

# Eurocentric roadblocks to school change in Nunavut

## Les obstacles eurocentriques au changement scolaire au Nunavut

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### Résumé de l'article

Soixante ans après sa mise en place, la scolarisation de l'Arctique de l'Est conserve des valeurs, une pédagogie et un programme à prédominance euro-canadienne, qui privilégie l'anglais au détriment des langues inuit. De nombreuses études ont démontré que les faibles résultats scolaires tenaient à ce modèle d'enseignement, celui-ci constituant en outre une agression envers la culture inuit, tandis que de nombreux Inuit ont, durant des décennies, insisté pour que l'enseignement reflète leur culture. Dans cet article, j'avance que c'est l'eurocentrisme qui contribue à ralentir le changement scolaire au Nunavut, en dépit des déclarations de soutien et des bonnes intentions des enseignants et des fonctionnaires blancs. En me basant sur un travail de terrain effectué dans une communauté du Nunavut et sur mes observations en tant qu'enseignant et visiteur dans les régions arctiques, je présente des exemples d'eurocentrisme au niveau individuel, d'eurocentrisme qui fait partie intégrante du système scolaire, et d'eurocentrisme pancanadien qui entrave le changement scolaire au Nunavut. Je suggère également quelques moyens d'atténuer ces obstacles. Tandis que les Inuit continuent de demander avec insistance que les écoles se basent sur leurs priorités, les Euro-canadiens devraient agir en tant qu'alliés. Afin d'y parvenir, les Euro-canadiens doivent reconnaître leur eurocentrisme et tenter d'y remédier.

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Paul Berger\*

**Résumé:** Les obstacles eurocentriques au changement scolaire au Nunavut

Soixante ans après sa mise en place, la scolarisation de l'Arctique de l'Est conserve des valeurs, une pédagogie et un programme à prédominance euro-canadienne, qui privilégie l'anglais au détriment des langues inuit. De nombreuses études ont démontré que les faibles résultats scolaires tenaient à ce modèle d'enseignement, celui-ci constituant en outre une agression envers la culture inuit, tandis que de nombreux Inuit ont, durant des décennies, insisté pour que l'enseignement reflète leur culture. Dans cet article, j'avance que c'est l'eurocentrisme qui contribue à ralentir le changement scolaire au Nunavut, en dépit des déclarations de soutien et des bonnes intentions des enseignants et des fonctionnaires blancs. En me basant sur un travail de terrain effectué dans une communauté du Nunavut et sur mes observations en tant qu'enseignant et visiteur dans les régions arctiques, je présente des exemples d'eurocentrisme au niveau individuel, d'eurocentrisme qui fait partie intégrante du système scolaire, et d'eurocentrisme pancanadien qui entrave le changement scolaire au Nunavut. Je suggère également quelques moyens d'atténuer ces obstacles. Tandis que les Inuit continuent de demander avec insistance que les écoles se basent sur leurs priorités, les Euro-canadiens devraient agir en tant qu'alliés. Afin d'y parvenir, les Euro-canadiens doivent reconnaître leur eurocentrisme et tenter d'y remédier.

**Abstract:** Eurocentric roadblocks to school change in Nunavut

Sixty years after its inception, schooling in the eastern Arctic remains predominantly based on Euro-Canadian values, curricula and pedagogy, and privileging English over Inuit languages. Many studies have linked this model of schooling to poor academic achievement and assault on Inuit culture, and many Inuit have for decades indicated that they want schooling to reflect Inuit culture. In this article I argue that Eurocentrism continues to slow the pace of educational change in Nunavut, despite the supportive proclamations and good intentions of White teachers and bureaucrats. Based on fieldwork in one Nunavut community and on observations as a teacher and visitor in Arctic areas, I present examples of individual Eurocentrism, Eurocentrism embedded in the educational system, and pan-Canadian Eurocentrism that create roadblocks to school change in Nunavut. I also suggest some ways to challenge the roadblocks. As Inuit continue to press for schools based on Inuit priorities Euro-Canadians should act as allies. To this end, Euro-Canadians need to acknowledge and challenge Eurocentrism.

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In the formal education system our parents had absolutely no influence or input, and our unique identity as Inuit was of no consequence inside the schoolroom. The legacy of this imposition crossed over to the problems of lost identity and dismantled self-esteem, which still plague the latest generations of Inuit students in education systems across the Arctic (Nungak 2004: 14).

## Introduction

Inuit schooling in Nunavut is in crisis. Ninety-six percent of Nunavut's 9,000 students are Inuit but fewer than 25% graduate from high school (ITK 2008; Silta Associates 2007), and almost none of the graduates go to university (Dorais and Sammons 2002). Inuit students who enter school with confidence and optimism often end up losing faith in themselves. The human costs are staggering (McElroy 2008) and contribute to high Inuit unemployment while the Nunavut government imports high-salaried professionals (ITK 2007). Nunavut schools are failing the people of Nunavut and must be improved (ITK and ICC 2007). Inuit have lacked real control over their own schooling for the entire 60-year history of government-run schooling in the eastern Arctic (Berger 2005; Van Meenen 1994). The educational system began, and remains, a system based primarily on the knowledge, pedagogy and culture of Euro-Canadians rather than Inuit. This has hurt Inuit students and limited their academic achievement (Berger et al. 2006; cf. Cummins 1986). Reviews of research confirm that successful schooling of Indigenous and minority students requires culturally responsive curricula and pedagogy as well as community ownership of schooling (Castagno and Brayboy 2008; Osborne 1996). Change in Nunavut schooling is needed and Inuit voices must be heeded.

Government-run schooling in what is now Nunavut began after WWII as an instrument of colonial policy to move Inuit from the land into settlements (Tester and Kulchyski 1994) and to prepare people for a wage economy (Van Meenen 1994). The schools imposed southern educational traditions on people who were used to learning holistically in daily life (Douglas 1994; Nungak 2004). Not long after their inception the transplanted model of southern schooling came under fire. Hinds (1958), a teacher, warned of the folly of mimicking southern Canadian education. Later, three studies called the structure of Arctic schooling into question and blamed schools for conflict and loss of culture (AINA 1973). In response, local education committees were created, but a decade later the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Education (1982) noted that control was still held centrally. In response to the committee's report, three school boards were created in present-day Nunavut, but pressure for educational self-determination continued (Simon 1989). In 1989, the Baffin Divisional Board of Education published *Piniaqtavut: Integrated Program*, a guide to help teachers move toward culturally appropriate teaching by following culturally relevant themes. In 1996, *Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective* (Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment) was published. Coupled with training and hiring of more Inuit teachers, these steps helped to bring Inuit content into schooling, especially in the elementary grades. Unfortunately

schooling still remained, as McAuley (1991: 45) wrote, “essentially a foreign institution [...] delivering a foreign curriculum [...] in a foreign language.”

The push for community control and cultural relevance has continued. In its 1999 policy statement, *The Bathurst Mandate*, the Nunavut government promised to create culturally relevant curricula. In an updated version called *Pinasuaqtavut*, the Government of Nunavut (2004) committed to building the education system within the context of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*—traditional Inuit ways and knowledge. During this time the Nunavut Department of Education (2004) produced the *Bilingual Education Strategy 2004-2008*—a policy that calls for a bilingual educational system to replace the abrupt transition facing most students in Grade 4, that is, from instruction in Inuktitut to instruction in English. Two recent consultative processes, the *Sivuniksamut Ilinniarniq* consultations (Aylward 2004) and the *Education Act* consultations (Nunavut Department of Education 2006), were conducted across many communities and confirmed Inuit wishes for more Inuit culture in schools, for strengthening of Inuktitut, and for higher academic standards. These findings were confirmed by my in-depth work in one Nunavut community, which showed a consistent wish for more Inuit culture and language across Inuit adults of all ages, educational backgrounds, employment status, sex, and whether or not participants took part in land and land-related activities (Berger 2008). Following consultations, the Government of Nunavut (2008a) passed the *Education Act*, thereby mandating schooling in Inuktitut from kindergarten to Grade 12 by 2019.

Against this backdrop of studies, policy, and laws calling for change in Nunavut schooling, much has remained the same since the inception of government schooling in the eastern Arctic. Although some new courses include content relevant to Nunavut, the main structures are still Euro-Canadian, and most of the curricula remain southern. Even where specific Inuit cultural skills like sewing of skins are taught, they are add-ons to the regular program and depend on year-to-year funding. Many Inuit are teaching in the elementary grades, but almost all teachers in the intermediate and senior grades are from southern Canada (Aylward 2007). Hence high school teaching takes place in English, and most of the southern recruits receive no orientation in teaching Inuit students respectfully and effectively (Berger and Epp 2007). While there has been what Cummins and Skutnabb-Kangas (1988: 2) called a “veneer of change,” many of the damaging structures have remained intact. As columnist Pizzo-Lyall (2006) noted, little about schooling has actually changed in the years since the creation of Nunavut. Why?

In this paper, I examine the ways Eurocentrism may act as a roadblock to educational change in Nunavut—change that would help schools reflect Inuit wishes rather than Euro-Canadian priorities. Eurocentrism is belief in the superiority of European ways (Smith 1999). While not alone in slowing the pace of educational change, Eurocentric thinking must be acknowledged and resisted if Inuit visions for schooling in Nunavut are to be fulfilled. My analysis comes from recent dissertation research (Berger 2008), my time teaching in Nunavut, trips to Nunavut and Greenland, and literature on Inuit schooling and self-determination. I argue that Eurocentrism has

acted to maintain the status quo and continues to sabotage Inuit wishes and plans for schooling in Nunavut. Eurocentrism hinders well-intentioned non-Inuit teachers, hurts systemic initiatives for change, and paralyzes national action that might otherwise facilitate school change and increase the well-being and academic success of Inuit students in Nunavut.

## **Methodology**

I am a White male academic who wants schools in Nunavut to become “sites of hope” (Tompkins 2002: 407). During my master’s research I came to believe that the lack of real Inuit control of schooling was problematic (Berger 2001). In my doctoral dissertation research I explored Inuit wishes for schooling in one Nunavut community through a descriptive case study (Berger 2008). While writing my dissertation, I went back to the research data and analysed Eurocentrism as a barrier to educational change in order to understand why so little has changed despite a strong desire by Inuit for schooling that reflects their culture. The analysis is reported in this paper.

The research was conducted in 2006 through ethnographic interviews with 74 Inuit adults and through participant observation during four months of fieldwork in a community of just over 1,000 people in the Qikiqtani region of Nunavut. This community was selected because I taught Grade 7 there in the 1990s and was well known to many. It shares many characteristics with Nunavut’s other 26 communities, although Inuit culture and language use varies considerably across the territory. From visiting other communities and speaking to educators from elsewhere in Nunavut, I am confident that the experiences reported here are not unique to my place of fieldwork. Colonial history is similar across Nunavut and many circumpolar regions (Darnell and Hoem 1996), so the presence of Eurocentrism across these regions is also predictable. I initially travelled twice to the community to discuss the research, changing the aims and format substantially following District Education Authority input. Such constraints as time, money and distance resulted in the process being closer to a “researcher inspired project” (Menzies 2004:17) with modifications following community input than to a research agenda co-created with Inuit. I returned to the field several times: first to present my preliminary findings; then to deliver a six-page summary of the preliminary analysis; and finally to deliver copies of the dissertation.

Much of the empirical data used for this paper came from interactions I had in the high school’s staff room during volunteer work, and in the community, rather than from interviews. My fieldwork included participation in two “school improvement” meetings with high school and elementary school staff and community members, sponsored by the Department of Education, and two days of in-service workshops conducted by Qikiqtani School Operations about the *Sivuniksamut Ilinniarniq* consultation findings (Aylward 2004). Field notes were written during and after. Along with the research data, this paper is informed by my time teaching in Nunavut and from experiences during visits to Nunavut and Greenlandic communities. The quotes from Inuit participants are presented here anonymously.

There were some limitations on the broader findings since I am non-Inuit and do not speak Inuktitut; however, much of what I report here took place in English through direct contact with non-Inuit. Still, my analysis of Eurocentrism may differ from the conclusions of an Inuit researcher. This work is the product of a non-Inuit researcher's experiences, thinking, and writing. It is also limited by lack of classroom observation. For example, a former colleague of mine once said that he could teach math to anyone, anywhere on the planet, without any special preparation—and that he had said so in a job interview for a First Nations school. I interpret this as Eurocentrism, but without speaking with his students or observing his teaching, I cannot know how this belief impacted the classroom, or be certain that he would resist increased emphasis on Inuit culture. In some cases the reader will need to decide whether the Eurocentrism I describe is likely to influence behaviour.

### **Findings: Eurocentrism blocks school change**

In arguing that educational change is impeded when Qallunaat (non-Inuit) cannot imagine doing things other than in Euro-Canadian ways, I am not criticizing individuals. Most Qallunaat in Nunavut are well-intentioned and hardworking, and I hope this criticism will be taken with an open mind. I have also heard and seen examples of Qallunaat teachers learning about Inuit culture and struggling to meet the needs of their students, although these stories are not the ones told here. The findings are presented in three sections: individual Eurocentrism; Eurocentrism at school and in the educational system; and Canadian Eurocentrism.

#### ***Individual Eurocentrism***

I saw many examples of Eurocentric beliefs during fieldwork, both inside and outside the schools. Many involved Inuktitut, the first language of almost all Inuit in the community. In one instance a long-time Qallunaat community member told me that he did not want his tax dollars “wasted” on Inuktitut, which he characterized as a “dead language.” While his position would not be shared widely, and he was not a teacher, Qallunaat voices are often heard disproportionately (Brody 2000; Tompkins 2002). This phenomenon led one participant in Martin's (2000a: 50) language of instruction research to comment that language policy “is *not to be* left to local control, since control is often in the hands of the non-Inuit minority through numbers or influence” (emphasis in original). Sometimes this happens in a public forum, such as in a letter to the editor that claimed that using Inuktitut as the main language of instruction would be disastrous for Inuit students and would “seal their prospects” (Athavale 2008).

A version of this belief was voiced at a school improvement meeting with school staff and some community members present. A non-Inuit community member, chairing a curriculum committee, recommended using English as the language of instruction, starting in kindergarten, so that the students could better compete with Iqaluit students. In the silence that followed, I commented that research suggests a strong first language

helps the transition to a second. An Inuit teacher then noted success in another community with a later transition to English, and another expressed concern about language loss: “I noticed that some children are learning English even though their first language is Inuktitut [...]. Some kids are calling their parents ‘mom’ and ‘dad.’” I cannot causally connect non-Inuit attitudes toward Inuktitut to the persistence of the educationally hazardous early-exit model in most Nunavut communities, where English becomes the medium of instruction in Grade 4 (Cummins 2000; Martin 2000b). White people’s attitudes, though, must help to frame the language of instruction debate. The power imbalance between Qallunaat and Inuit remains large (Tompkins 2002), and some Inuit may tend to defer to authority (Annahatak 1994; Napartuk 2002), often leaving disproportionate influence in non-Inuit hands. Unfortunately, pro-English attitudes may endure despite research evidence, and notwithstanding Nunavut policy to increase Inuktitut usage in schools (Nunavut Department of Education 2004).

I also saw examples of Qallunaat school staff misunderstanding the linguistic context in Nunavut. At the first school improvement meeting one high school official congratulated the community on the preservation of their language, as seen, he said, by the way all the children were fully bilingual. In interviews, though, Inuit community members expressed dismay at their children’s shallow knowledge of Inuktitut and expressed fear that the language would disappear—they wanted it strengthened in the schools. With an erroneous belief that Inuktitut is strong, the school official would have no compelling reason to work to strengthen Inuktitut in the schools. Another erroneous belief is that for students to *really* learn English, only this language should be spoken in class, as a high school teacher told me. While well-meant, not allowing the use of the students’ first language would slow their learning of English and harm their identity (Cummins 1988). Even more troubling, one Inuit parent said that a teacher had recommended speaking only English to her children. She did not say whether this incident happened in the recent or more distant past. Such advice has been noted elsewhere—it is poor pedagogy and threatens language survival (Crago et al. 1998).

These Qallunaat misconceptions demonstrate a Eurocentric attitude towards language—lack of knowledge about Inuktitut and prioritisation of English at the expense of Inuktitut. This resonates with findings from Nunavik (Spada and Lightbown 2002). Language loss in Nunavut is in part due to English-language schooling (Dorais and Sammons 2002), and legislation has recently been passed to compel schools to offer schooling in Inuktitut (Government of Nunavut 2008a, 2008b). Unfortunately, if teachers advocate less Inuktitut, they are poorly positioned to help raise its status and presence. Fortunately, Eurocentric beliefs are neither inevitable nor immutable. Some Qallunaat have made other choices, like former principal Joanne Tompkins (1998) who strove to respect Inuktitut and to expand its role and status in school life. Such an effort requires more than lip service (Arreak 2001) and will not happen without real conviction that Inuktitut matters. Policy may not be enough to overcome teacher resistance (Aylward 2006).

Another form of Eurocentrism is the belief of some non-Inuit teachers that students cannot succeed at school because of deficiencies in their home culture. This

explanation for academic failure has been discredited in the literature, but persists among educators (Aylward 2004; Bishop 2003; Fuzessy 2003). In one example, during a staff room discussion amongst Qallunaat teachers, Inuit parents were criticised for not waking their children and getting them to school on time. As I probed a bit, the teacher who most strongly voiced this opinion said that Inuit parents “just do not like to get up in the morning.” Brody (2000) and Vallee (1972) both reported that a lack of understanding of Inuit culture led Qallunaat teachers to mistakenly believe that Inuit parents fail in their parenting. This belief would not only undermine respectful or effective responses to late arrival and poor attendance (Berger et al. 2006), but also the possibility of imagining doing things differently. During fieldwork I took part in professional development with the Qallunaat high school staff and the topic of attendance and punctuality came up. I said that community members had also expressed concern and suggested that the school listen to their ideas. I was told that school is like work—you cannot be late for work—and that the Inuit would, sooner or later, get used to the school schedule.

In interviews, many Inuit expressed disdain for the school policy of sending students home for arriving more than 15 minutes late for class, i.e., a “suspension.” For example, one said: “If it was like that and I was going to school, I’d be late on purpose just so I would be suspended.” Making the student sit in the corner for a while, something participants found effective from their own school days, was the most popular idea for dealing with lateness or minor discipline problems. When this suggestion was made by an Inuit parent at a school improvement meeting, a school official smiled and said he “wouldn’t want to try it with some young men here.” At first glance it might seem like this penalty is as European as the school’s policy on lateness, but it was described in interviews as a way to express dissatisfaction with a person’s behaviour without excluding him or her or interrupting the learning process. It may therefore better fit Inuit ways. Historically, embarrassment was a much less invasive way to maintain harmony than ostracism (Boult 1989). Whether or not this penalty would be workable today, unwillingness to dialogue on school practices belies a Eurocentric orientation and reduces the likelihood that Inuit solutions will eventually guide schooling in Nunavut. This kind of Qallunaat domination is familiar to Inuit. As one participant said: “We’re so used to when White people come up they control—we don’t want that anymore.”

I believe Eurocentrism is insidious for White people. Despite my reading and writing about colonialism and Inuit schooling, Eurocentrism also came easily to me sitting in the staff room, discussing matters like how to stop students from wandering. At various points during the fieldwork, my partner, anthropologist Helle Møller, needed to point out that I was thinking like a White teacher. It may take a high degree of awareness and constant vigilance for Euro-Canadians to avoid acting and reacting Eurocentrically, but there is no alternative if we wish to do things differently.



## *Eurocentrism at school and in the educational system*

Much about schooling must be questioned if Nunavut schools are to meet Inuit wishes. In this section I will document how Eurocentrism can constrain this questioning and the needed educational change. When I attended two full-day school improvement meetings that were open to community members, a school official told the group that the aim was “to make principles of IQ (*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*) the foundation” by focussing “on what educators and parents are doing well and how they can build on successes and best practices.” Small groups were formed to create draft mission statements, vision statements, and long-term goals for the schools. People chose their own group, which in most cases was almost wholly Inuit or Qallunaat. The groups consisting predominantly of White teachers completed their tasks quickly, in one case typing their statement on a computer and printing it out, while my group spent much time discussing what was expected, translating instructions and ideas between English and Inuktitut, and finishing the task hurriedly.

Statements from mostly Qallunaat groups read something like: “encourage cooperation and communication between the schools and community promoting intellectual, social, athletic, cultural and bilingual growth with an overall sense of well-being in a safe, secure and caring environment,” while mostly Inuit groups said things like: “to have pride in their culture, language and tradition,” and, “cultural excursions (on the land and teamwork); winter day trips; igloo building and survival skills and how to make shelter; how to set up nets in the winter; overnight trips—include elders and hunters.” While the mostly Inuit groups were more explicit about the need to include culture, this need also appeared in the mostly Qallunaat group statements as well. As long-term goals, six of the seven groups asked specifically for increased elder involvement, such as this Inuit group, “Elders must teach Inuktitut classes and values and traditions”, and this Qallunaat group, “Using elders to demonstrate seasonal activities.” There seemed to be consensus on the need for more Inuit culture in the schools.

Near the end of the second meeting an Inuit community member asked if anything would change following the discussions or if it would “stay on paper.” Another community member asked about money to hire elders, which was not available. I suggested converting a high school teaching position into money to hire elders and the principal responded that changing the credit requirements would require Department of Education approval. I suggested changing the high school schedule, not credits, even though the time needed to graduate might be longer. The principal said that culture can be taught across the curriculum and that what was really needed was new curricula and money to hire elders. An Inuit community member said that this sort of meeting was held whenever new staff was hired, and urged “action this time, not just lip talk.”

Despite general agreement that more Inuit culture should be part of schooling, limitations were quickly found that made changes impossible. Lack of funding was the major obstacle. In Aboriginal education, lack of money is frequently cited as a barrier to change and must be viewed suspiciously, “merely another way to avoid

implementing constitutional rights and human rights” (Battiste 2000: 205). It is troubling that the Nunavut Department of Education (2006) claims that the educational system should be based on Inuit ways and values while no funding is earmarked for permanent hiring of elders and little money is available for teaching specific Inuit skills—things that must certainly be just initial steps in a more fundamental transformation of schooling. Nevertheless, while lack of money is certainly a real obstacle, it can also be used to justify maintaining the status quo (Skutnab-Kangas 1988). When the meeting ended I felt that it had been disingenuous, an exercise in consultation without the real possibility for change. Qallunaat educators resisted the idea of fundamental change in school staffing—exchanging a Qallunaat teacher for Inuit elders—and made no plans to investigate and pursue other avenues to raise the status of Inuit language and culture in the schools.

It would be easier to pursue educational change in line with Inuit wishes if Inuit were not underrepresented as teachers. Almost all teachers and principals in Nunavut high schools are non-Inuit (Aylward 2007). During fieldwork I took part in “multiple graduation options” meetings with high school staff and a school superintendent, which were meant to give feedback on changes planned by the Department of Education. There were seven White males discussing the future of Inuit education, while during an earlier phase of consultations on the issue two-thirds of the people present were Qallunaat (Nunavut Department of Education 2005). Without doubting the sincerity of individual Qallunaat, it is easy to imagine that most are poorly situated to plan or support fundamental educational change. Thirty years ago, Bunz (1979: 172) surveyed community members and teachers in the Northwest Territories and found that “the goal of preserving cultural identity was one of the highest priorities of Inuit and Loucheux respondents and one of the lowest priorities of Euro-Canadians.” Despite proclamations of support, the same situation seems to prevail today.

In addition, positions of authority today are held mostly by Qallunaat. The Nunavut bureaucracy remains “massively Qallunaat” (Searles 2002) with an acute shortage of Inuit managers and professionals (Kenny 2002). As Graveline (2002: 19) cautioned, where the bureaucracy remains White, we should not expect it to rush in and dismantle Eurocentric hegemony. As in Greenland, privileged outsiders may bring with them an ethnocentric state of mind (Jonsson 1999), which prevents change despite most politicians being Inuit. This may help to explain promising government rhetoric and very slow change. As Kulchyski (2005: 64) wrote about the Northwest Territories, Aboriginal control of government does not ensure Aboriginal control of the State. The bureaucracy can act “as a braking mechanism on government in general.”

In theory, District Education Authorities should be able to drive educational change. They were created to bring control closer to the people, but the results have been disappointing (IDEA 2005a). The foreignness of the Qallunaat school structure (Douglas 1994), the lack of training for members (IDEA 2006), and the Qallunaat urge to control (Brody 2000) have all undermined their effectiveness. In an interview, the process was explained by a woman in her 50s:

I found out that a lot of them don't know what kind of authority that they have [...]. They still respect Qallunaats very much [...]. But a lot of them are now finding out how to be board members so they're not just yes-people anymore, or trying not to be [...]. It takes a lot of guts for the people on the board.

Two Inuit teachers from another community told me a story to illustrate their frustration with outsider control. People from the community did not want a long Christmas break and the District Education Authority designed the school schedule accordingly. Qallunaat teachers wanted a longer break in order to fly to southern Canada for the holidays. The Qallunaat principal threatened the District Education Authority with the resignation of the high school teachers if the schedule change was not reversed. It was reversed. Even modest changes to respect Inuit wishes can be thwarted by Qallunaat needs or desires.

At school and in the educational system, change is hampered by Euro-Canadian ideas about schooling, by lack of money to facilitate change, and by structures that keep control and influence among the non-Inuit, who often seem to embrace change in principle and then block it in practice. Nonetheless, there is currently a strong movement for change in Nunavut schooling. The recently passed *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* (Government of Nunavut 2008a, 2008b) mandate schooling in Inuktitut, and the Government of Nunavut (1999, 2004) and the Nunavut Department of Education (2006) have both proclaimed that Inuit culture and language should be the foundation of schooling in Nunavut. Later, I will make suggestions as to how this spirit of change might be pursued without being bogged down by Eurocentrism, but first I will turn briefly to national Eurocentrism and the need for adequate funding to transform schooling in Nunavut.

### ***Canadian Eurocentrism blocking change in Nunavut schooling***

If the Nunavut Department of Education's (2006: 1) commitment to "a fundamental shift in the delivery of education in Nunavut" is to be met, money will be needed. Resources are needed for culturally relevant curricula, for curricula in Inuktitut, and for properly funded land and culture programs (DeMerchant and Tagalik 2000; IDEA 2005b; Martin 2000b; Simon 1989). The money has to come from the Canadian government since the Nunavut tax base is small and education competes with other priorities such as housing and healthcare, which are also currently under-funded and in crisis. A call for federal funding was made strongly by Thomas Berger (2006) who had been hired to mediate a dispute between the Nunavut government and the Canadian government over Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. The Article guarantees a representative territorial government workforce in Nunavut—about 85% Inuit, and Berger wrote that the target was impossible to reach without a major overhaul of the educational system to make it bilingual and bicultural. In a letter to then Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Jim Prentice, he called for \$20 million annually to support Inuktitut, and millions more to make schooling in Nunavut bilingual. He wrote that the money was necessary to fulfil the Canadian government's

obligations under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. While Thomas Berger (2006: 45) wrote that there were too many factors to specify the exact amount of funding needed, he argued forcefully that the costs of doing nothing, in human and financial terms, were staggering and avoidable.

Prentice answered by noting that more money was already being spent on education per capita in Nunavut than anywhere else in Canada (Windeyer 2006). At the time, Canada was experiencing huge budget surpluses (CBC News 2007), but even in a recession billions of dollars can be found for bailouts and infrastructure projects. Money cannot be the real issue. Canadians must call for an end to the Eurocentrism that allows schooling, which began in the eastern Arctic as an instrument of colonialism, to remain an institution that assimilates and fails Inuit students. Underfunding is an endemic and persistent problem in Inuit and First Nations schooling, undermining self-determination (Goddard 1997; Hookimaw-Witt 1998) and making major systemic reform unlikely (Agbo 2002). Alfred (2005) might call it post-modern imperialism, enforcing the will of the colonizers without using force. Underfunding may indicate broader societal attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples. I thus find the Canadian government's position to be deeply troubling. Underfunding signals that the Canadian policy of assimilating Aboriginal peoples, so evident in residential schools policy (Haig-Brown 1988) is acceptable to Canadians. It is incumbent upon us to challenge this Eurocentrism.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Despite constraints, the creation of Nunavut has led to an increase in Inuit control over government (Dorais and Sammons 2002). Nunavut government and Department of Education policy and rhetoric call for fundamental school change. This will require leaving Eurocentric thinking behind and will need courage, creativity, and risk taking (Cummins 1988; Dei 2000; Tompkins 1998). Many Qallunaat educators are unaware that they are embedded in an educational system that marginalizes Inuit students (Aylward 2006: 77) and to date they have had little help in understanding their own Eurocentrism. Those who believe that schooling should reflect Inuit wishes may be useful in helping transform schooling in Nunavut, but the onus is on them to understand how their thoughts and actions might block change. As Battiste (2005) wrote, we have all been marinated in Eurocentric thought, so it is not surprising that our own Eurocentrism may seem somewhat like the air we breathe and be just as invisible. This will make identifying and combating it an extra challenge.

To be effective, teachers must understand the social relations and history of the places where they teach (Goulet 2001). In Nunavut, they must learn about the colonial past and the continuing inequality inside and outside the educational system. White teachers also need to explore the prejudices inherited from their past (Noordhoff and Kleinfeld 1993) and learn about their own culture with a view to seeing it as one of many, rather than as the natural order (Shore 2003). The new Education Act (Government of Nunavut 2008a) requires an orientation for teachers who are new to

Nunavut, and this training should include a focus on Eurocentrism. Since teachers' own cultural patterns can be quite unconscious and can cause actions that contradict their conscious aims (Spindler and Spindler 2000), ongoing support is also crucial. Some of the Qallunaat teachers in Nunavut—those who are unhappy with their own shortcomings and troubled by the continuing existence of Qallunaat schools for Inuit students—will be able to play a role in reinventing schooling. Other Qallunaat may be unable, and as they leave Nunavut their replacements should be screened for “personable suitability” (Kenny 2002). Individual Qallunaat in Nunavut need to be aware of, and actively addressing, their own Eurocentrism.

To move away from Eurocentrism, the Nunavut government and the Nunavut Department of Education should prioritise hiring Inuit teachers. While Inuit teachers may also have to unlearn Eurocentrism to varying degrees, they are well-positioned to bring Inuit language, culture and worldviews into schooling—yet they make up only 26% of Nunavut teachers (Aylward 2007). Inuit principals can lead in ways more congruent with Inuit culture (Tompkins 2006) and Inuit teachers can spearhead the transformation of curricula and pedagogy (Aylward 2006). The education of Inuit teachers and principals should be prioritised and the process should respect Inuit knowledge and ways of being. The Nunavut Teacher Education Program has been very successful in graduating Inuit teachers, but more are needed and the program needs more culturally relevant content (Aarluk Consulting 2005; Aylward 2006; Kenny 2002; Russell 2006). Student academic performance will improve when well-supported bilingual teachers who share their students' values and aspirations form the core of Nunavut teachers (*cf.* McCarty 2003).

Eurocentric thinking must also yield in the way the needed Inuit teachers are to be prepared. Even at full capacity the Nunavut Teacher Education Program cannot graduate Inuit in sufficient numbers, so alternatives should be considered. Apprenticing new teachers into their jobs was successful in one Nunavut community (Tompkins 1998) and suggested by an Inuit teacher in this study. A program similar to the recent *Akitsiraq Law Program* (Driscoll 2006) could prepare Inuit to teach at any grade level. Like the *Law Program*, it would be expensive and would signal a break from the Eurocentric thinking where “efficiency” is the key consideration. Euro-Canadians everywhere, through the Canadian government, should support initiatives designed by Inuit to provide Inuit teachers for Inuit students. Another possibility is to hire experts who have no paper qualifications (Nunavut Social Development Council 1998). By recognising that Inuit have knowledge that cannot currently be gained in Euro-Canadian degree and diploma programs, we take a step away from typical Qallunaat thinking rather than toward a lowering of standards.

The educational system also needs to improve support for Inuit teachers, who, as one teacher told me, do two jobs due to the heavy demands of translating curricula and resources into Inuktitut. The Government of Nunavut (2007) recently announced funds to “revitalise education in Nunavut,” in part earmarked to improve resources in Inuktitut. Production of relevant curricula and resources in Inuktitut would signal a real shift away from Eurocentric schooling, as control of the knowledge base is critical for

control of schooling (Stairs 1988). Inuit educators should direct curriculum and resource creation. As they work to introduce Inuit culture into Nunavut schooling, they would benefit from an Inuit educators' association like the *Ciulistet* in Alaska (Lipka and Ilutsik 1998; Tompkins 2006). The power of Inuit working together may be threatening for Qallunaat in Nunavut who are used to having power and privilege, but it holds great promise for moving schooling toward Inuit ways and values.

Schooling in the eastern Arctic was introduced as part of a colonial policy to strengthen Canada's claim to sovereignty in the area (Tester and Kulchyski 1994). It disrupted Inuit ways of being and of educating (Douglas 1994, 1998). Schooling has failed Inuit students in preparing them for life in their time and place (Watt-Cloutier 2000) and still does not meet the needs or wishes of many Inuit. Schooling has, from its inception, formed an integral part of an assault by Euro-Canadians on Inuit culture. Taking responsibility for ending the assault will mean that the Eurocentrism that blocks school change must be acknowledged and challenged, by Qallunaat teachers, Qallunaat bureaucrats, and Qallunaat citizens. Inuit will continue to make changes and to press for change in Nunavut schooling. Hopefully, well-meaning Qallunaat will stop standing in the way.

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