

Curriculum Change in Nunavut: Towards Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit
Changement des programmes au Nunavut : vers l'Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit

Heather E. McGregor

Volume 47, Number 3, Fall 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014860ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014860ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculty of Education, McGill University

ISSN

0024-9033 (print)
1916-0666 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

McGregor, H. E. (2012). Curriculum Change in Nunavut: Towards Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 47(3), 285–302. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014860ar>

Article abstract

Between 1985 and the present, curriculum developers, educators and Elders in Nunavut have been working towards reconceptualization of curriculum to better meet the strengths and needs of Inuit students and to reflect, preserve, and revitalize Inuit worldview, language, and culture. This article outlines the development of the 1989 curriculum framework *Piniaqtavut*, the 1996 framework *Inuuqatiguit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective*, and the 2007 foundation document *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum*. It goes on to describe the cross-curricular principles and philosophies of education in Nunavut, and identify the most important contributing factors in this system-wide curriculum change process. The intent is both to describe the approach taken in Nunavut, as well as to inform comparable work in other Indigenous contexts.

CURRICULUM CHANGE IN NUNAVUT: TOWARDS INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGIT

HEATHER E. MCGREGOR *University of British Columbia*

ABSTRACT. Between 1985 and the present, curriculum developers, educators and Elders in Nunavut have been working towards reconceptualization of curriculum to better meet the strengths and needs of Inuit students and to reflect, preserve, and revitalize Inuit worldview, language, and culture. This article outlines the development of the 1989 curriculum framework *Piniaqtavut*, the 1996 framework *Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective*, and the 2007 foundation document *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum*. It goes on to describe the cross-curricular principles and philosophies of education in Nunavut, and identify the most important contributing factors in this system-wide curriculum change process. The intent is both to describe the approach taken in Nunavut, as well as to inform comparable work in other Indigenous contexts.

CHANGEMENT DES PROGRAMMES AU NUNAVUT: VERS L'INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGIT

RÉSUMÉ. Depuis 1985, des développeurs, des éducateurs et des aînés du Nunavut travaillent à la refonte des concepts des programmes et ce, afin de mieux répondre aux forces et besoins des élèves inuit. Ils veulent également refléter, préserver et redonner vie à la vision du monde, à la langue et à la culture inuit. Cet article explique le développement du programme d'études *Piniaqtavut* (1989), du programme *Inuuqatigiit: Un programme d'études à partir d'une perspective inuit* (1996) et du document fondateur *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: le cadre d'éducation pour le curriculum du Nunavut* (2007). Par la suite, l'auteur décrit les principes des compétences transversales et les philosophies de l'éducation au Nunavut. Elle identifie les facteurs ayant le plus contribué à ce processus de transformation des programmes dans l'ensemble du système. L'objectif est d'à la fois décrire l'approche préconisée au Nunavut et de présenter des travaux comparables, réalisés dans d'autres contextes autochtones.

Schooling in Nunavut should provide support to students in all areas of their development so that they can achieve personal goals, become well-equipped to contribute and serve their families and communities, demonstrate leadership and healthy attitudes, and be able to actively participate and contribute as Nunavut takes on new roles in the global community. (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007, p. 17)

The rich history of curriculum change in Nunavut, oriented towards delivery of education based on Inuit ways of knowing, being, doing and sense of place, is relatively unknown to educational scholars. While the call, and need, for quality curriculum and learning materials continues (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK], 2011), there is much good work to be considered, and many foundational steps have been taken to guide the emergence of new ways of teaching and learning within the school system. Using documentary sources and historical analysis, the question I explore here is: how have Inuit and Northerners in Nunavut gone about creating a curriculum based on local perspectives and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ)*, which “encompasses all aspects of traditional Inuit culture, including values, world-view, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations” (Nunavut Social Development Council, 1998, p. 1)?

Inuit are an Indigenous people, distinct from First Nations or Metis peoples, who for the most part live across the Canadian Arctic. The Inuit homeland of Nunavut was recognized by Canada in 1999 as a separate territory, in conjunction with the settlement of a land claims agreement specifying rights and benefits for Inuit residing in the region. The mechanisms of the public territorial government have been leveraged to set mandates for services, including education, that privilege Inuit language¹ and culture. Self-determination is now in the implementation phase, unlike many Indigenous peoples in North America whose position in relation to their respective states remains less clear. It is within this distinctive context that I will outline the development of the 1989 curriculum framework *Piniaqtavut* (Baffin Divisional Board of Education, 1989), the 1996 framework *Inuuqatigiit* (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 1996), and the 2007 foundation document *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum* (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007). I will conclude by identifying some of the most important contributing factors to this deep and system-wide curriculum change process, which help to describe the approach taken in Nunavut, as well as inform comparable work in other Indigenous contexts.

LOCATING MYSELF

I am a white Northerner who attended school in Nunavut, my parents are long-term northern educators, and I have worked for the Department of Education coordinating various system-wide change implementation projects associated with the 2008 *Nunavut Education Act*. Having grown up in a region of Canada

where an Indigenous population forms the majority, I have experienced many moments of questioning my role in shifting power dynamics between Inuit and non-Inuit in the Arctic.²

For example, I recently participated in writing a social studies module for grade 10 students in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut on the history of northern residential schools (Nunavut Department of Education & Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2012). I also contributed to in-servicing teachers on facilitating learning through this difficult topic. Residential school histories bring to the surface the role schooling played in colonization and settlement, and illustrate the intergenerational impacts in northern communities. Current school staff members are being asked to teach northern youth about how government representatives and settlers had a role in disrupting traditional forms of Indigenous education, attempting to assimilate students, and a great deal more. Doing this work raises many questions about identities and legacies, such as: what brought newcomers to the North, what keeps them there, and what effect has that had on northern Indigenous peoples? Particularly on the part of non-Indigenous teachers and education staff such as myself, this work calls for a careful balance of respect and sensitivity in listening, as well as willingness to actively engage in discussions about responsibility, compensation and reconciliation. I have seen and experienced hurt and disagreements in these conversations. Nevertheless, I view the role of schools in supporting this learning as integral to the possibility of nurturing different relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the present and future.

I believe educational scholarship with Nunavut communities will be strengthened as more Inuit and long-term northern educators take up research questions directly relevant, or vital, to the school system, through respectful cross-cultural dialogue. Educational histories related to residential schools, curriculum reform, or other topics may then become resources useful to historicizing and contextualizing such research. I continue to call Nunavut my home, and I feel a deep responsibility and commitment to the people and place. I would like to recognize all those whose work and knowledge is reflected in telling this story of curriculum change in Nunavut, and from whom I have had the opportunity to learn – including, most importantly, my parents.

SITUATING NUNAVUT EDUCATIONAL HISTORY WITHIN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN CANADA

The emphasis here on place is intended to distinguish Inuit education in Nunavut from generalizations often made about Indigenous education across Canada. Colonization began later in the Arctic and manifested in different ways. The four Inuit regions are governed under land claims with the federal government, and most persons living in the Inuit homelands experience life

significantly shaped by Arctic conditions. The majority Inuit population in Nunavut maintains relative cultural and linguistic identification and solidarity despite vast geographic dispersal. Inuit educational history in Nunavut is distinct because of: the heritage of regional school board engagement in educational change prior to the creation of the Nunavut government, the political accomplishment of the land claim, and the current territorial mandate for Inuit education within a public system. Fewer compromises or conflicts have resulted from adversarial relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents, communities, and expectations as in other Canadian regions. Nunavut history has been marked by huge change, in speed and degree, in terms of education as well as across other realms of society (Simon, 2011; Tester & Irniq, 2008). Inuit have endured this “totalizing” change (Tester & Imiq, 2008), and are now taking significant steps such as passing made-in-Nunavut education legislation privileging Inuit interests (McGregor, 2012).

While I think it is important to engage in theoretical and practical conversations that draw comparisons between Indigenous communities, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, I will not emphasize that here. Nunavut deserves recognition for the significant educational change efforts that have been a feature of administration, policy-making, and curriculum development since the dream of Nunavut was born. This overview is intended to support more informed discussion and comparison between places and peoples in the future. Lastly, while I focus on curriculum framework documents, there are innumerable other aspects of the education system that warrant further study. Indeed, analysis of northern curriculum development processes with more detailed commentary from those who participated in the work, would add a great deal to this conversation.

Briefly, then, there is considerable resonance between the curriculum development initiatives featured here and the approaches to culturally responsive education advocated by Ray Barnhardt and Oscar Kawagley in the context of Alaska (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998). This resonance is in terms of the relationship between Indigenous education and place, the balancing act of engaging with both Indigenous and Western systems of knowledge in a “two-way transaction” (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 9), the importance of beginning instruction with concepts and activities familiar to the students, and the insistence that students not be required (actively or passively) to give up or leave behind their rights, language, identities, histories and worldviews in order to participate in schools and universities. Marie Battiste and James Henderson have theorized such comprehensive efforts at rethinking, decolonizing and infusing the education system with Indigenous knowledge as “naturalizing” (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 14-16). These educational paradigm shifts gain momentum and solidarity from national and international Indigenous education initiatives, but they are fundamentally local changes that must be conceived and implemented in relationship to place

(Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Marker, 2011). The insights offered in Jo-Ann Archibald's (2008) description of a First Nations story-based curriculum development process in British Columbia share a great deal in common with the work being undertaken to create teaching and learning units in Nunavut. However, the scope of curriculum change in Nunavut is different, involving all public school programs from kindergarten to grade 12, in all subject areas, and with the requirement to teach and learn in two languages.

The curriculum development initiatives led by Inuit in the eastern Arctic have received little attention from scholars, and are rarely framed by Northerners in the language or theory of a greater Indigenous education movement. Nonetheless, I would argue that such work exemplifies the kind of place-based, culturally-responsive, and Indigenous-knowledge based educational change called for by Indigenous education advocates elsewhere in North America (Battiste, 2010; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Having survived – and still surviving – colonization, engaged in the struggle towards decolonization, named and begun the deconstruction of cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2000) in educational institutions, and pursued Indigenous educational decision-making in policy and practice, Indigenous peoples are now documenting and deepening understandings of their knowledge systems. This work serves to enliven and activate Indigenous knowledges in education – contexts where it is necessary to continuously withstand and resist the hegemony of Western knowledge systems (Marker, 2004). Frank Tester and Peter Irniq³ (2008) have referred to this process as a rejuvenating social history exploration:

Rediscovering and rearticulating [the Inuit] worldview is a task best undertaken by Inuit, and it contains the possibility of rejuvenating and invigorating Inuit culture and relations between youth and elders. Such an exercise involves an important exploration of Inuit social history, which includes a history of resistance to, as well as compliance with, the edicts of a colonizing culture. (p. 58)

Indigenous curriculum frameworks, the metaphors that often accompany them, and the values-based, holistically-oriented student competencies that emerge from such work may still be questioned and criticized as simplistic, irrelevant or quaint when viewed through often hegemonic Western and Eurocentric lenses. Rather, such frameworks and conceptual tools are fundamental in the hard work of envisioning and continuing to imagine, deliver, and assess education from different ways of knowing, being, and doing. Nunavut has many stories to contribute to this movement across the North and across Canada.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Elsewhere I have described the history of education in Nunavut in more detail (McGregor, 2010). What is important to note here is the condensed

nature of this educational and colonial history. In the early decades of the 20th century, traditional Inuit education was occurring much as it had within hunter-gatherer societies in the North for centuries. Education was integrated into the daily lives, daily responsibilities and daily relationships within families. This approach to education resulted in a set of competencies, worldview and knowledge base now distinguished as *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ)* and will be discussed in more detail below. In simplified terms, the most critical aspects of Inuit education were environmental knowledge, experiential learning, caring between teacher and learner, and family control over childrearing.

In terms of Inuit history in general, Tester and Irniq (2008) have asserted:

There is likely no other group of indigenous people in the world that has made such a transition – from scattered hunting camps to settlements steeped in the organizational logic and material realities of high modernism – in such a short time (from ca. 1955 to 1965). (p. 57)

The comparatively short colonial period, fast pace of change, and the era in which this change was experienced by Inuit sets their history apart from most Indigenous peoples elsewhere in North America (Simon, 2011).

While the timing and pace of change in the Arctic left Inuit extremely vulnerable, it also offered opportunity. Only approximately twenty years – fewer for some – passed between the time of their permanent settlement, engagement with schooling and the beginning of their political mobilization toward self-determination. The transfer of administrative responsibility for education from the federal government to the Northwest Territories (NWT) occurred in 1969-70. Without a substantial non-Inuit student population or substantial public expectation that schooling be “multicultural” or “culture neutral,” public schools in the Arctic could move in the direction of respecting and recognizing Indigenous language and culture with fewer constraints.⁴

Education underwent significant transition after the 1982 report *Learning: Tradition and Change (LTC)*, produced by the Special Committee on Education for the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly. The landmark report involved extensive public consultations conducted in 34 communities; it was the first time parents were formally and systematically consulted on their children’s education. What they asked for was more local control. Territorial legislation followed, giving education authorities more flexibility to recognize the vastly different views of education existing between Inuit and other Indigenous peoples within the NWT. By 1985 local authorities with greater responsibilities were organized to form regional boards of education. This combination – of parental and community control over local schools and representation at the regional level to participate in policy decisions and input into curriculum and programs – offered Inuit the opportunity to envision their own system of education. In doing so, they largely chose to identify and integrate the import-

ant aspects of Inuit education, such as traditional environmental knowledge, experiential learning opportunities, and Elders as teachers.

Historically, Canada's northern territories have relied on borrowing curriculum from other jurisdictions (depending on the subject and grade level), with some adaptations and additions, due to their lower administrative and development capacity, and the need to uphold standards recognized by post-secondary institutions across Canada. However, when educational administration underwent the transition to regional decision-making curriculum, developers and community members in Nunavut began to reconceptualize curriculum to better meet the strengths and needs of Inuit and Northern students, as well as to reflect, preserve and revitalize Inuit worldview, language and culture. These long-term political commitments and administrative mechanisms, oriented to reconceptualizing curriculum from local and Inuit perspectives, are crucial to mobilizing the necessary opportunities to facilitate educational change; a process that is extremely time and resource intensive, particularly when using holistic, bilingual, and community-based approaches.

Following creation of the Nunavut government, educational decision-making policy and administration changed again with the closure of school boards and the transfer of responsibilities to district (community) education authorities or regional and territorial Department of Education offices. This division of responsibilities was in flux during the development of new education legislation passed in 2008, which is still in the process of being implemented. During this time local control, or more specifically the ability of parents to have a say in education, has been the subject of some debate (McGregor, 2010; 2012). In the meantime, curriculum development has proceeded with notable participation of educators and Elders from around Nunavut.

The documents chosen for analysis form the major milestones in work completed in the eastern Arctic region of Baffin (now called Qikiqtani) and later Nunavut. I examined them for articulation of knowledge, values and pedagogy, considering to what extent the contents reflected or diverted from ideas about knowing, being and doing informed by *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*. Each, in its own time, was ground-breaking and contributed to subsequent work, but I do draw conclusions about their strengths and limitations in terms of a contemporary view. Each document lists a large development team – dozens of authors and collaborators, most of whom are Inuit – without distinguishing between individual contributions and thereby presenting collective authorship. The names of individual educators and Elders involved therefore do not appear here, because I intend to honour the spirit of collective authorship as I understand it to be practiced by the people involved.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT BEFORE NUNAVUT

Piniaqtavut

In 1989, the Baffin Divisional Board of Education (BDBE) published *Piniaqtavut*, a framework document for grades K-9 designed to give shape to a number of northern teaching units. The BDBE was the first Inuit board of education in the NWT. It took a leadership role in establishing policy and programs in support of Inuit education and it served the biggest (population and geographic) region of what is now Nunavut. *Piniaqtavut* was developed in response to what was considered to be “clear direction” from parents in the region that education should centre on topics related to the North, respect for Elders, and maintenance of traditional skills (BDBE, 1989, p. i). The *Piniaqtavut* development committee involved a large number of Inuit educators working bilingually. This group articulated teachers’ growing concerns about the southern perspective embedded in most curricula, the large volume and fast pace of mandatory content, and the lack of resource materials for teaching in the Inuit language. To determine what knowledge and skills schools should be teaching according to Inuit, most households in every Baffin community were surveyed and a draft of the resulting document was circulated to each community’s district education council. Through carrying out such consultation, and referencing it in their publications, BDBE demonstrated its commitment to cooperatively developing a paradigm for Inuit knowledge to be used in schools, as well as local involvement in educational decision-making.

Piniaqtavut was intended to provide “learning experiences which reflect the cultural and linguistic strength of the Inuit” (BDBE, 1989, p. i). The major goals of education to be realized are listed as: bilingual communication skills, pride in cultural identity, responsibility, and independence. All topics or categories of content that are viewed as important to Inuit are organized under four headings: Community; Land; Sea; and Sky. The narrative around future development of *Piniaqtavut* resources reinforces the importance of Inuit values to program development:

Whenever possible, units and supporting resource material will be developed from an Inuit perspective, that is, by Inuit in Inuktitut, and translated into English so that teachers who do not speak Inuktitut will be able to use the material. Inuit beliefs will permeate every unit so that the values of Inuit culture will be reinforced. (p. ii).

Unfortunately, the values or beliefs of Inuit culture referred to in the preceding quotation are not listed in the *Piniaqtavut* document. Therefore, while this suggested process of program development sounds ideal in terms of grounding curriculum in Inuit ways of knowing, being, and doing, the implications of this process and the entire program itself, particularly in a context where a majority of teachers are non-Inuit, remained somewhat unclear when Inuit values were not identified or described fully. This lack of specificity about the

Inuit values being promoted by the BDBE was a limitation, particularly with regard to expectations for classroom practice.

Nonetheless, *Piniaqtavut* demonstrated a commitment to the development of programs which are not only northern-oriented, but also locally and Inuit oriented in content. *Piniaqtavut* identified many of the ingredients which must go into a system of schooling in order to achieve culturally responsive ways of knowing, being and doing. These include the development of programs by Inuit in Inuit language, employing teaching methods like hands-on learning, and encouraging a student-centered rather than standard-centered approach to achievement. The intention to build a program around a core of Inuit-specific values, rather than assimilative, multicultural, or universal ways of engaging with the world, indicates the vast difference between the approach of the BDBE to formal schooling and that which students would have been exposed to previously or in other jurisdictions. As well, the stated intention to involve parents, Elders, and community members in development and delivery of culturally-relevant learning experiences reinforces the opportunity for local control.

Inuuqatigiit

*Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective*⁵ is a curriculum issued by the Northwest Territory's Department of Education, Culture and Employment in 1996 and involved collaboration with Inuit groups across the Northwest Territories, though the project was initially spearheaded by staff of the BDBE. The document lays out the framework outlining the objectives, knowledge, and experiences that have been deemed essential to each set of grades (K-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12) in fulfilling a curriculum reflective of Inuit ways of knowing, being, and doing.

The introductory section of the document provides a great deal of context to the vision of schooling articulated through *Inuuqatigiit*. The vision of education, and by extension the purpose of the document, was to reinforce Inuit identity in future generations and address the loss of Inuit language and culture. "Traditional beliefs and values are still felt to be important to the communities and the elders would like to see them revived through the schools" (NWT Dept of Education, 1996, p. 2). At least 55 elders and many more Inuit are named in the credits for this document, and it is filled with direct quotations from those participants.

The document includes a discussion of the goals of education, an orientation to the values and beliefs of Inuit, a description of traditional Inuit education, a vision of learning and child development, a justification for bilingual education, an approach to pedagogy and evaluation, and the philosophical foundation of the curriculum. The introductory portion of the document is laid out according to topics such as language or evaluation, and each includes

a summary of the traditional knowledge or belief around that topic followed by a short recommendation about how it may be applicable to the school environment. Points such as these indicate awareness of the cultural negotiation which constantly occurs in northern schools, even if a commitment to reflect Inuit culture has been established by policy-makers. *Inuuqatigiit* attempts to educate teachers about Inuit education and provide adaptations of it to the modern school setting, rather than copying it exactly (which would be nearly impossible within school structures recognizing, for example, that traditional Inuit education almost always take place between one or two learners and one teacher).

The curriculum itself proceeds according to two sections: "Relationship to People" and "Relationship to the Environment." Within these two sections are topics, and each topic includes a summary according to Inuit knowledge and at least one direct quotation from Inuit Elders before describing that which should be accomplished to cover the topic in grades K-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12. "Relationship to People" includes such topics as the family or laws and leadership. "Relationship to the Environment" includes topics like land and weather predicting. Each of these two sections is also built around a foundation of three cycles: Cycle of Life, Cycle of Seasons, and Circle of Belonging. In the summary for each topic, *Inuuqatigiit* offers a rationale for why that topic has been included, the values around that topic, the beliefs held by Inuit, the major understandings expected of children, and the student attitudes that should be nurtured. Following this summary, each topic is broken down by grade set, and the objectives, knowledges, traditions, and key experiences/activities are outlined in point form for each. Key experiences and activities recommended by *Inuuqatigiit* often involve invitations to community members to address the class, experiential learning opportunities, and topics for research or discussion are also suggested.

Inuuqatigiit provides teachers, especially new teachers, with the background information and broad context necessary to begin developing their classroom activities to reflect culturally responsive content and values. The information offered regarding each topic not only incorporates northern content, but consistently reflects an orientation to Inuit ways of knowing, being and doing. The following paragraph is one of the most concise articulations of the vision of education promoted through *Inuuqatigiit*:

Instruction must incorporate not only a sensitivity to the Inuit perspective, but actual learning experience in Inuit language and culture. Instruction should always relate subjects to Inuit history, knowledge and experience. Every school, ideally, every classroom, should have elders adding their living wisdom and skills to our children's education. Positive learning can happen whenever there is an educational partnership between the child's family, the community, educators, and the school system. (p. 15)

Here again is the emphasis on the role of the local community and an education driven by the local culture and language rather than an abstract construction of Indigeneity or multiculturalism. This is evidence of an intentional effort to engage aspects of Inuit education through schooling.

The implementation of *Inuuqatigiit* in Baffin schools involved a crucial regional and local component. While the BDBE participated with the Department of Education in developing *Inuuqatigiit*, they also developed BDBE-specific implementation documents in anticipation of additional support required by educators in their schools. The basis of the planning for implementation of *Inuuqatigiit* is cited as resulting from a high level of input through or “community visioning” meetings with teachers, principals, district education council members, parents, community members, students and elders.

Even with the supplement of the implementation documents by the BDBE, the weakness of *Inuuqatigiit* overall lies primarily in the great deal of further work needed to provide teachers with sufficient classroom resources and orientation. While the curriculum provides an overview of the knowledge and skills for every grade set, and covers a wide range of topics, it does not provide the level of detail required by teachers, nor does it provide specific teaching tools. There remains an assumption that educators would know how to engage with the content of Inuit values and beliefs within the appropriate cultural frame, and know how to balance this content with other, more familiar programs and materials. Lastly, the articulation of the relationship between students and teachers and the ways in which teachers can create student-centered learning experiences within an Inuit framework are underdeveloped in this document.

Inuuqatigiit offers a close articulation and reinforcement of Inuit education within a public school system. With access to *Inuuqatigiit*, educators had more guidance in translating aspects of Inuit education into school contexts. The challenge remained: to undertake new ways of teaching and learning without letting the formal system or non-Inuit structures change those ways so much that they lose their meaning, and still prepare children to attain a standard level of education at the 12th grade level. The complexity of curriculum implementation should not be underestimated, but Lynn Aylward’s (2009; 2012) research has shown that development of *Inuuqatigiit* marks a crucial phase in what she calls the place-based “IQ Conversation,” “an anticolonial, intellectual, and social movement in Nunavut education that resists the polarities of biculturalism and engages with more culturally relevant discourses of decolonization and transformation” (Aylward, 2012, p. 227).

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NUNAVUT

IQ foundation document

Since the creation of the Government of Nunavut in 1999, the momentum of educational change has continued, with responsibility for change processes managed primarily on a territorial basis rather than the previous regional board administration. The landmark document *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum* (referred to hereafter as the “IQ foundation document”) published in 2007 by the Nunavut Department of Education articulates a more detailed vision of education from Inuit foundations. The Minister of Education at the time, Ed Picco, stated: “It is the responsibility of educators to ensure graduates have a strong sense of Inuit identity and clear knowledge of their unique personal strengths and skills and how to use them to serve family and community. To assist each student to achieve these goals will require a fundamental shift in the way we do business in schools” and he goes on to say, “Made-in-Nunavut curriculum, teaching materials and learning resources, which combine Inuit knowledge with the best of western educational thought and practice are essential to achieving this shift” (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007, p. 5).

Under development since the year 2000, the IQ foundation document is the source of nearly all policy, curriculum and programming undertaken by the Department of Education concurrent with, and since, the production of the document. The document states that Nunavut educators are expected to understand IQ, how the document affects the basic elements of curriculum, and what implications that has for the practice of learning and teaching in Nunavut schools (p. 3).

The IQ foundation document credits more than 55 Inuit Elders, 65 Northern and Inuit educators, 12 community experts, and 18 government staff as contributing to the questions: “What’s worth knowing? How should it be taught? What are the values behind what we are teaching?” (p. 18). It also references curriculum development done by the school boards prior to Nunavut - *Piniaqtavut* in 1989 and *Inuuqatigiit* in 1996. The IQ foundation document came about because policy-makers within the Department of Education recognized the importance of Elder knowledge, Inuit knowledge and the lack of source material to turn to in informing the curriculum, arguably necessary for creating real change in schools. Those involved in the IQ foundation document development and promotion were actively addressing the same problem Verna J. Kirkness (1998) identified in First Nations education:

Not properly acknowledging the Elders is probably the most serious mistake we make as we attempt to create a quality education for our people... How can we learn about our traditions on which to base our education if we don’t ask the Elders? Little is written by our people that we can turn to for this information. (p. 13)

Two statements found within the *IQ* foundation document give a strong sense of the perspectives and approaches endorsed:

Elders are articulating how and why *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* – beliefs, laws, principles, values, skills, knowledge and attitudes – are so well suited to Inuit today. In doing so, the Elders are not advocating a return to the past, but a grounding of education in the strengths of the Inuit so that their children will survive and successfully negotiate the world in which they find themselves today. By entrenching *IQ* beliefs and principles within the system and curricula, the aim is to provide a learning environment where *silaturniq* (becoming wise) is fostered, and within which the strength of *inummarik* (a capable person) can develop. (p. 21)

The development of *Sivuniksamut Ilinniarniq* [Nunavut / *IQ*] schools requires extensive consultation with District Education Authorities, educators, parents and students in each community about *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* education. It requires collaboration with Inuit Elders, Inuit organizations, and Government of Nunavut departments to translate the core *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* values and beliefs into working models and goals for school improvement. Each school must work with the community to articulate a vision for how community members want to educate their children. The Department of Education will support each community in designing school(s) that meet the needs of their children. (p. 56)

The document offers a source of Inuit Elder knowledge and an application of that knowledge to the context of schooling, including: a vision for the purpose of education based on an Inuit story; explanation of the Inuit beliefs that provide a foundation for *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, including referring directly to the laws of relationships, cycle of seasons, cycle of life, and circle of belonging already described in *Inuuqatigiit*; the philosophy of a learning continuum and stages within the continuum, described in traditional Inuit terms of individual life-long learning and development; cross-curricular competencies based on principles of *IQ*; and Inuit educational philosophies regarding inclusive education, language instruction, assessment and pedagogies. Also important to note, rather than numerous subject areas, the Department of Education curriculum work is being conceived within four integrated curriculum “strands”, facilitating closer approximation of the holistic nature of Inuit knowledge:

- *Nunavusiutit*: heritage, culture, history, geography, environmental science, civics, economics, current events, world news.
- *Iqqaqqaukkaringniq*: math, innovation, problem-solving, technology, practical arts.
- *Aulajaaqtut*: wellness, safety, society, survival, volunteerism.
- *Uqausiliriniq*: communication, creative and artistic expression, critical thinking.

As a result of this work, Nunavut's curriculum competencies are now drawn from Inuit laws, principles and values. The definitions of these Inuit concepts were agreed on through consensus decision-making by a group of respected Inuit Elders from across the territory, and have also been interpreted by Elders in the context of curriculum development for the Department of Education. Elders describe *maligait* (natural laws) as the most fundamental laws that respect one's place in the universe, the environment and in society. These laws speak to the interconnectedness of the world and the supports available to aid in survival:

- Working for the common good.
- Being respectful of all living things.
- Maintaining harmony.
- Continually planning/preparing for a better future.

The natural laws are supplemented by the "communal laws" or what is more commonly referred to as the "IQ principles":

- Inuuqatigiitsiarniq - respecting others, relationships and caring for people.
- Tunnganarniq - fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive.
- Pijitsirniq - serving and providing for family or community or both.
- Aajiiqatigiinni - decision making through discussion and consensus.
- Pilimmaksarniq - development of skills through practice, effort, and action.
- Piliriqatigiinni - working together for a common cause.
- Qanuqtuurniq - being innovative and resourceful.
- Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq - respect and care for the land, animals, and the environment.

These eight principles are described in more detail and interpreted or adapted as cross-curricular competences at all levels and through all activities both within and outside of the school. Teaching units being developed within the integrated curriculum content strands incorporate more specific concepts (although most are still based on IQ) in order to more effectively reflect Inuit holistic approaches and help students understand connections between learning in various contexts. Because instruction in the Inuit language is mandatory, many new teaching units are also being developed bilingually. Over the last ten years the Department of Education has been working closely with Nunavut schools to identify ways to make IQ part of everyday teaching and

learning within school-communities. These principles are also supported by other initiatives to document Inuit ways of knowing, being, and doing that have are being continuously contributed to, and further defined by, Inuit Elders and educators. Definition of these principles and application of them to multiple layers and branches of curriculum, programs, pedagogy, assessment and school climate represents a deepening of the work begun with *Piniaqtavut* and *Inuuqatigiit*.

CONCLUSION

Schools in Nunavut are now administered under comprehensive legislation calling for bilingual education that uses curriculum and pedagogy in accordance with *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*. Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada with education legislation calling for all public education to be based on Indigenous knowledge. This means schools cannot rely on borrowing curriculum, teaching units and learning materials from other jurisdictions, or securing them from the commercial educational publishing industry. Instead, they are in the depths of reconceptualizing education from K-12 and in all areas of the system.

What conclusions can be drawn about factors contributing to the success of this significant work? I have summarized them in Figure 1. Long-term government commitment is the first crucial factor. Educators and curriculum development staff have been given the direction and resources to work with Elders in Nunavut to actively reconceptualize schooling based on Inuit foundations. This level of deep, ongoing community involvement, rather than cursory or fragmented consultation, is the second factor essential to the Nunavut process between 1985 and the present. Creating a cohesive understanding of the relationship with knowledge as it is conceived in the Indigenous community or nation in question is another key piece of this work; it is crucial to informing a place-based vision for education that can be articulated in meaningful terms.

However, the experience in Nunavut also shows that an effective curriculum framework requires detail, especially at the relational level. It is not enough to say schools will operate using “Inuit values;” those values must be articulated, specified and interpreted in context, they must be modeled through content and they must form part of the required pedagogy and student competencies. Of course, this work will not be sustainable without high quality, culturally-responsive, locally-relevant and linguistically-appropriate teaching units, learning materials, and assessment tools. Lastly, while a curriculum framework is essential to this work, change happens in the ways students and teachers and the community engage each other in learning.

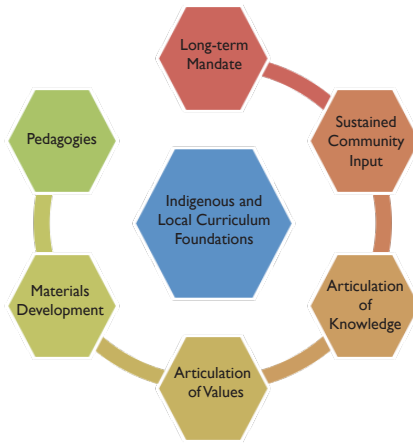


FIGURE 1. Factors contributing to the process of reconceptualizing curriculum towards Indigenous and local foundations.

Full redevelopment of K-12 curricula that can fulfill a new vision of education is challenging in terms of time, human resources, and funding. As the Inuit organization Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) has described, “the process of developing new Inuit-centered curriculum ‘from scratch’ is costly and time-consuming. It requires collaboration between Inuit educators and elders to develop new learning modules, new Inuit-language terminology, and to mentor the new generation of younger teachers in appropriate methods” (2011, p. 82). A potentially greater challenge is the change associated with implementation in classrooms and other learning spaces, which requires considerable staff training, leadership and ongoing mentorship. Sustainable school change in Nunavut is burdened by many other demands resulting from the geographic dispersal of communities, high staff turnover, the need for more staff with Inuit language skills, and infrastructure requirements such as more staff housing. Nevertheless, the importance of curriculum change is not only linked to increasing educational achievement amongst Inuit youth, but also with continuing to support Inuit self-determination. Echoing ITK again, I hope that: “As the implementation of the new curriculum evolves, new best practices emerge and need to be shared” (2011, p. 82). The return of the land, the creation of a public government exclusively within Inuit territory, and the protection and promotion of Inuit linguistic and cultural vitality constitute the dream of Nunavut. The curriculum change process outlined here indicates that the Nunavut Department of Education is undertaking initiatives to realize this dream, and while outcomes may take more time than all involved would like, those who have contributed should be acknowledged for their courage, hard work, and persistence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Jo-ann Archibald, Michael Marker and Penney Clark for feedback on an earlier drafts of this work, and to Teresa Strong-Wilson and the MJE reviewers who provided suggestions in the final stages of editing. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

NOTES

1. Inuit language is the term used in Nunavut legislation and educational policy to refer to Inuktitut, indicating inclusion of various dialects of Inuktitut, and/or Inuinnaqtun.
2. I have briefly described some memories and experiences in this regard elsewhere (McGregor, 2010, p. x-xi; 13-15; 2012, p. 29) and have engaged in some deeper analysis in several other forthcoming works.
3. Peter Irniq (he also spells his first name Piita) is an Inuit public figure, was Commissioner of Nunavut from 2000-2005 among many other political positions held, a speaker and advocate for Nunavut in a number of realms including the history of residential schooling and the promotion of Inuit culture.
4. I use the phrases “move in the direction” as well as “respecting and recognizing” intentionally, but tentatively, here. I acknowledge great variation and inconsistency in where and when such initiatives occurred. My point, however, is that the opportunities and dynamics involved in making policy and program changes are different in jurisdictions where Indigenous families form the population majority. For example, public opinion was not a significant constraint in making such change in the North, as it might be in other parts of Canada.
5. As stated in the document, “the name of the curriculum, *Inuuqatigiit*, means Inuit to Inuit, people to people, living together, or family to family. It implies togetherness and family unity between people. This is the foundation of the curriculum: a unity of Inuit philosophy for the benefit of children, teachers, schools and communities” (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 1996, p. 3).

REFERENCES

- Aylward, M. L. (2009). Journey to Inuuqatigiit: Curriculum development for Nunavut education. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 3(3), 137-158.
- Aylward, M. L. (2012). The Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit Conversation: The Language and Culture of Schooling in the Nunavut Territory of Canada. In Z.Bekerman, T. Geisen (Eds.), *International Handbook of Migration, Minorities and Education: Understanding Cultural and Social Differences in Processes of Learning* (pp. 213-229). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Baffin Divisional Board of Education. (1989). *Piniaqtavut: Integrated program*. Iqaluit, NWT: Baffin Divisional Board of Education.
- Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, O.A. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8-23.
- Battiste, M. (2000). Maintaining Aboriginal identity, language, and culture in modern society. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 192-208). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Battiste, M. (2010). Nourishing the learning spirit: Living our way to new thinking. *Education Canada*, 50(1), 14-18.
- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. (2009). Naturalizing Indigenous knowledge in Eurocentric education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 32(1), 5-18.
- Castagno, A.E., & Brayboy, B.M.J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 941-993.
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2011). *First Canadians, Canadians first: National strategy on Inuit education 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Published for the National Committee on Inuit Education by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2011). *First Canadians, Canadians first: National strategy on Inuit education 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Published for the National Committee on Inuit Education by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.
- Kawagley, A.O., & Barnhardt, R. (1998). *Education Indigenous to place: Western science meets native reality*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.
- Kirkness, V.J. (1998). Our peoples' education: Cut the shackles; cut the crap; cut the mustard. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(1), 10-15.
- Marker, M. (2004). Theories and disciplines as sites of struggle: The reproduction of colonial dominance through the controlling of knowledge in the academy. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 28(1/2), 102.
- Marker, M. (2011). Sacred mountains and ivory towers: Indigenous pedagogies of place and invasions from modernity. In G.J.S. Dei (Ed.), *Indigenous philosophies and critical education: A reader* (pp. 197-211). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- McGregor, H.E. (2010). *Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- McGregor, H.E. (2012). Nunavut's education act: Education, legislation and change in the Arctic. *Northern Review*, 36(Fall), 27-52.
- Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment. (1996). *Inuuqatigiit: The curriculum from the Inuit perspective*. Yellowknife, NWT: Government of the Northwest Territories.
- Nunavut Department of Education. (2007). *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: Education framework for Nunavut curriculum*. Iqaluit, NU: Nunavut Department of Education, Curriculum and School Services Division.
- Nunavut Department of Education & Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment. (2012). *The residential school system in Canada: Understanding the past – seeking reconciliation – building hope for tomorrow*. Ottawa, ON: Legacy of Hope Foundation.
- Nunavut Social Development Council. (1998). Towards an Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) policy for Nunavut: a discussion paper. In *Report of the Nunavut traditional knowledge conference*. Igloolik, March 20-24, 1998. Iqaluit, NU: Nunavut Social Development Council.
- Simon, M. (2011). Canadian Inuit: Where we have been and where we are going. *International Journal*, Autumn 2011, 879-891.
- Special Committee on Education. (1982). *Learning: Tradition and change in the Northwest Territories*. Yellowknife, NWT: Legislative Assembly: Government of the Northwest Territories.
- Tester, F. J., & Irniq, P. (2008). Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: Social history, politics and the practice of resistance. *Arctic*, 61(4), 48-61.

HEATHER E. MCGREGOR is a PhD student affiliated with the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. She has lived in the NWT and Nunavut and continues to work there. Heather's primary research interests are Nunavut's educational history including curriculum, pedagogy and policy, residential schools history, social studies curriculum, and decolonization.

HEATHER E. MCGREGOR est une doctorante affiliée au Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness de la faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Elle a demeuré aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest et au Nunavut et y travaille encore. Les principaux intérêts de recherche d'Heather sont l'histoire de l'éducation au Nunavut incluant les programmes, la pédagogie et les politiques, l'histoire des pensionnats amérindiens, les programmes de sciences sociales et la décolonisation.