

TOWARDS THE FINANCIAL ACCESSIBILITY OF LIFELONG LEARNING: A FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVE

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By the
First Nations Education Council (FNEC)

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, First Nations education embraces a holistic approach. This approach considers the individual as whole; encompassing the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. It is an approach that develops all aspects of the human being and infers a lifelong process, from birth to the deathbed. “**The Road to Knowledge is Eternal**”¹ embodies the underlying principle of this philosophy of education.

From a historical perspective, this vision of education is closely related to the necessity to adapt to changes experienced by the person, the community and the environment. Adaptation is tantamount to survival. Moreover, the whole community contributes to the education process on a daily basis. The Elders are granted a particularly privileged place in the education of young ones.

The coerced imposition of a formal and school-centered Euro-American style of education has dramatically changed the rules of the game for First Nations. Even though lifelong learning is still possible, the traditional model accessible to all and at all times in life is slowly losing ground to a formal model which is conditional to financial investments from society and individuals.

The financial accessibility to lifelong learning is a thorny issue for First Nations. This Paper aims to tackle two aspects of the question; access to funding for the creation and operation of education institutions and access to financial support at the individual level for those who wish to enter a learning process.

I. PRESENTATION OF THE FNEC

The First Nations Education Council (FNEC) is an association based in Wendake. It gathers together twenty-two member communities hailing from eight First Nations of Quebec: Abenaki (Odanak and Wôlinak), Algonquin (Barrier Lake, Eagle Village - Kipawa, Kitigan Zibi, Kitchisakik, Lac Simon, Winneway, Pikogan, Timiskaming and Wolf Lake), Atikamekw (Manawan, Opitciwan and Wemotaci), Huron-Wendat (Wendake), Innu (Mashteuiatsh), Malecite (Viger), Mig'maq (Gesgapegiag, Gespeg and Listuguj,) and Mohawk (Kahnawake and Kanasatake).

¹ This message was relayed by Eddie Benton-Banai (2002) to his students in the Indigenous Knowledge/Philosophy master's degree program in which he is one of the lecturers. Mr. Benton-Banai describes this as a fundamental principle of the Anishinaabe, in particular in their return to the language, philosophy and traditions of the Anishinaabe.

FNEC member communities have languages, cultures, traditions, socioeconomic and demographical profiles which bear both strong similarities and display striking differences. Ever since its creation, the FNEC has been striving to respect both the common points and the differences, by focusing on the aspiration shared by its members i.e. the improvement of First Nations education. The organization must also cope with the requirement to work in the two official languages in Quebec since in addition to their Native language, half of the member communities use French, while the other half speaks English as first or second language in the workplace.

The FNEC is affiliated to the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL), a political organization regrouping the Chiefs of all First Nations of Quebec and Labrador. The General Assembly of the FNEC is made up of an Education Representative per member community. The FNEC also has a Special General Assembly, made up of the Chiefs of the member communities. The organization therefore, has since its very onset a representativity structure which abides by the main principles of the *Indian Control of Indian Education*, including that of the autonomy of each community.

1.1. Context of its creation

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood, which in 1980 became the Assembly of First Nations, published *Indian Control of Indian Education*, a document aimed at reaffirming the resolve of First Nations in regaining full jurisdiction over their education. In 1973, the Canadian government adopted the policy document as a keystone for its policy-making as regards First Nations education.

Towards the end of the 1970s, we see the onset of the administrative management of schools by the Band Councils in non-treaty communities (i.e. non-signatory of a treaty or agreement such as the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement). Communities became aware that they faced similar challenges and that it was in their advantage to develop a common expertise and share their experiences.

At a meeting of the Education Representatives of the communities in 1983, a proposition was made to combine efforts within a common organization whose mission would be to safeguard the interests of the First Nations communities in view of ensuring quality holistic education. Education was perceived, then and now, as a positive solution leading to the development of the communities, the elimination of poverty and cultural preservation.

The FNEC was officially founded on April 22, 1985. The following is an excerpt from the proposal of creation:

*“The rationale behind the creation of the Education Council is based on the fact that **the Indian People have the right and responsibility of controlling, managing and ensuring that the best possible education is imparted to population.** We believe that this education must be one that bears sense to the various communities and/or Indian Nations and one that instead of destroying the roots of our identity valorizes it...”*

1.2. Mission, vision and mandates

Excerpt of the mission summarizing the rationale of the FNEC:

“The FNEC is an association of First Nations and communities, whose common purpose is to achieve full jurisdiction over education.”

Excerpt of the vision statement on education which is at the basis of the actions of the FNEC:

“The First Nations Education Council will ensure that the goal of quality, holistic education, as defined by our members, and attained through complete jurisdictional autonomy over our education programs, will be achieved in a spirit of collaboration, respect, sharing, and commitment.”

In its 2004 update, the General Assembly of the FNEC defined and set the mandates as follows:

- Take political action to ensure that First Nations regain full control of their education.
- Take administrative action to ensure the respect of the educational rights of First Nations communities.
- Provide human resources and consulting services to its member communities, as requested.
- Conduct studies and make recommendations on the governments’ political and administrative decisions on Aboriginal education.
- Manage programs transferred by different government departments and ensure that services are developed for the benefit of the communities.
- Maintain links with other First Nations organizations working in education.

II. FUNDING OF NATIVE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN QUEBEC

First Nations of Quebec have experiences in education which vary greatly, depending on whether they are non-treaty First Nations, treaty First Nations or Inuit.

“Treaty” communities are signatories of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) of 1975 for Crees and Inuit and of the North-eastern Quebec Agreement (NEQA) of 1978 for Naskapi.

Non-treaty communities are member communities of eight nations in Quebec which are signatories neither to the JBNQA nor to the NEQA. They are grouped within two associations: the FNEC and the Tshakapesh Institute (previously known as the *Institut culturel et éducatif Montagnais*, ICEM).

Quebec Natives undergo different school experiences depending on whether they live in or outside the communities and whether their communities are geographically isolated or not. The way the funding of education takes account of all these particularities results in different financial accessibility to studies for individuals.

This section concerns the funding of Native educational institutions in Quebec. A distinction is made between the funding modalities of establishments for non-treaty First Nations, treaty First Nations and Inuit, to emphasize the different challenges faced in each case. However, the question of financial accessibility to studies for First Nations and Inuit living outside the reserve is not dealt with in this section; the same applies for persons having a Native identity without being a registered Status Indian.

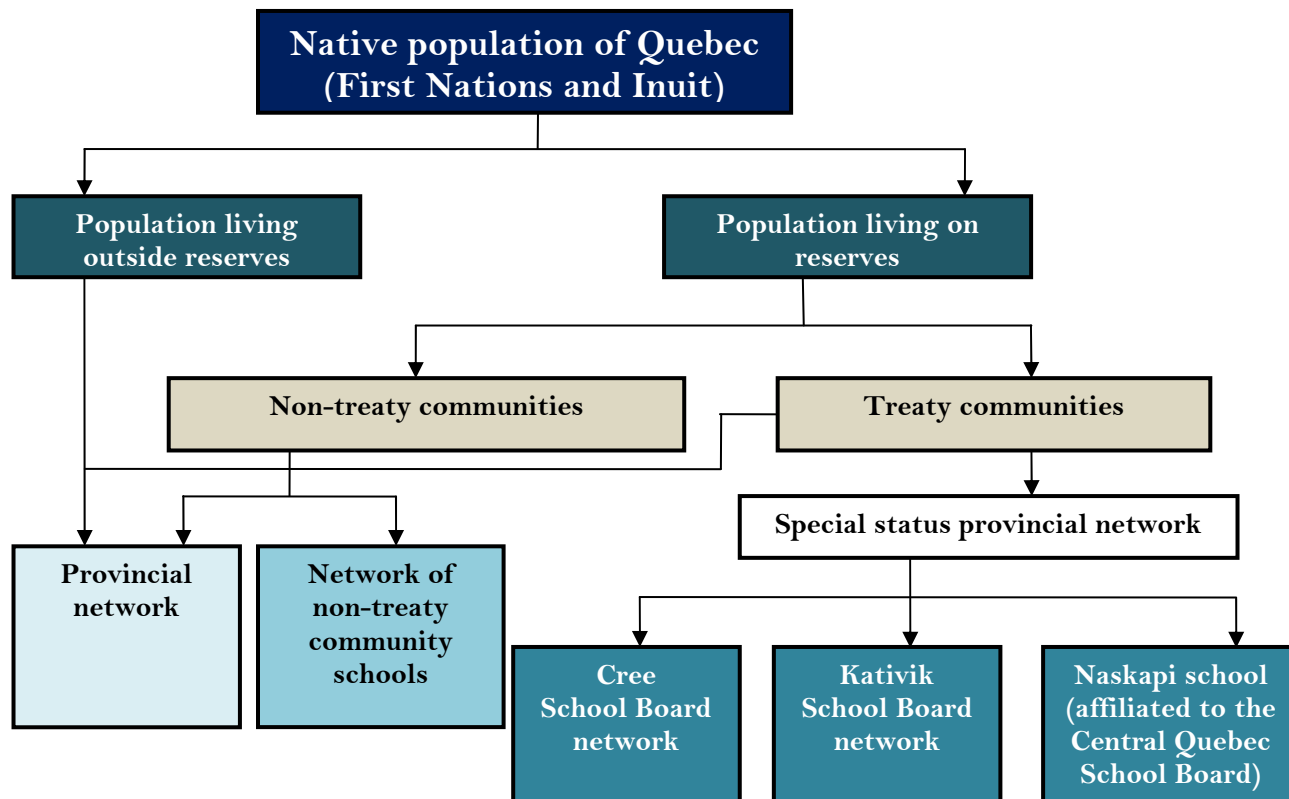
The funding of education establishments will be tackled under two angles: firstly, the funding of fixed assets, i.e. the funding of the construction and maintenance of infrastructure, and secondly, the funding of the services offered by these establishments.

2.1. Funding of fixed assets

2.1.1. Construction and maintenance of elementary and secondary schools

The diagram below depicts the different educational institutions which Native students (First Nations and Inuit) attend at the elementary and secondary level:

***Educational institutions attended by Native students
at the elementary and secondary level:***



Treaty communities

The elementary and secondary schools of treaty communities are administered under the *Education Act for the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi Native Persons* and are grouped in structures under provincial jurisdiction: the Cree School Board, the Kativik School Board and the Naskapi school. These structures therefore have a special status, provided by Law and applied in the facts.

School Boards (or the school, in the case of the Naskapi) require prior authorization from the Education Department of Quebec and prior approval of the plans and estimates for all construction, reconstruction or extension works in schools. In virtue of Section 594 of the above-mentioned Education Act, a budget is granted to cover the cost of construction, maintenance and replacement of school buildings, residences, installations and material.

Non-treaty communities

The construction and maintenance of school buildings falls under the jurisdiction of the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). INAC allocates a budget to Band Councils for the construction and maintenance of schools via the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program and not through the education budget. INAC has its own norms and standards for space, which are lower than provincial norms. A joint study made by the FNEC and the Quebec regional office² of INAC indicated that the average space per student varied as follows:

- According to INAC: 12.69 m²
- According to MELS: 14.3 m²
- According to the Cree School Board: 25.7 m²
- According to the Kativik School Board: 29.2 m²

A recent report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer³ established that INAC mismanaged the school infrastructure of First Nations. The report identified only 49% of schools as being in good condition and 21% has not been inspected. Moreover, INAC considerably underestimated the budget to allocate to the school infrastructure of First Nations.

2.1.2. Construction and maintenance of vocational education training centres

In Quebec, vocational education is offered at the secondary level, while elsewhere in Canada, it is offered at the post-secondary level. Thus, the vocational education training centres fall under the authority of the School Boards, like any other public secondary school.

Treaty communities

The construction and maintenance of vocational education training centres in the treaty communities follow the same process as those of the other School Boards of the province. The Cree School Board has built a modern vocational education training centre at Waswanipi. The Kativik School Board has, on its part, built two centres.

Non-treaty communities

The objective of INAC's elementary/secondary education program is to provide education programs and services in First Nations community schools comparable to those provided in the provincial school network. However, the funding policies of INAC do not take account of the specificity of Quebec in offering vocational education at the secondary level. Communities therefore, have no funding to build vocational education training centres.

² FNEC/INAC, *An Analysis of Educational Costs and Tuition Fees: Preschool, Elementary and Secondary*, 2005

³ *The Funding Requirement for First Nations Schools in Canada*, May 2009.

2.1.3. Construction and maintenance of adult education centres

In the education system of Quebec, adult education is under the jurisdiction of the School Boards. The construction and maintenance of the adult education centres are funded by the School Boards.

Treaty communities

The Kativik School Board has, in the same manner as other School Boards, funded the construction of six adult education centres (Puvirnituk, Kuujjuaraapik, Salluit, Kangiqsujaq, Inukjuak and Kuujjuaq) providing general training. For vocational training, adults can benefit from the two previously mentioned vocational training centres.

Cree communities do not have a centre dedicated specifically to adult education. Adults attend the vocational training centre in Waswanipi. Concerning basic general training for adults, it is provided by the community schools.

Non-treaty communities

INAC has no general policy or specific funding for First Nations adult education. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) has elaborated a few programs for Native adults, notably as regards literacy, the development of basic skills and employability development.

Some communities have created adult training centres via funding agreements with the federal departments⁴ (INAC, HRSDC or both) and sometimes with the help of the *ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS), as in the following examples:

- The *Centre de développement de la formation et de la main-d'œuvre* (CDFM) in Wendake, provides adults with general and professional secondary-level training programs as well as collegial-level programs.
- The adult education centre of the Kitigan Zibi community.
- The adult centre education of Mashteuiatsh, found within its secondary school.

2.1.4. Construction and maintenance of post-secondary educational institutions

In Quebec

No post-secondary educational institution belonging to First Nations currently exist in Quebec. The Manitou College, the sole First Nations College in the history of Quebec, closed its doors in the middle of the 1970s.

⁴ These agreements require reallocation of funds, since no policy or funding is available to this end.

The FNEC has been trying for years to set up a post-secondary educational institution for First Nations. Funding such a project implies enormous difficulties, but after years of effort, the long-sought project is expected to materialize in 2010-2011.

Elsewhere in Canada

In Canada, there are 64 post-secondary educational institutions belonging to First Nations. Information regarding the origin of the funds for the creation of these institutions was not available prior to the publication of this Paper. However, in its February 2007⁵, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development deplored the underfunding of these institutions even though their contribution in raising graduation rates was evident.

2.2. Funding of educational services

2.2.1. Educational services at the elementary and secondary levels

Treaty communities

In virtue of Section 256 of the *Education Act for the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi Native Persons*, all children aged 6 to 16 years must mandatorily attend school, cost-free.

The educational services of school in treaty communities are financed in virtue of the JBNQA and the NEQA, as per the following proportions:

- For the Cree School Board, 75% of the funding comes from the federal government and 25% from the provincial government.
- For the Kativik School Board and the Naskapi school, 25% of the funding comes from the federal government and 75% from provincial government.

Section 594 of the *Education Act for the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi Native Persons* stipulates that the budget of the School Board must take into account the exceptional nature of the geographical situation and the composition of the student population of its signatories. It guarantees the following:

⁵ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*.

The budget of the school board shall take into account the unique characteristics of its geographical location and of its student population. It shall provide for items such as the following:

- a) the cost of the construction, maintenance and replacement of school buildings, residences, facilities and equipment;
- b) increases in the student population and the need for adequate teaching facilities;
- c) the cost of transportation of students and teaching staff, including transportation of students to and from schools in other parts of Quebec;
- d) the development of a special curriculum provided for in section 575;
- e) the maintenance of hostels and residences for its students attending schools outside their community;
- f) the establishment and maintenance of kindergarten programs and facilities;
- g) physical education and sports programs;
- h) adult education programs;
- i) the payment of northern allowances where applicable;
- j) the provision of working conditions and benefits to attract competent teaching personnel and to encourage such personnel to remain in their positions for extended periods of time, taking into consideration the conditions and benefits offered in surrounding areas.

The Section therefore indicates that School Boards have a budget for school-related fixed assets as well as for development and operation of services.

Non-treaty communities

Certain communities have no school (six FNEC member communities for instance), other communities have a school but not all the school grades from preschool to secondary V. Thus, a certain number of young people living on-reserve find themselves obliged to attend a provincial or private school. Some parents also opt for the provincial school.

For the educational services offered to these youth by provincial schools, the communities sign agreements in terms of tuition fees with the School Boards, which manage the payment modalities for services offered by the provincial schools. The costs are deducted from the funding agreement with INAC. It should be noted that the agreement is based on the

allocation of a fixed sum per student, irrespective of the fact whether the student attends a provincial or a community school.

It should also be noted that it may happen that the amount invoiced by the School Board be higher than the funding received, thereby reducing the funding per student for community schools. A Paper⁶ published by the FNEC in 2009 showed that up to 2006, the schools of the First Nations of Quebec had received only 67% of the funding allocated to elementary and secondary education despite the fact that they group 76% of the students.

Most young people in non-treaty communities attend a school within their community. For FNEC member communities only, during the 2008-2009 school year, the nominal rolls showed that 77% of students attended a school within their community. However, this percentage varies from one community to another: 0% when the community has no school to 100% when the community is remote and isolated.

Community schools are under federal jurisdiction. The educational services for non-treaty communities are therefore funded at 100% by the federal government. However, the level and distribution of the funding to the communities are determined by INAC policies and based on an outdated federal formula devised in 1988.

The guidelines of the INAC Elementary and Secondary Education Program (K-12 Program) stipulate that:

“Provide eligible students living on-reserve with elementary and secondary education programs comparable to those that are required in provincial schools.”

Theoretically, children and young people aged 6 to 16 years are entitled to a basic education **comparable** to that of non Native students. Nevertheless, in reality, the schools are unable to provide comparable educational services due to chronic underfunding.

Basic education is crucial to the acquisition of necessary competences for further learning. Through this process, individuals acquire essential skills in reading, writing and calculation, in addition to general knowledge and other basic competences.

The chronic underfunding of First Nations educational services is no longer to be proven. Three combined factors are at the root of this chronic underfunding: an outdated funding

⁶ FNEC, *Paper on First Nations Education Funding*, February 2009.

formula which ignores several essential elements, a 2% annual increase cap on the funding since 1996 and derisory amounts allocated to certain elements.

i. A completely outdated funding formula

INAC calculates the funding of First Nations schools according to a formula which dates back to 1988. INAC officers integrated no needs analysis when they devised this formula. They had to quickly elaborate a formula which allowed budgets to be allocated to communities managing schools. The INAC officers were aware that the formula did not take account of the needs and recommended that the formula be revised within the following two years.

More than twenty years later, the formula is still in effect, despite the fact that it ignores major developments in the field of education since 1988. New technologies for educational purposes are now available in most mainstream schools. Scientific discoveries and technical progress have led to various reforms, new technologies, edition of new school books and the modernization of school libraries. What is more to it, a major education reform took place since in Quebec. School paths have been diversified, allowing for the introduction of subject-centered programs focusing on languages, sports or arts. All this time however, INAC did not review its funding formula.

Another new aspect in the funding of education consisted in taking account of the socioeconomic disadvantage factor in the determination of the funding. Hence, for several years now, MELS has been using a formula integrating the global socioeconomic disadvantage index⁷ to determine the supplementary support for schools. For instance programs such as “New approaches, new solutions” implemented in disadvantaged areas are based on this calculation. INAC’s funding formula for Band-operated schools however, does not take into consideration the socioeconomic disadvantage factor as regards First Nations families.

ii. A 2% cap on the annual increase in funding

In 1996, the government of Canada imposed a 2% cap on the annual increase in the funding of First Nations social programs, including education. Since then, the increase in funding could no longer keep up with the demographic growth, the rise in the cost of living and, more importantly, the Education Price Index which has risen faster than the cost of living.

⁷ Complex calculation derived from 4 variables: level of income, the mother’s education level, female single parenting and the occupation of the parents.

Thus between 1996 and 2006, the funding of the School Boards in Quebec has increased on average by 4.3% annually, while to take into account the demographic growth and the cost of living an increase of 2.8 % was sufficient.

First Nations, on their part, had to satisfy themselves with a maximum annual increase of 2%, which by the way is yet to be granted. For the First Nations of Quebec only, the cost of living and the demographic growth would have required an average annual increase of 4.5% in the funding of education.

Between 1996 and 2008, the shortfall for schools due solely to the 2% cap is estimated at approximately \$196 million. For the year 2008 only, the shortfall is estimated at around \$25 million, on a budget of approximately \$95 million.

iii. Derisory amounts

The chronic underfunding of basic First Nations education is not solely attributable to various essential elements in education which are persistently ignored or to the 2% cap in annual increase in funding; it is also due to the derisory amounts granted to those elements which are financed.

The instruction of languages is one of the most eloquent examples in this regard. First Nations schools have to teach two official languages in addition to their own respective mother tongue which for recall, are threatened by extinction. Nevertheless, each school receives merely \$185 per student for the instruction of a Native language, to which Canadian Heritage adds some \$5,000 per community. With such meagre amounts, it is not possible to realize any noteworthy project (like publishing a school book or a dictionary, for instance).

Each school receives \$190 only for the instruction of a second official language, which more often than not is a third language for most students. For comparison purposes, in 2008, the School Boards of Quebec received \$2,082 per elementary level student and \$3,253 per secondary-level student for the francization of new immigrants.

The instruction of First Nations languages constitutes a key to the better understanding of one's own culture and the reinforcement of cultural identity and self-esteem. As for the instruction of the official languages, they constitute an indispensable base and tool for further learning. The acquisition of linguistic competences being limited by underfunding in turn limits accessibility to other trainings, initiating a vicious circle.

Another constituent in education that receives derisory amounts is curriculum adaptation. Each school receives a sum of \$265 per student. This amount is preposterous when one knows that the provincial curriculum program has not been devised to take into account either First Nations culture or First Nations realities.

For a class of 20 students, this amounts to \$5,300, a sum which is supposed to adapt the curriculum in all subjects, from languages to sciences via the social universe, plastic arts and physical education!

All these elements demonstrate that schools of non-treaty communities are not sufficiently funded to provide quality basic education, a right which is defined as follows by a recent UN report⁸:

“quality education - which may be defined as education that is well resourced, culturally sensitive, respectful of heritage and that takes into account history, cultural security and integrity, encompasses human rights, community and individual development, and is designed in a way that is implementable”

Moreover, the funding conditions imposed by INAC make it difficult, if not impossible, to meet the obligation of providing comparable education to that offered in the provincial network, thus compromising the accessibility for further learning later in life. Last but not least, the underfunding of First Nations schools makes them less competitive than provincial schools. The preference of some parents for provincial schools, which are better funded and able to provide greater diversity in services, aggravates even further the underfunding as the community schools are funded in function of their student enrolment.

Statistics on graduation and dropout rates reveal that the accessibility to quality basic educational training is highly jeopardised for non-treaty communities.

In 2004, the report of the Auditor General of Canada indicated a 28-year gap between the education level of the First Nations and that of the remainder of the Canadian population. The same report revealed that INAC is not aware whether the funding of First Nations education is sufficient to ensure the norms that it has set in education, nor if the results obtained are proportional to the resources provided. Unfortunately, the Department has undertaken no concrete action to close the gap since the publication of this report.

2.2.2. Vocational Education Services

Treaty communities

⁸ UN Human Rights Council, *Study on lessons learned and challenges to achieve the implementation of the right of indigenous peoples to education: report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

The Cree School Board and the Kativik School Board both receive funding from the provincial and federal governments for the operation of the vocational training centres. The Cree School Board offers services in its vocational training centre at Waswanipi and the Kativik School Board, in its two centres at Inukjuak and Kuujjuaq.

Non-treaty communities

As indicated above, in Quebec vocational education is offered at the secondary level, while elsewhere in Canada, it is provided at the post-secondary level. Since INAC programs do not acknowledge this specificity, no funding is set aside for vocational training services. More often than not, the members of Native communities who wish to acquire this type of training must look for these services outside of their community. In such cases, the communities pay to School Boards the training services received by their members at conditions determined by budgetary regulations set by MELS.

Since tuition fees are higher in the regular sector, this negatively impacts on the amount available for students in the community schools.

INAC has officially recognized this anomaly. Below is an excerpt from a letter of June 2006 that the Education Branch sent to the FNEC:

“[...] and after analysis it would appear that the federal government does not provide adequate funds for vocational training in schools administered by Quebec bands. In the Quebec provincial schools, vocational education constitutes a fundamental element of the secondary education program, but our Department does not take into account these specificities to make this type of training accessible at the secondary level for all First Nations.”

2.2.3. Adult Education Services

Treaty communities

The School Boards receive funding for adult education, in the same way as School Boards of the provincial network. For the Cree School Board, general adult education services are provided in all the communities, while vocational education services for adults are dispensed at the Waswanipi vocational training centre, which also welcomes young people.

For the Kativik School Board, general adult education services are provided in six adult education centres (Puvirnituq, Kuujjuaraapik, Salluit, Kangiqsujuaq, Inukjuak and Kuujjuaq). The adult clientele can also benefit from long-distance educational services. Adults who wish to acquire vocational training can register to one of the two previously

centres, which also welcome young people. As for continuing education, the Kativik School Board provides a customized service for enterprises and organizations in Nunavik.

Non-treaty communities

Many First Nations adults did not have access to basic educational training in their youth. The 2006 census revealed that in Canada, 50% of First Nations members aged 25 to 64 living on-reserve had not completed secondary studies. The needs in basic training are therefore enormous. However, First Nations adults are given less incentives to return to studies as compared to other Canadian adults.

Since INAC has no policy and no specific funding for adult education, only Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) provides some financial assistance for certain projects and initiatives. These projects are however, not centered on basic education but rather on the development of employability.

Certain communities have signed flexible agreements with INAC allowing them to reallocate funds for one program to another. Thus, certain communities can use funding for post-secondary education services to set up vocational training or adult education services.

Through these agreements, some communities have set up adult education services, in one form or another, mainly centered on the development of employability. In addition to the previously mentioned communities having vocational training centres (Wendake, Kitigan Zibi and Mashteuiatsh), some communities have also undertaken initiatives:

- In Manawan, a partnership agreement has been signed between the education and human resources sectors to upgrade adults and provide them with School Board certification.
- Opitciwan offers adult education services dispensed in the community from September to May, through a local School Board.

These initiatives are often one-time projects because no policy or recurrent funding exists to support them in a sustainable way. Moreover, the reallocation of funds from post-secondary education for adult education constitutes a problem as it is detrimental to the former, even more so that the clientele for post-secondary education is on the rise. The hard facts are that because the funding of the post-secondary program has not been indexed to take into account the increase in the cost of living and the demand, reallocation is not even an option.

In certain cases, First Nations adults can benefit from an adult education centre belonging to a School Board, and the communities pay the School Board conformingly to the agreements in effect. In other cases, the communities purchase trainings with the School Boards. These trainings are often very costly for the communities.

Adults who follow training are eligible to a subsistence allowance during their training period. These allocations are funded by the HRSDC and administered by a First Nations body. However, they do not always take account of family responsibilities given the high demand.

A vast consultation led by the FNEC and the FNHRDCQ in 2007⁹ showed that many obstacles to training are related to funding. Among the respondents aged 26 to 35 years, 75% were responsible for 3 persons, implying high subsistence allowances. For example, the majority of respondents estimated that the subsistence allowances that they received were insufficient in covering their daily expenses and daycare centre fees. Respondents also indicated that personal finances were determining in school perseverance and graduation. Many participants indicated that an increase in funding to help students with financial difficulties would be a winning card for school success.

2.2.4. Post-secondary education services

Post-secondary educational institutions belonging to First Nations exist in the other provinces of Canada. These institutions provide quality study programs adapted to the needs of First Nations and have contributed to increase the number of post-secondary graduates among First Nations. However, these establishments suffer from chronic underfunding, as observed by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in its 2007 report, entitled “No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education In Canada”.

Since there are no First Nations institutions in Quebec, First Nations members have to attend non-Native educational establishments. The latter are eligible to financial support from the provincial and federal governments to elaborate programs and services for the Native clientele. Through this support, UQAT, UQAC and McGill University have been offering programs adapted to the needs of Native people and communities for years.

⁹ FNEC and FNHRDCQ, *Study on Quebec First Nations Access to Vocational Education and Technical Training*, 2008.

At times First Nations organizations also establish partnerships with universities in view of providing programs to interested groups. For instance, the FNEC has, in the interest of its member communities, built the following partnerships:

- In collaboration with the Saint Paul University, the FNEC offered a First Nations Leadership Certificate; the program already counts ten graduates.
- In collaboration with the Université de Montréal, a Microprogram for Integrating ICTs in Education was offered to over ten professionals involved in community schools. The experience was a rewarding success, and the Microprogram has evolved into a Masters program. A first graduation class of eleven students completed the Microprogram in 2006. Eight of these students went on to the Masters degree and a second graduation class of six students followed suite shortly after. Six students have already graduated from the Masters and four will do so shortly.
- In partnership with UQAC, the FNEC currently provides a short undergraduate program in First Nations audiovisual production.

Concerning student support, INAC began granting support to Native students in the middle of the 1960s. It is worth noting that before 1970 only 200 Status Indians were attending colleges or universities in Canada. In fact up to 1954, the *Indian Act* forbade First Nations to undertake university studies or take up a liberal profession, unless they officially renounced their Indian Status (this process was called “emancipation”).

The implementation of a student support program drastically changed student numbers from 3 in 1963 to 3,600 by 1977, year in which a specific student support program at the post-secondary level was officially launched. This program allocated funding on a universal basis i.e. all admitted students received support. The financial support granted by INAC for post-secondary studies was – and still is – managed by the Band Councils.

INAC adopted the E12 policy in 1989, in virtue of which the program went from the universal funding model to closed envelope funding, thereby limiting funding to only a number of students since there are generally more candidates to a program than available funds. Band Councils have to set up priorities and selection criteria to award funding to candidates each year. The remaining demands are reported to the following budgetary year.

In 1996, the government imposed a 2% capped the annual increase on the funding of the programme, as in the case for social programs. Since then, the funding could no longer keep up with the demographic growth and the increase in educational costs. The two factors combined (E12 policy and 2% cap) have entailed an unprecedented decrease of 24% in the number of students between 2000 and 2007 and given rise to a lengthy waiting list of 10,589 names (2001 - 2006).

The underfunding of the program has been under the limelight of criticism on several occasions:

- In 2005: an internal evaluation report¹⁰ noted that:

“It was found that guidelines for PSSSP student living allowances are 14 years out of date; that PSSSP students are, on average, receiving between \$500 and \$4,000 less per academic year than they are paying in living expenses; and that current per student allowances are below the national average established under the Canada Student Loan Program five years ago.”

- In 2007: the *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* Report of the Standing Committee Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development recommended that the 2% cap be abolished and that the support to students be based on real costs incurred for tuition fees and student needs.

Today, the future of this program is uncertain. In 2008, the government announced the revision of the program as well as its intention to withdraw the management of the program from the communities to the benefit of a third party.

The FNEC vehemently denounced this intention. The management of the program by the communities echoes their need to establish their own priorities in terms of qualified labour and the ability to adequately this want. Communities are close to students and support them. Withdrawing the management of the program will penalize the students and communities without bringing any solution to the main problem: underfunding.

2.2.5. Professional development services for persons active on the job market

Many First Nations members are on the job market without prior qualifications; training courses are in this perspective very helpful to help them obtain qualifications through credits awarded for prior learning recognition. For individuals detaining qualifications, the training course remains crucial for updating skills.

For the majority of employed persons living on-reserve, access to training remains a complicated issue for several reasons. Geographical remoteness is one factor – bearing in mind that these persons often have family responsibilities – and the fact that distance learning remains to be developed. Concerning professional development of personnel within

¹⁰ INAC, Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch, *Evaluation of the Post-secondary Education Program*, 2005. (In the Executive summary under Findings: Cost-Effectiveness)

companies, no programs or measures have been found for First Nations organizations despite intensive research.

III. PROMISING SOLUTIONS TO EXPLORE

For the FNEC, the solution to the problem of financial accessibility of non-treaty First Nations resides in adequately funding education services. It is not feasible to bridge the 28-year education gap, observed in the 2004 report of the Auditor General, between First Nations and the other Canadians, without major reinvestments.

The federal government must shoulder its responsibilities by:

- Revising the funding formula to take into consideration essential elements in elementary and secondary education: adaptation of the curriculum and education programs, development of pedagogical material, teaching three languages, complementary services (school libraries, sports and recreation, technologies, etc.), remoteness, deprivation index of families, etc. Without quality basic education, access to lifelong learning is jeopardized.
- Devising a policy and a funding for the development of vocational and adult education, at the local and regional levels;
- Indexing the funding of the Post-secondary Education Program;
- Investing in distance learning, using new technologies notably.

Concerning MELS, facilitating agreements between First Nations, School Boards and other training establishments constitutes another promising solution. The FNEC and MELS have, as shown in the following section, created good avenues for cooperation.

IV. THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC: A CRUCIAL PARTNER

Partnerships in education between First Nations and governmental agencies of Quebec already exist. MELS supports vocational training centres such as the CDFM and a few other First Nations projects in education. It took up the commitment of financially supporting the creation of the post-secondary educational institution that the FNEC will inaugurate in 2010-2011. MELS and the FNEC have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding allowing for the creation of a MELS-FNEC Discussion Table.

The Discussion Table is a tool for the two partners to analyse the challenges and problems faced by persons (students, parents, teachers and professionals) and organizations (schools, communities, School Boards, etc.) with respect to:

- Access to education, integration, school perseverance and success of First Nations students attending educational institutions in Quebec;
- Questions regarding the funding of education for individuals;
- The school success objectives of First Nations students in the Quebecer school network and their follow-up;
- The transfer of students from one education system to another;
- Respect and harmony between First Nations and other Quebecers in the school context;
- Sharing best practices, collecting and publishing data.

A tripartite partnership agreement involving the federal government, the government of Quebec and the FNEC is currently underway. The three partners will have a common platform to discuss on a regular basis about the stakes involved in transitions from one education system to another and in the school success of First Nations students.

The government of Quebec also supports First Nations education in other forms. On July 17, 2008, an article of the Canadian press quoted Quebec's Premier:¹¹

“Quebec’s Premier, Jean Charest, stated that the funding of education in Native communities will be one of the priorities to be discussed at a future meeting. In Canada, he reminded, expenses in education for First Nations children are twice less than for children from other communities. « The meagre amount speaks for itself, he said. There are several priorities. We do not want to close the door to anyone.” (Free translation)

The FNEC considers this declaration as a support to First Nations in obtaining adequate funding for their education. Ministers from Manitoba, Ontario and Alberta have on occasion made similar declarations. Such declarations certainly validate First Nations claims and should add pressure on the federal government to shed its blatant lack the political will in remedying to the situation.

¹¹ <http://www.ledevoir.com/2008/07/17/198039.html>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

For non-treaty First Nations, the needs in lifelong learning are manifest. Financial accessibility to studies is more restricted as compared to other Quebec residents. The chronic underfunding in education imposed by the federal government represents the greatest hurdle to equal accessibility; a fact thoroughly documented in the Paper of the FNEC¹². The Paper of *Centrale des syndicats du Québec*¹³ submitted to the Commission also mentions this issue.

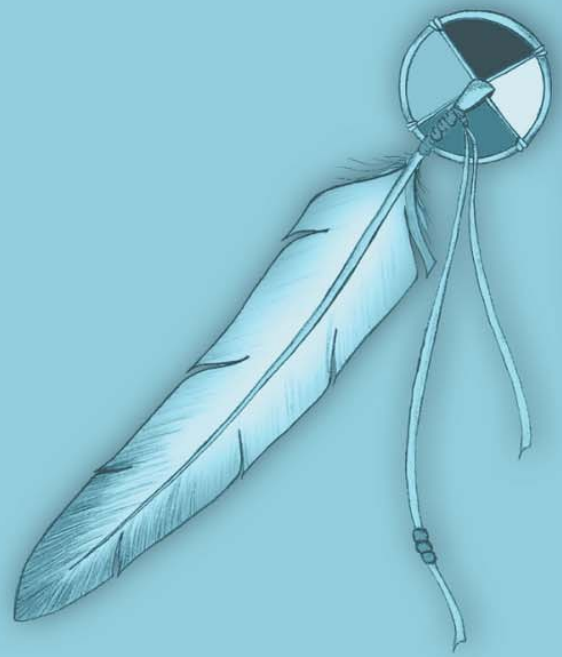
Improving financial accessibility to lifelong learning implies investing in First Nations institutions, which are dramatically underfunded. These investments are vital to ensure that First Nations members have access to quality basic education, a key element for further learning.

First Nations members would be able to participate more in adult education if they were granted financial support adapted to their conditions. Many people wish to follow a professional training or participate in continuing education, but are hampered due to restricted financial support.

Partnerships with the government of Quebec are highly valuable, as long as these partnerships are established on a voluntary basis and abide by the respective areas of jurisdiction. On the political scene, the government of Quebec can help First Nations by supporting their justified claims for the adequate funding of an education system under First Nations jurisdiction.

¹² FNEC, *Paper on First Nations Education Funding*, February 2009.

¹³ *Vers l'accessibilité financière à l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie: une accessibilité difficile et négligée*. Paper presented to the Advisory Committee on the Financial Accessibility of Education (ACFAE) in the scope of its consultation on financial accessibility to lifelong learning with the Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)



First Nations Education Council (FNEC)
95, rue de l'Ours, Wendake (Québec) G0A 4V0
Tel.: (418) 842-7672 Fax: (418) 842-9988
E-mail: info@cepn-fnec.com
www.cepn-fnec.com