Pigiasilluta oKalagiamik: Culturally Relevant Assessment in Nunatsiavut
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Article abstract
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Jennifer Godfrey Anderson\textsuperscript{i} and Jodie Lane\textsuperscript{ii}

ABSTRACT
Beginning with a story of travelling between northern communities and the shared experiences of the researchers, the environment, and the animals, this research reports the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents on how school-based assessment practices impact Inuit learners in Nunatsiavut, the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area. To adjust to current global social, economic, and environmental challenges (Council of Ministers of Education 2018; OECD 2018; United Nations 2010), mainstream jurisdictions are centering their curricular content and assessment measures on competencies (Alberta 2018; British Columbia 2018; Council of Ministers of Education 2018; OECD 2018; Ontario 2016). Our results show that many of these values are already imbedded in community- and land-based experiences in Nunatsiavut and we argue that the development of assessment practices to capture competencies can help reveal the strengths in culturally relevant curriculum and instruction in Nunatsiavut.

KEYWORDS
Culturally relevant assessment, Inuit assessment practices, land-based and experiential learning

RÉSUMÉ
Pigiasilluta oKalagiamik: Une évaluation pertinente sur le plan culturel au Nunatsiavut
Cet article est le résultat d’un projet de recherche qui a eu lieu sur la côte du Labrador. En tant que chercheurs et éducateurs, nous avons cherché à comprendre l’impact des pratiques d’évaluation en milieu scolaire sur les apprenants inuits du Nunatsiavut, le territoire des Inuit du Labrador. En faisant état des points de vue des enseignants, des administrateurs et des parents, nous avons constaté une persistance de contenus et de méthodes d’évaluation normatifs et culturellement biaisés. Pour s’adapter aux défis sociaux, économiques et environnementaux mondiaux actuels (Conseil des ministres de l’Éducation 2018; OCDE 2018; Nations Unies 2010), les juridictions traditionnellescentrent le contenu des programmes et les mesures d’évaluation sur des compétences telles que la réflexion critique, la créativité et la collaboration. (Alberta 2018; Colombie-Britannique 2018; Conseil des ministres de l’Éducation 2018; OCDE 2018v; Ontario 2016). Nos résultats

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montrent que bon nombre de ces valeurs sont déjà ancrées dans les expériences communautaires et terrestres au Nunatsiavut et nous soutenons que le développement de pratiques d’évaluation pour saisir les compétences peut aider à révéler les forces d’un programme et d’une instruction axés sur la culture du Nunatsiavut.

**MOTS-CLÉS**
Évaluation culturellement pertinente, pratiques d’évaluation des Inuit, apprentissage basé sur la terre et par l’expérience

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**Pigianninga**

*Jen.* As the skidoo pulled up to my accommodations, I strapped on my backpack, pulled my knee-high rubber boots over my ski pants, and headed out into the bright spring morning sun. Jodie was smiling and in a hurry to beat the day’s melting heat. As part of our study, we were travelling 80 km across the northern Labrador Sea ice by skidoo to visit schools and parents in the Nunatsiavut region of Labrador. As it was also a school holiday, Jodie was making our journey to Hopedale a family trip by including her husband, Cyril, their 14-year-old son, Lucas, and 10-year-old daughter, Marin. Their lunches were packed, the kids were anxious to go, and their little friends were hanging around, jealous of the adventure they couldn’t make. As a last check, Cyril made sure Lucas, who was hoping to get his first seal on this trip, was carrying his ammunition.

Jodie and I met while I was teaching in the Inuit Bachelor of Education Program in Labrador, a community-based teacher education program developed in partnership between the Nunatsiavut Government and Memorial University (see Moore 2016). I felt very much at home in Labrador. I grew up at a similar latitude in a small northern town in Haisla territory, on the coast of British Columbia. There is something different about the North. I believe that growing up in an isolated northern valley surrounded by thousand-year-old giant cedars taught me humility and gave me a glimpse of the complexity of our natural ecosystems; the breath of the ancient rainforest, the strength of the intermingling tree roots, the song of the birds as they return in the spring, and the bounty of the magnificent Chinook salmon traveling back and forth between salt and fresh water year after year feeding bears, eagles, and humans alike. The mountains were my mentors and their paths my mental health. With a few exceptions, this was not an understanding represented in my classrooms and I believe this remains a gap in curriculum and instruction today.
As a teacher, I brought my students out of the classroom and into nature and their communities as much as I could. Independent of year group or continent, I witnessed how engaging students holistically connected them to their learning, to their world, and to one another. The learning was rich and involved a complex web of different content and skills. My students have since told me that those experiences shaped their interests as well as their personal and social development. That said, over my decades-long career in education, I watched as curriculum became more prescriptive and increasingly focused on discrete and measurable skills, at the expense of holistic experiences.

In October 2018, the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report declaring that by 2030, climate-related risks will impact health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth (IPCC, 2018). Connecting children to their communities and teaching them how to understand and relate to their planet has never been more critical. Yet, despite teachers’ and curriculum designers’ best efforts, fragmented and disembodied content continues to dominate curriculum content and instruction, and assessment practices are compounding the problem by disaggregating content into discrete, measurable constructs. There has to be another way to gather good information in classrooms and school systems. Because I believe there are solutions in other perspectives on teaching and learning, I jumped at the chance to explore these ideas with Jodie.

Jodie. I wanted so much for Jen to experience what I get to experience every year: springtime in Nunatsiavut. The days are long and the mood is light and fresh with possibility. Having Jen witness for herself the beauty of the land, the quietness of standing on the sea ice, and the wonders that lay before us as we made our way north that beautiful day in May was nothing shy of perfect.

The warmth of the sun meant that the sea ice would be riddled with puddles. The simple act of driving without worry over sometimes deep areas of slob and water on the top of sea ice is something we take for granted. I never felt that this was something I needed to teach my children until the time my daughter, Marin, became afraid that we would fall through. I realized that I needed to teach her how to recognize safe ice and unsafe ice. I had to reassure her that not only were we safe, but also her father would never put us in a dangerous situation. It wasn’t long before she was ploughing through these puddles on her own skidoo without getting stuck, giggling and screaming with excitement.

Teaching and learning on the land is fluid, with the teacher and the learner often changing places. As parents, we expect that we are always the teacher, but often our children surprise us with knowledge we didn’t
know they already had. They learned by listening and observing. By experiencing. This is what happened throughout the day on our way to Hopedale.

The drive was quiet, yet alive with excitement. Everyone’s eyes were alert and straining toward the horizon as we looked for seals. Marin, not yet carrying her own rifle, could only point when she saw a mass lying on the ice. Lucas, on the other hand, would veer from the group and try his best to get close enough for a shot. After watching the third or fourth seal slip back into its hole, Lucas pulled up beside his dad for a chat. Cyril pointed out to Lucas that the ones we can see easily are a lot bigger than what we need, and reminded him of the range of his rifle. He didn’t need to get too close, as long as he had a good shot.

After Lucas missed several attempts, Cyril saw an opportunity to demonstrate. We all held our breath as he reached for his rifle from his back and took aim. The tension was thick but immediately disappeared when we heard the shot as Lucas yelled, “He got him!” We sped off toward the seal. I felt bad for Lucas, but my worries lasted only seconds as I saw that he was still excited that “we” had gotten a seal.

We turned off our skidoos as Lucas was already digging through his bag for his knife. Marin, not having the chance to witness this very often, headed straight for the seal and was amazed by all of the blood soaking into the ice and seeping into the water. She watched intently as her brother began to skin the seal. She didn’t flinch when the first cut was made, releasing the intestines and other internal organs onto the snow. She asked questions as Lucas cut through the fat to remove the skin so that he could harvest the meat.

With all of the seal’s insides now on the outside, Marin got her hands dirty as she inspected the pile. Her dad helped her distinguish between the liver, the kidneys, and the lungs. To say she was amazed would be an understatement. Her absolute favourite meal is seal meat and I truly believe she gained a whole new appreciation for it as she now fully understands the process. She was excited to bring the meat home so that her grandma could cook it for her.

The drive continued and we came across holes of water more frequently. Our speed didn’t change, but how we handled our machines had to be modified to maintain our pace. Closer to land, we came upon a company of geese –which is exciting for even the most experienced hunter but even more so for a 14-year-old with an itchy trigger finger. There was no time for a shot, and the communication between father and son that took place with just eye contact was one of frustration, but it was an important conversation all the same.

As we carried on, Lucas continued to scout the ice for another target. Sighting one in the distance, he slowed down and circled back
to come up alongside of his dad. Again, no words were spoken, all
the information was communicated through a simple nod of Cyril’s
head. Lucas shot out in front in hopes of getting one more seal to bring
home. But this last effort was in vain as the seal sensed his presence
and immediately retreated into the safety of the sea. Lucas was more
frustrated than disappointed because it is in his nature to share with
others. The more he killed today meant more people with whom he
could share his bounty. I guess it’s a good frustration to have because
it will fuel his desire to try again next time.

As Hopedale came into sight, memories came rushing back to me
of my trips as a child, and I was so very thankful for the opportunity to
travel the same path with my own children. We pulled off of the ice
onto the main road running through the community of 650 and I was
so pleased with how the morning had unfolded. I could not have asked
for a more perfect experience for my colleague and friend. She saw and
experienced exactly what I had hoped she would… and more.

Kaujisautet

Beginning with this story of travelling between northern communities and
the shared experiences with each other, the environment, and the animals,
this research is grounded in relationship—the relationship between the
oftentimes disparate communities of “southern” education authorities and
the small schools situated in remote and northern regions of Canada. These
relationships include people situated within their contexts and cultures,
interacting and enacting educational policies. Schools are agents of the
dominant society and reflect the cultural patterns of that society through
the goals, content, structure, and methods used (Barnhardt 1981). Authority
is defined as “a social relationship in which some people are granted the
legitimacy to lead and others agree to follow” (Pace and Hemmings 2007, 6).
In education, curriculum reveals those with authority by reflecting their
knowledge. How subjects are divided, what is valued in each of the subjects,
and how targets are measured and reported, for example, are all decisions
made by subject specialists, teacher committees, and curriculum developers.
Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, 5) viewed curriculum as “an ‘internal colonizer’
at work to authorize the metropole and conscribe her periphery.”

Assessment is a powerful method of standardization. Nelson-Barber
and Trumbull (2007, 136) write, “Whether it takes the form of a standardized
test, an informal quiz, or an observation of student performance, assessment
is associated with culture-based assumptions about how it should be
conducted and how students should participate.” Studies and reports
constantly show gaps in educational achievement between Indigenous
and non-Indigenous students (Auditor General of Canada 2011; Statistics
Canada (2018), with Indigenous students over-represented in special education programs and under-represented in the gifted and talented categories (Ottmann and Jeary 2016). Battiste (2013, 35) argues that through racist, patriarchal, and bureaucratic authority structures, Canadian society has consistently displaced Indigenous ways of knowing and being through acting on a “Eurocentric lens that measured everything against itself, and therefore, Indigenous peoples were always found lacking.” Not surprisingly, statistics representing First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students in the Canadian education system report high dropout rates, reduced graduation rates, and under-representation of Indigenous students in post-secondary institutions (Statistics Canada 2018).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) recognizes the right to be educated within one’s own culture, and section 1.5 of The Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada stipulates that assessment measures should be suited to the cultural backgrounds of students (Joint Advisory Committee 1993). However, in Canada, curriculum content and both large-scale evaluations (e.g. provincial assessment programs and externally created reading evaluations) and expectations for classroom assessment practices and grading policies are managed by central school districts and provincial legislation located in the capital cities, often hundreds of kilometres away from the populations they are serving. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015, 6) calls on Canadian society to reconcile the exclusionary practices of its education systems by committing to “restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned.” In this study, we examined how assessment can also become responsive to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) by investigating assessment practices in the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area (known as Nunatsiavut) of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Nunatsiavut

Nunatsiavut is one of the four regions of Nunangat and means “our beautiful land” in Inuktitut. The population of Nunatsiavut is 2,355, with 90% identifying as Inuit (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2018). There are five communities and five schools in Nunatsiavut. The fly-in communities located along the coast of Labrador range in population from 180 to 1,125. Inuit have lived in these settlements for more than 5,000 years, but it was not until 2005, with the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement Act, that Nunatsiavut was officially recognized as self-governing Inuit land.

Under the Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement, the Nunatsiavut Government has the authority to assume responsibility over education; currently, however, all education policies, curricula, and assessments are managed through the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education.
and Early Childhood Development, located in the provincial capital city roughly 1,000 km away— as the crow flies—from Hopedale, the legislative capital of Nunatsiavut. The five community schools are staffed through the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and curriculum is standardized through a Provincial Program of Studies (2019) and the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial curriculum (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, various years). The curriculum outlines objectives, teaching strategies, suggested resources, and assessment measures. Until the COVID-19 outbreak, the province tested every student in grades 3, 6, and 9 in mathematics and reading. These do not account for any part of the students’ grades. There are also normally subject-specific provincial assessments in secondary subjects, accounting for 50% of the final grade.

As in other regions of Inuit Nunangat, the people of Nunatsiavut have a distinctly close relationship with the land and their ancestral territories (Nunavut, 2019). In Inuit Nunangat, the overwhelming majority (70%) of Inuit adults take part in harvesting activities and half (51%) gather wild plants and berries.” Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2018, 20) notes, “Our harvesting, sharing, and country food consumption reinforces family and community ties and contributes to the continuity of an ancient tradition. The findings of our study are applicable to Nunatsiavut and the communities we visited. There is no one Inuit truth uncovered in this research.

**Atuttaujut**

Information for our study was drawn from multiple sources including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document searches on policy and curriculum relevant to the Nunatsiavut context. The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data analysis involved the researchers and two graduate students independently categorizing the focus group and interview transcripts, the survey data, and the researchers’ journals. Thematic clusters emerged the basis of these categories, highlighted texts, and written reflections.

To maintain participant anonymity in the small school populations, the participant data is reported as an aggregate. At the time of the study, there were five principals, three vice-principals, 50 teachers, and 13 language and culture teachers (Ilusivut and Inosivut life-skills instructors) in the five Kindergarten to grade 12 schools. Twelve participants completed the online survey, 22 participants attended the focus groups, and three participants engaged in individual interviews. Two principals, two vice-principals, and 19 teachers participated in the focus groups. Because many of the teachers are also parents (and therefore identified as both), we placed them in the teacher/Illusivut/Inosivut category, not the parent category. Despite assurances
of anonymity in the consent form, not all survey participants included their name. Consequently, to avoid duplication in our findings, the survey participants were not counted in the percentage of participants. The written comments from the surveys, however, were used in the aggregate of written responses. Three of the five schools participated in the research.

**Nagvasimajavut**

Our research question asked whether current assessment practices served the students in Nunatsiavut. As such, the study centered on the teachers’, principals’, and parents’ perceptions of their experiences with school-based assessments. Their responses were clustered according to issues with the content of the assessments and issues with the methods of assessment. The importance of holistic engagement with the community as well as teacher education and experience were also identified as major clusters. Generally, the participants referred to assessments as either large-scale external assessments or classroom assessments; we will therefore use their definitions of assessment when discussing the findings.

**Curriculum Content**

A theme that continued to emerge was that the curriculum lacked relevancy to the Inuit-specific context and culture in Nunatsiavut. Noting that the curriculum “has no meaning to them… doesn’t connect them to the world or to their community”, and discussing how curriculum is developed in “the South”, many of our respondents felt that the curriculum reflected the perspectives and experiences of the people who constructed the documents, not those of the people of Nunatsiavut. For example, one participant claimed that “I think that’s where we need to make sure the province understands, that we have a unique group in this area of the province that they are kind of ignoring” and another participant specifically involved herself in a development committee because she wanted to ensure the “Labrador perspective” was included in the curriculum.

The lack of perspective was primarily recognized as a lack of content specific to Nunatsiavut. In our review of the provincial curriculum in the core subject areas from Kindergarten to grade 9, we found few references to the context, culture, and language in Nunatsiavut. With the single exception of the mention “Inuit” in a list of demeaning words (e.g. “Indian” and “Eskimo”) in the English Language Arts Grade 5 Curriculum (2013, 181), there were no other instances of the use of “Nunatsiavut” or “Inuit” in the English Language Arts and Mathematics curricula from grades Kindergarten to Grade 9. There was more content in the Social Studies and Science guides as well as some nuanced geographical and natural references, such as “ice”, “bear”, and “snow”, in the mathematics and English Language Arts
Curriculum, but no other explicit content pertaining to Labrador was found in these two core subject areas, which are currently the two subjects tested in the provincial assessment program (in grades 3, 6, and 9).

Our review revealed that although the science curriculum did have some more explicit content, the suggested and provided resources in science consistently reflected the culture of the South. For example, one science teacher discussed dissection. In a hunting society, many of the students are intimately familiar with animal body parts, as was demonstrated in our opening narrative. Yet, in school, this science teacher recognized that the students were limited by the poor quality of preserved specimens. She took the initiative and rather than use the provided resources, she sourced local specimens which she stated were better quality, more comprehensive, and more relevant to the students.

Lack of relevancy was also evident in non-core subjects such as art, which was specifically mentioned as a subject that excluded the Inuit perspective, despite the cultural focus and reliance on art, crafting, and constructions (Nunavut Government 2019). Although our review of the art curriculum did include relevant content in grades 7 to 9, we found little direct connection to Inuit art in the elementary grades (Kindergarten to grade 6). Throughout the focus groups and interviews, participants discussed how this lack of relevancy alienated students from both their learning and the subject area.

Assessment Content

The participants also declared that large-scale provincial assessments have not reflected their context. As with the curriculum content, participants claimed that these tests reflected southern culture because they were conceived and constructed in the South. One participant felt that achievement levels would be different if the tests were constructed and field-tested in Nunatsiavut, noting that at one time, “it was done up here for our kids and they were very successful.”

This problem extended to other types of evaluations, such as Running Records. In these levelled reading assessments, students are asked to read passages aloud while the teacher records reading fluency. The reading is then followed by a number of comprehension questions. Participants criticized Running Record texts because they are based on southern culture and are thus neither applicable nor relatable to their students. Indeed, they pointed out several specific examples where the subject of the narrative involved such foreign concepts or ideas as riding on a carousel or old-fashioned cars. While teachers can choose to avoid using inappropriate resources or teaching and assessment strategies in the curriculum, they cannot adjust the content of the provincial assessments. One basic principle of testing theory is to ensure fairness (Zieky 2006); however, questions on
assessments that include antique cars, for example, are a source of confusion for the students and place them at a disadvantage. One participant noted: “I remember there was an English exam, that they described situations about someone riding on a school bus. Now, in North Coast communities, people have never seen a bus, never sat in a bus, they have no idea what that context would be like.”

Throughout all of the interviews, focus groups, and survey results, the respondents discussed the lack of and need for local content:

The passing on of knowledge from traditional Elders in the community is extremely important, and in some courses, there are ways of meeting outcomes by doing certain Indigenous projects, whether its kamutik making, or snowshoe making, or making models of traditional Indigenous shelters that were used years ago, or even making mitts and slippers, and also making traditional lines for hunting seals and making gaffs. The opportunities are almost endless.

In their appeal for more connected and community-oriented content, our participants concurred that the curriculum and assessments needed to be enhanced purposefully with culture and language to enable students to make connections with their learning. In all forms of data collected (surveys, interviews, and focus groups), participants emphasized a need for land-based holistic experiences. The importance of this was reflected in such statements as “Going outside helps them grow as a person and who they are and how they identify themselves as Inuit” and “The kids here are more hands-on learners. They love doing outdoor cultural land-based activities and anything that reflects our culture, especially connecting with the land.” The participants also agreed that this method of instruction significantly impacts student wellness, engagement, and achievement: “If we supported that type of non-formalized learning, then we probably would have happier children in our schools who are ready to learn and contribute more to the classroom because of their own outside-of-school experiences that are supported by the school system”.

Indeed, it was expressed that this lack of relevance ultimately alienates students from the school and, as the centre of the community, alienation from school has several immediate and dramatic effects, such as less community involvement and self-esteem issues, and long-term effects including the lack of certification through further education.

Assessment Methods
Our participants felt that because students in Nunatsiavut have differences in both the manner and the method of showing their knowledge, the existing expectations for both large-scale and classroom assessments were
problematic, despite the espoused flexibility in allowing students to show what they know in different ways. Some respondents spoke of the reliance on pencil and paper methods of showing knowledge, as is expected in provincial assessments, while others argued that privileging these methods limited not only the depth but also the outcomes of learning. Participatory and authentic demonstrations of knowledge were mentioned as possible methods to gather data on student knowledge and attributes.

Another cluster of responses centered on the problems associated with using oral language as an evaluation practice (and focus for evaluation, such as the Running Records). Responses in different communities specifically mentioned issues with privileging a particular manner of verbal expression. One participant noted:

We have always had high percentages of speech and language with exceptionalities, and a lot of reasons for that is the cultural quietness. They’re just not verbal people. So, a lot of times, we have like 85-90 percent of our kids with speech language exceptionalities and most of it is in the expressive area... we’re getting these results back from these assessments saying basically the test cannot be summarized because there’s this imbalance... Their IQ in their cognitive is really really high.

It was felt that testing comprehension through Running Records was biased because, as one participant noted, “If you ask a question [Inuit students], don’t go on and on and on. They’re into like yes or no or like short answer questions.” The teachers also pointed out that when students are tested, “Reasoning skills are way higher than the verbal output.”

Participants mentioned that formative assessment strategies in the classroom were being pushed by the South and that the values embedded in formative assessment strategies were miss-matched in their context. Formative assessment involves establishing clear targets, pre-testing to find gaps in understanding of these targets, then working with the individual students to fill the gaps (Bloom, Hastings, and Maddaus 1971). Key in that process is student involvement, which may include using assessment information to set goals, making learning decisions related to their own improvement, self-assessing, and communicating their status and progress toward established learning goals (Stiggins 2017).

The notions of discussing grades with teachers and self-advocacy were also considered problematic: “You sort of take them as an authority figure and they’re right and you’re wrong and you don’t have a right to question it. I think that’s the culture.”; “You don’t want to offend anyone”; and “The first time I ever questioned a mark was in university and it took me forever to get the nerve to go over.” Most of the teachers in Nunatsiavut (both Inuit and non-Inuit) are educated in the South and therefore bring southern
methods into Nunatsiavut schools. In this regard, several respondents mentioned that using culturally relevant methods was an additional undertaking on top of the normal challenges new teachers have to work through. Participants also noted that new teachers and/or teachers from the South were not always aware of the lack of relevancy or the availability of local resources. One participant stated:

I am a first-year teacher. So this year, anyways, like I’m just even figuring out how to do a quiz. How do you do a test try to do like the more traditional type. And just like figuring that out like in the traditional sense is a lot of work… what I had to do this year is just like teach them toward the assessment because I just don’t really know how to do it any other way.

Finally, participants declared that the harm caused by historic and ongoing disenfranchisement has come to alienate parents, and as a consequence, their children do not have the same level of support in their school relationships. As schools are still viewed as agents of the South, many Inuit will not speak to authority to question issues with grading and achievement. These relational constraints are compounded with different social and economic realities that also impact assessment readiness. In the opinions of our participants, these systemic issues extend throughout the school system and into the workplace through certification requirements that serve as gatekeepers to keep achievement norms at the status quo.

**Okalautigiaugialet**

Although the findings of our study are not new, the message is consistent. Over 20 years ago, the Government of Canada’s Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996) found consistency in the recommendations seeking relevant content, language, and the inclusion of parents and Elders spanning the previous 30 years. The commissioner remarked, “What we find most disturbing is that the issues raised at our hearings and in interveners’ briefs are the same concerns that Aboriginal peoples have been bringing forward since the first studies were done” (Vol. 3, 411). We thus believe our findings are significant. While they show this negative consistency throughout decades and geographies, our findings are re-contextualized by self-governance (Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement 2005), and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). Furthermore, many of the benefits of a contextualized curriculum mentioned by the participants mirror shifts in mainstream education toward competencies (Alberta 2018; British Columbia 2018; Council of Ministers of Education 2018; OECD 2018; Ontario 2016).
Content

Throughout our study, the participants repeatedly mentioned that the current standards did not fit the context of Nunatsiavut. This does not mean that there should not be set standards. On the contrary, Demmert (2001) states that the potential in standards-based systems lies in the authority of Indigenous communities to set their own standards, and student success must be determined by the development and implementation of assessments that consider cultural knowledge, linguistic backgrounds, experiences, communication styles, and socioeconomic situations (Solano-Flores 2011).

There are examples of the positive impacts of developing content in specific core content areas in Inuit contexts (e.g. Lipka and Adams 2004), and more relevant standards have been created in other Inuit regions. The National Strategy on Inuit Education (2011) outlined standards such as working for the common good, being respectful of all living things, maintaining harmony, and continually planning/preparing for a better future (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2011). Throughout our discussions with the participating teachers, parents, and administrators, they argued how learning in the community and on the land developed higher-order skills; skills that were also revealed in our narrative, as Lucas and Marin explored the biology of the animals, the relational aspects of an ecosystem, and the social structures of their family and community.

In addition, The Nunavut Department of Education, in consultation with Elders, produced the Ilitaunnikuliriniq Foundation for Dynamic Assessment (2007), setting guidelines for culturally relevant assessment practices. These standards include: consideration for supporting continuous learning; showing respect for all learners; recognizing each student’s unique talents and skills; emphasizing the interdependence, growth, and success of the group; ensuring assessment is outcome-based and has different purposes; and ensuring assessment is authentic, meaningful, and builds on student strengths (Nunavut Department of Education 2007). Any of these considerations, laws, or principles can be used as a framework for content development, teaching methodology, and constructs from which to report success.

This broader view of the learning experience also reflects recent efforts in mainstream education toward building competencies. Described as foundational to subject-specific curriculum, competencies refer to the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and processes we associate with cognitive, inter-/intra-personal, and social development, and they are being written into curriculum internationally, nationally, and provincially (Alberta 2018; British Columbia 2018; Council of Ministers of Education 2018; OECD 2018; Ontario 2016). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the rationale for this shift is a requirement that education systems
adjust to the significant social, economic, and environmental challenges and changes. They state:

To navigate through such uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience and self-regulation; they will need to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others; and they will need to cope with failure and rejection, and to move forward in the face of adversity. Their motivation will be more than getting a good job and a high income; they will also need to care about the well-being of their friends and families, their communities and the planet. (2018, 2)

A competency-based curriculum thus has the potential to align with what the Elders (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2011; Nunavut 2008) and researchers (Barnhardt 2005; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2011; Nunavut 2019; Snow and colleagues 2021) are saying is important in Inuit contexts. Competencies such as “Reconciling Tensions and Dilemmas” or “Taking Responsibility” (OECD, 2020) have potential to reconcile mainstream education more toward the values espoused by the participants in our study who spoke of their students’ interest in engaging in their communities and environment in authentic and holistic ways. Although building curriculum within the community from experiences that matter and are relatable to students has been suggested before, aligning these skills to what is assessed in large-scale external and classroom assessments is an important next step.

Methods
In addition to rethinking the content of what is measured and reported, our participants expressed concern about the methods of assessment. Classroom-based formative assessment has been shown to produce significant achievement gains and benefits low-achieving students in particular (Black and Wiliam 1998). However, formative assessment processes are designed within a particular cultural view. For example, while formative assessment shifts authority to the students by developing their skills in self-assessment and self-regulated learning, dependence on verbal volubility and strategies that involve self-advocacy remains an ongoing issue in the Nunatsiavut context (Johnson 2014; Saucier and Goldberg 2001; Sanford et al. 2012). Feedback and biases in teacher judgement are also problematic (Harry et al. 2002), particularly in Nunatsiavut, as the majority of its teachers are from the South. Furthermore, according to our participants, the lack of professional development compounds these issues.

The notion that learning begins with a goal in mind or criteria also requires consideration through a lens of decolonization. Currently, school-based assessment begins by making the standards for assessment clear.
However, identifying the expected learning outcomes in an authentic, culturally-relevant, and relational manner immediately narrows the learning. Indeed, setting out with an agenda of expectations before you begin suggests a collection or a consumption for gain and limits the experience by predetermining what will be important. The process is both extractive and controlled. In contrast, Kovach (2018, 221) writes:

> With a holistic philosophy that has ease with the possibility of unifying energies and the fluidity of flux, tribal knowledges are less inclined to “bracket out” subjective experience of an embodied knowing in constant relation to this world... From this perspective, the desire is not to extrapolate but rather to seek a situated understanding.

Standards, targets, or learning outcomes are at the core of all formative assessment, and until these learning outcomes are decolonized, formative assessment only further entrenches colonial structures. However, formative assessment as a process may offer potential. By recognizing a relational approach to teaching and learning, the process is criterion-referenced, and is therefore not inherently grade-based or competitive.

**Context Matters**

Throughout the research project, the participants reiterated that what is currently being assessed is not capturing what is valued in the communities. They emphasized the value of learning holistically and the essential learnings that come from being in relationship with the community, each other, and nature. As Moore et al. (2016, 99) discuss, “The approach locates learning in a particular place and the human knowledge of living within that location. It is learning in relationship to the land and the life of the land.” This process is not prescriptive, as put forth by Hatcher et al. (2009, 146):

> The Western/Indigenous Science dichotomy is a construct that arises, in part, from the Western practice of viewing knowledge as singular, independent from the teacher... Knowledge is not a tool but rather it is a spirit. It transforms the holder. It also reminds us that we have responsibilities to the spirit of that knowledge. We must pass it on.

> The experiences in our narrative tell of excitement and curiosity; of amazement at and respect for human and natural communities. In one short day, a family shared experiences, gained respect for each other's knowledge and ability, intimately explored human relationships within nature, developed wonder, skills, and knowledge, and underwent rites of passage that enriched all of our lives. Rich and connected learning took place for all generations, without a script of preconceived learning outcomes. Webber
and Miller concluded that “Integrated, interdisciplinary, and inquiry-based approaches embrace broader conceptualizations of teaching and learning that are critical, creative, innovative, and engaging to diverse learners” (2016,13). Learning in context thus promotes an understanding of human knowing and being, and from this grows an enriched understanding of curriculum and the notion that to be human is to live connected both to the world and to one another (Godfrey Anderson 2019; Moore 2017).

Reconciliation

Despite historical efforts to destroy languages and cultures (TRC 2015), the message remains the same: Education must include language and culture, it must be holistic and involve parents and the community, and it must recognize and nurture the strengths of the culture where the schools are located (RCAP 1996). For this reason, the teachers, parents, and principals in our study all urgently call for culturally relevant curriculum and assessment measures, with effective methods to match. Teaching Inuit knowledge systems alongside European colonial knowledge systems, and the ability to draw on which one is most useful in different circumstances, has a powerful potential to extend and deepen the learning for all (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005). Furthermore, the development of competencies in mainstream systems is possible through the development of curriculum, teaching strategies, resources, and assessment methods that align better to higher-order competencies. That said, it will be important to resist interference and control over the same process taking place in Nunatsiavut. As Justice (2018, 241) demands, “We cannot continue to replicate the closed circuit of white heteropatriarchy in affirming the same group of voices over and over again.”

In addition to the environmental crisis described by the IPCC (2018), we are writing this during the COVID-19 pandemic. Society has an opportunity to do things differently, and much can be learned from richness in the different ways of understanding and interacting with each other and our planet.

Nâninga

Jen. In the year since our trip through the communities, while the transcriptions, coding, writing, and editing are taking place, Lucas and Marin have grown a year older and we have welcomed a new grandson. The world has been gripped by a global pandemic. Despite the snow that falls on Makkovik on this spring day, the buds are pushing up and the birds are nesting. In our conversation today, Jodie told me that just yesterday Lucas was out on the ice and finally shot his first seal. She then sent me a picture of him standing beside his dad, proudly holding
up a goose. After they cleaned the animals, he delivered the seal to five people in town. The goose is headed to his nan.

**Jodie.** Speaking to the teachers was an eye-opener for me. To hear them talk about the things that they were doing in their classrooms and on their own time to make learning as culturally relevant to their students as possible warmed my heart. The provincial curriculum doesn't tell teachers how to do this. The curriculum itself is sorely lacking when it comes to anything other than the Western, Euro-centric views and pedagogies, but we are seeing many of our teachers in Nunatsiavut taking it upon themselves to at least try to mitigate the lack of culture in our children's daily formal learning. I say formal, because it is in the informal learning that culture is abundant, and dare I say, far more effective—and meaningful.

Most of the teachers, whether they are local or from away, see the lack of cultural relevancy in the curriculum. They try their best to make these connections themselves, but this becomes just one more task in their already heavy workload. This part, this cultural connection, should be provided for them. It should be present in the curriculum, there to be supplemented by the teachers’ own experiences.

The trip to Hopedale was 100% educational. On our way home, in the silence of the newly fallen night, we heard the faint cronk of a goose. The nights in the Spring still have some light, and as we looked up, we could see its silhouette fly just feet over our heads. Lucas sprung into action and, knowing the land announced that it was heading for the nearby pond. In seconds, Lucas had released his father's shotgun from the side of the skidoo and headed to the pond, cronking as he ran. Back and forth, their conversation continued as the goose found its way to the pond. Then there was silence. We held our breath until we heard the ring of the shotgun, followed by a very enthusiastic “Woo Hoo!” Cyril jumped on his skidoo and immediately headed toward Lucas to help him recover the goose from the dark water of the pond. They returned with the fattest spring goose I’d ever seen.

From preparing the skidoos, to packing essentials for the day, to the drive itself, the kids were included in the learning. Cyril let Lucas lead; it is how he operates as a father. It is our responsibility to teach our kids about the land and to prepare them for making these journeys one day with their own families. From a very young age, both of our children have been instructed to read the land and lead the way. The means by which we as ‘teachers’ in this situation assess our ‘students’ is by observing what they do. If Lucas were to go the wrong way or make an error in judgement, it would be corrected, as we go. We learn as we go. We experience as we go. We remember as we go.
I am a firm believer in connecting with students as a way of keeping them interested in formal learning. Having students see themselves in their curriculum not only engages them and keeps them interested but also encourages them to share their learning with others. When the subject matter is something that students can relate to, they have a base on which to build and this becomes meaningful learning that is easier to assess, is more relevant, and is reflective of the students' own journeys.

Connection to the land is important. In Nunatsiavut, the land is one of our greatest teachers. It teaches us patience, preparedness, adaptability, resilience, sustainability, and the value of hard work. Using the land as a teaching tool will ensure not only that children learn valuable, life-preserving skills, but also that their skills become transferable. Young children can themselves be teachers.

That beautiful spring day out on the land gave Lucas and Marin more experiences from which to draw when learning other new skills. However, most important to us as parents are their values of taking care of the land, harvesting what you need, and sharing with your community.

As we all know, not everyone will be university or college material. Not everyone will venture on to write academic papers or earn their PhD; but every last one of the students who finishes our K-12 system will have a place in our communities. Roles will be different. Responsibilities will vary. Stress levels, pay levels, education levels will all be unique to the job. One thing that is a given, though, is that we want our children to all be good people, grounded in solid Inuit values, traditions, and culture. And we do this by using all of these in our teaching.

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