques en tant qu'outils de rencontre réflexive et conversationnelle avec les réalités autochtones et allochtones du Québec, Thesis, Montréal, Université de Montréal, Doctorat en éducation par les arts et anthropologie.

⁵ Lefevre Radelli, Léa (2019). "L'expérience des étudiants autochtones à l'université : racisme systémique, stratégies d'adaptation et espoir de changement social" Thesis. Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, Doctorate in Science of Religion.

⁶ CAPRES (2018). *Sécurisation culturelle*. "Étudiants des Premiers Peuples en enseignement supérieur". <https://www.capres.ca/dossiers/etudiants-des-premiers-peuples-en-enseignement-superieur-dossier-capres/securisation-culturelle/> [Accessed January 15th 2021]

⁷ Dufour, Emanuelle (2019). "La sécurisation culturelle des étudiants autochtones". *Pédagogie collégiale*. vol. 32, no. 3, <https://aqpc.qc.ca/sites/default/files/revue/dufour-vol.32-3.pdf>

⁸ Zhao Xin Wu. 2012. "Un modèle computationnel d'intelligence culturelle ouvert et extensible", Doctoral Thesis, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, page 213.

establish a balanced collaborative relationship, we will document the challenges prioritised by co-constructors and we will be attentive to the ways in which these challenges evolve in at times subtly transformative contexts. At Collège Ahuntsic, we seek to amplify the Indigenous voices that contribute to this centre, supporting them with our own.

3. The means of flexible, diverse and original creation

3.1 To achieve objectives that are rooted in the creation of collaborative tools and spaces

- Co-creation and adaptation of pedagogical material that reflects the needs of colleges, in collaboration with the Mikana organisation and other pioneers in the field, such as the Tshakapesh Institute
- Inclusion of the guiding principles of Competency 15⁹ in courses and programs at non-Indigenous institutions;
- Support of original initiatives that valorise youth and pride, such Mikana's Ambassador program;
- Congruence of fluid, flexible pathways to education (secondary - collegial - university), especially in conjunction with the First Peoples Student Centre at the Université de Montréal and within the framework of the *Apprivoiser Montréal* program developed in partnership with the community of Opitciwan, which is also open to other communities;
- Proposal of training programs created with Indigenous communities that have expressed a need, and co-developed with, among others, the Kiuna Institution, a leader in Indigenous post-secondary teaching;

3.2 Some examples of concrete projects that aim to achieve these goals and are born of the dissemination and transfer of best practices:

- Dissemination of Indigenization tools for college-level teaching, notable an interactive workshop on decolonizing syllabi¹⁰, and a co-developed pedagogical guide that encourages the exploration of a new graphic novel across different programs;
- Presentation of a variety of proposals allowing a wide audience to appreciate the transformative potential of Indigenization for personal, professional and institutional frameworks, through openness to the knowledge of others, such as through our

⁹ First Nations Education Council, Tshakapesh Institute, Centre de développement de la formation et de la main-d'œuvre huron-wendat. (2020). "Competency 15 – Value and promote Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, cultures and history". FNEC. <https://cepn-fnec.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Competency-15-ANG.pdf>

¹⁰ DeChavez, Yvette (October 8th 2018). "It's time to decolonize that syllabus". *LA Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/books/la-et-jc-decolonize-syllabus-20181008-story.html>

longstanding connections to the traditional healing-focused Wapistan Centre;

- Storage of tools that will be created within our new self-education portal¹¹, supported by Collège Ahuntsic's development fund and upheld by the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion service of the Department for Student Affairs;
- Access to a multitude of resources and opportunities already available at Collège Ahuntsic: students, educators, research professionals, the graphic arts department, the implementation framework of the new humanities program, etc.;

3.3 To achieve the objectives derived from the documentation of this process

The post-doctoral research *Ethnographie du processus d'autochtonisation et de décolonisation des cégeps en milieu francophone au Québec*¹² conducted by Léa Lefevre-Radelli, principal researcher, and accompanied by co-researchers Natasha Blanchet-Cohen, of Concordia University and co-chair of the Indigenous branch of the Chaire-Reseau Jeunesse, and Sivane Hirsch of the Université de Québec à Trois-Rivières, allows us to document the creation of this new space for sharing Indigenization practices in education. This research seeks to understand how educators undertake, if at all, an Indigenized perspective of their disciplines, and what challenges may be experienced in the application of respectful practices regarding the histories and realities of Indigenous peoples. This project is developed within the framework of collaboration with Collège Ahuntsic. How do non-Indigenous educators understand their role within the context of the deconstruction of prejudices and the teaching of Indigenous realities? What practices have they developed in their classrooms, according to discipline? What are the perceived benefits of these practices, and what challenges are encountered in their employment? This research allows us to clear our paths of the tensions inherent to the process of transforming praxis in the framework of cultural safety.

- **Beyond the pitfalls and blindspots of Indigenization**

It becomes imperative to justly and honestly identify the hurdles that are inevitably encountered over the course of this long journey. Many of these hurdles are problematic to other initiatives underway in colleges and universities, typically because no one wants to change or disrupt that which stands to benefit them. An Indigenization process is not a collection of disembodied¹³

¹¹ This interactive web portal aims to facilitate exchange and to shed light on the realities and challenges of ethnocultural diversities, of Indigenous peoples and LGBTQ2S+ and seeks to equip the collegial community for the creation of a more inclusive, equitable and decolonized environment. The portal also offers a wide variety of testimonials, pedagogical materials, thematic resources, specialised glossaries, and external references. These resources will be presented in a cross-platform dialogue space (video, photos, graphic novels, visual arts, literature, interactive material).

¹² Funded by a SSHRC (Social Science and Humanities Research Council) post-doctoral grant

¹³ Tuck, Eve and Yang, K. Wayne (2012) "Decolonization is not a metaphor", in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.1-40 <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/staff-profiles/data/docs/fjcollins.pdf> [accessed November 14th 2020]

actions. It must emerge from an internal movement in which each individual and each milieu must choose to invest. Our capacity for reflexivity¹⁴ plays a significant role, regardless of what shape the commitment of those who are implicated takes.

Subsequently, self-examination, which is the first and potentially most disruptive step, permits a review of transformative opportunities and blindspots. As a reflexive practice that stands to guide non-Indigenous people towards awareness and eventually action, a position of cultural humility¹⁵ is also engaged. This concept may not be understood as exclusively interpersonal, cultural humility extended to the social domain provides tools and support to individuals who can then interact in sync with other members of their community. In doing so, the structural realities and injustices that contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups can be re-examined and thus, interrogated.

- **Our position at Collège Ahuntsic**

At Collège Ahuntsic, we are aware of the risk of reproducing, if unconsciously, the colonial models that have facilitated this whole process. In order to move past good intentions, tokenism,¹⁶ the savior complex, the consumption of 'other' cultures, the satisfaction of ethno-cultural quotas and other 'boxes to tick', we are committed to respecting the following principles as much as possible:

6.1 Our relationship with co-constructors

-By providing as much attention and space to Indigenous voices as possible, and to needs as they are expressed, as well as by paying as much attention to what isn't being said.

-By working together to provide suitable tools and solutions, even if that means stepping back at times.

-By being especially attentive to the apprehensions expressed by co-constructors.

-By re-defining what is understood as 'accompaniment' and by ensuring that our co-constructors do not carry the burden of our own education.

¹⁴ Ghasarian, Christian. (November 8th 2017). "La réflexivité dans la pratique ethnographique" [Conference presentation]. *Colloque 2017 : Ethnographies et engagements*. Université de Rouen Normandie <https://webtv.univ-rouen.fr/permalink/v12587435964dttvjth4>

¹⁵ Abe, Jennifer (2020). "Beyond Cultural Competence, Toward Social Transformation: Liberation Psychologies and the Practice of Cultural Humility", in *Journal of Social Work Education*. Vol. 56, No. 4, pp.696-707 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10437797.2019.1661911> [accessed December 30th 2020].

¹⁶ Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (2020), *Best Practices in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research*. <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/nfrf-fnfr/edi-eng.aspx> [accessed April 24th 2021].

-By questioning the quality, the limits and the nature of spaces of expression that are currently offered to Indigenous people.

-By giving ourselves the latitude and the necessary means to establish and implement new modes of transmission and original, cutting edge pedagogical proposals.

-By acting as a vessel for the transmission of existing tools created by our collaborators.

-By turning towards the needs of our partners who come from isolated, underserved Indigenous communities that are far away from urban centres.

-By recognizing our own biases and limitations, our positions and our errors, as well as the necessity of perpetual questioning.

-By remaining aware of our own continuous learning processes.

6.2 The education, rhythms and limits of our field

-By affording ourselves the right to distance ourselves from linearity, and from the typical limitations that characterise our systems.

-By accepting the inductive character that typifies this type of process.

-By taking the rhythms of the present parties into consideration, and adjusting ourselves to these, including those at work in our college.

-By maintaining a clear vision of the inner workings of our institution, and by using our own example as progressive and respectful 'open laboratory'.

-By being attentive to and acknowledging the importance of reactions, disharmonies, and tensions, and working with these.

-By being first to act on subjects that concern us as tributaries of a colonial system.

-By actioning the work we are doing and making it as applicable as possible to teaching and classroom contexts.

-By offering co-constructive training opportunities to our educators that are relevant to their needs and by staying true to our position in such a way that invites our educators to feel engaged and equipped, even an individual, personal sense.

Even as we are guided and attentive to our Indigenous co-constructors, we will inevitably experience pitfalls, so we must pay attention to the nature and the extent of these. The resistances of our field contribute to these pitfalls. To counter these, our process centers around the evolutionary dimension of the steps taken, and approaches *generous thinking*.¹⁷ Within the framework of non-Indigenous education, 'generous thinking' actualizes critical thinking, by allowing individuals (such as students, educators and staff) who do not consider themselves to be experts on a given subject (Indigenization, for example) to participate in the application of a collective project that guides them through a process of discovery and positive transformation.

¹⁷ Fitzpatrick, Kathleen (2019) "Generous Thinking. A Radical Approach to Saving the University". Baltimore. Johns Hopkins University Press, pg. 280.