

State of Inuit Learning in Canada

Prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning



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INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

Prepared by ITK
Socio-Economic Department

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City of Origin Ottawa, Canada

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Introduction

The purpose of State of Inuit Learning in Canada is to provide direction for the Inuit context for the Canadian Council on Learning's Knowledge Centres, with particular focus on the Aboriginal Learning Centre. It provides details on the following issues: background of Inuit Education; the current formal K-12, post-secondary; adult learning; work and learning; early childhood learning; health and learning; issues arising in process, policy, program and learner outcomes; success stories; and identification of potential partners for CCL to involve Inuit.

Background on Inuit Education

To understand the current challenges facing Inuit in the area of education, it is necessary to review some of the rapid social changes that have impacted Inuit over the past fifty years. Fifty years ago, the majority of Inuit continued to live primarily in small semi-nomadic groups relying upon the resources of the land and sea for sustenance. During the 1950's Inuit were being moved from their homes to resettle in communities where their children were assimilated into the Canadian education system. In some cases for example residential schools, children were taken from their families where they were disciplined and stripped of their culture. Today Inuit speak out about how their children are educated, something only over the past 28 years have they been permitted to do.

Inuit Traditional Education Practices

Camp life centered on extended family groupings, which regarded the rearing of children as a responsibility of the larger group, and not solely that of the immediate family. Children could turn to any adult or older child for comfort or food or to learn life skills. Older children assumed many childcare responsibilities early in life and learned critical parenting skills as they themselves were

growing up. Elders were revered for their wisdom and knowledge including their valuable advice and expertise in the area of child rearing and parenting.

Residential School

Residential schools were responsible for removing Inuit children from the families for extended periods of time. The critical bond between parents and children, and the subsequent transference of essential skills and knowledge including parenting skills, was broken for many Inuit.

Many of the survivors, and their children, continue to be impacted as a result of the residential school experiences and have indicated that their ability to raise their children as well as they can has been seriously compromised.

In 1906, an annual report submitted to parliament stated that pupils were 'disposed to be more teachable and less difficult to manage than an equal number of white children, when they were removed from all intercourse with relatives,' and "make fair progress, though necessarily somewhat slow, because of their total ignorance of the English language." – Principal of a residential school in Hay River, NWT CBC Newsmagazine, January 20, 1957.

Federal Schools Initiated by Missionaries

Subsequent to the missionaries who introduced organized learning, formal education in the form of "Federal Schools" operated in major centres in Inuvialuit, Nunatsiavut, Nunavik and some parts of Nunavut by the late 1950s. Many students travelled or were sent from their home communities for long periods of time to attend schools that aimed to assimilate them into the contemporary Canadian lifestyle.

At school, Inuit were actively discouraged from using their first language in favour of English. In the early 1960s, schools began to be built in all communities

of the four land claim areas and were completed in 1968. Thereupon, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police enforced attendance of Inuit school-aged children, in order that their families moved into the communities from outpost camps to maintain contact with them. The curricula followed by the new community schools were based on that of southern Canadian mainstream schools and spoken Inuktitut continued to be discouraged until about the mid-1970s.

Many Inuit parents and Elders, particularly in small communities, could not comprehend why their able-bodied older children, their helpers, had to sit about in school learning nothing useful for their lives, as they saw it. As soon as children were of legal age to leave school, many families encouraged their children to join their parents in hunting and maintaining their families.

Particularly in larger communities was schooling and learning English considered desirable because their Inuit/Inuvialuit parents could send their somewhat educated children to labour jobs to earn wages. In this way adolescents helped support their families with their wages while other family members hunted and performed the other family duties: childcare, preparing skins for sale, sewing and carving. In addition, the daily shift of authority from parents and Elders at home to teachers in school often confused the students, often resulting in a loss of respect for their parents, Elders, their language and traditions. The school drop out rate was very high as students struggled to balance the new school demands with conflicting family demands while attempting to become adults.

Control shifted from the missionaries to government between 1955 and 1969 with the government taking total responsibility on April 1, 1969.

State of Current K-12, Post-Secondary Education

Inuit presently participate in a school system that has been drawn from southern Canadian school system models, although Inuit staff are working in the schools, the majority of teachers and principals are non-Inuit. Elementary, middle and secondary schooling is available in most communities but there are few opportunities for at-risk students to experience positive learning successes throughout all levels of public schooling resulting in an alarmingly high drop out rate.

The drop out rate of Inuit adolescents at the high school level far exceeds the national average, stressing families, contributing to the social ills that trouble communities, often leading to crime and suicide. These drop outs are the future troubled parents of unfortunate children who must bear with them as they attempt to succeed at school. Statistics show a higher proportion of female Inuit attaining high school certificates. Although there are 3 times more Inuit who have not completed their high school diploma when compared to Canada as a whole (age group surveyed 25 to 34 years) there is currently no consistent and ongoing campaign that exists to encourage students to remain in school to gain their high school diplomas.

Learning beyond the traditional academic structure, such as traditional, vocational, artistic and recreational skills is not available at present for most Inuit students. Such programs may currently occur in some schools but usually on an ad hoc basis and often lack a learning plan with coherent learning objectives. Interest and successes in such programs may encourage academically faltering students, thus discouraging the student from dropping out. An added benefit may be that students

become better able to make choices for continuing their education for related careers and occupations.

There is currently little support for Inuit students to aid them in determining their educational and career path. Inuit need to know what opportunities are available and how to prepare for and access them.

It is not surprising that there are also a low number of Inuit who go on to complete trade certificates, college certificates/diplomas or University degrees given the low number of Inuit high school graduates. The reason for this is twofold: skills are not always at a level acceptable to many post secondary institutions due to early drop out, low literacy skills or the unavailability of certain courses at the high school level; as well as travel outside the community. Few courses at the college level and limited courses at the University level are offered in the land claims areas. There are insufficient qualified Inuit trades people, despite interest and aptitude.

Incomplete high school combined with low English literacy skills make it difficult to enter and succeed in the system. Those wishing to undertake skills training, career development courses or trades training are still frequently compelled to travel away from their home communities. Promising practises that diminish the need to travel away from home territory and take into account literacy skills are required.

State of Work and Learning

In 2001 the Government of Nunavut's Bureau of Statistics reported that Nunavut had an average of 28.2% unemployment rate, and as high as 46% in some places of the new territory. This was compared to

the Canadian average of 7.7 % during the same year. Statistics such as these are still overwhelming and still need to be addressed today.

On November 18th and 19th 2004 the "Life Long Learning (2) Sectoral Follow Up Session" regarding "Post Secondary Education and Skills Development" took place in Alymer, Quebec. One key message Inuit conveyed is "Education (life long learning) is NOT just about getting a job." Inuit need skills of various natures to build healthy communities.

Before this can be initiated however, funding is needed for projects such as literacy, a major concern in the North. Literacy must be looked at in the light of Inuktitut/Inuvialuktun as the first language, and English and French as secondary languages for Inuit whether in the working environment or the educational system.

Unfortunately there are many Inuit who are poorly educated by southern standards and unemployed, and often suffer from the effects of residential schools. Home management skills such as: nutrition, health, family budgeting, parenting, family relationships and human rights have often been lost and have gone untaught. There are many issues and gaps which need to be addressed for the betterment of Inuit life.

Integrating essential traditional skills into the workforce would be a step to creating healthy Inuit communities. Inuit need to create support centres where Elders pass on knowledge aimed at teaching marketable traditional skills to ensure these traditions are passed on to the next generation. Also important is the need to support additional trained counselors and mentors, and to promote Inuit success stories in hopes of building healthy Inuit communities. As well, there is the need to create partnerships that will benefit Inuit by fully involving the capacity and knowledge of Inuit with respect for Inuit culture and language.

The examination of existing Inuit cultural programs and the creation of work skill programs are also significant in this process. Work and Learning must reflect Inuit cultural values and concerns, and must adhere to the values of Elders and youth, as well center around community based decision making.

State of Early Childhood Learning

Inuit's future success is based on early childhood learning whether it is transferred through a parent, an Elder or daycare centre. Although daycares do exist in Inuit communities there is still a lack of early childhood services beyond daycares. The lack of other early learning programs are due to funding shortages, staffing and lack of infrastructure. Various government departments do not comprehend the cost of living in the North, and therefore do not provide adequate funding for infrastructure which impedes the communities' abilities to create sustainable programs. There is also a lack of trained staff due to lack of training and training opportunities, and wages and benefits are comparatively low, although there have been some successful on site early childhood programs in the North.

In many instances some families are unable to afford hunting equipment and stretch income support to meet all the family needs, families are often unable to provide their children with the food and clothing necessary for them to be prepared to learn at school. Inuit have identified many issues that affect children in their early years. Some priority issues include: parenting; Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder; nutrition; hearing impairment; appropriate support and care for women during childbearing; and lack of school readiness.

Actions must also be taken to ensure that Inuit culture,

traditions and language are handed down to young generations who in turn will take pride in and carry on traditional Inuit lifestyles.

What must happen for children in Inuit communities to thrive?

- Communities need to work together, plan together and to develop a plan, which sets out the actions needed to raise the health and welfare of the Inuk Child in Inuit communities to priority number 1.
- Inuit regions must create opportunities to convene, discuss, and direct positive program and planning outcomes for IECD. This is already happening in Nunavut, where the three Nunavut AHRDA Holders have formed a team dedicated to planning together best possible outcomes for the delivery of licensed child care services in Nunavut.
- Access to appropriate, reliable, consistent, experienced, qualified professional services at all levels must be secured for Inuit children, now.
- Action must be taken to ensure that Inuit culture, lifestyles and language thrive. Programs must be accessible to all.
- Inuit in all regions need to have equal opportunity to access children's funding.

State of Health and Learning

While national health data for Inuit is severely limited, some of the available regional data provides a rough sketch of the health of Canadian Inuit.

- Life expectancy for Inuit men is 16 years less than the Canadian average and 10 years less than other Aboriginal men
- Accidental death rates in the two largest Inuit regions are nearly three times the Canadian average
- Suicide is reported at more than six times the national average
- In Nunavik, the TB rate for children 0-5 for 1996-2001 was 40, compared to a rate of 2 for all of Quebec.
- In 2000, according to the Canadian Institute of Cancer, lung cancer rates in some Inuit regions were 60% higher than the national average.
- Inuit babies are being negatively impacted by the PCB's and mercury found in their country foods taken from the environment.
- Inuit community health and safety is being negatively impacted by climate change.

Success Stories and Best Practices

Kativik School Board- McGill University Inuit Teacher Training Programme

In 1975 Kativik School Board founded the teacher training program on the fundamental belief that Northern Education would require a cadre of trained Inuit teachers. The number of Inuit who have graduated from the program, and who now occupy key teaching and administrative positions, is a measure of the program's success. Over the years a unique vision

of education has crystallized around the following principles:

Teacher training must be designed in such a way as to minimize disruptions to family and community life that are fundamental to Inuit values. This is accomplished by designing intensive academic courses that can be offered to trainees in Northern communities. The courses are prepared by a team involving academic staff from McGill University and senior Inuit instructors. The result of this collaborative process is that teachers-in-training receive their courses in Inuktitut.

Just as it is crucial for Inuit children's self-esteem and cultural identity to have teachers of their own culture, it is equally important for teachers-in-training to be taught by Inuit instructors in their mother tongue.

The content of the teacher training program must be continuously evaluated and revised. As with course development, program and course evaluation is conducted on an ongoing basis by teams of social scientists from McGill University and senior Inuit educators.

The development of teaching materials and their evaluation, as well as all educational research being carried out, must be an integral part of the program.

Courses in special needs education must be emphasized early on so that teachers can help all students, including those with minor learning disabilities.

Teachers enrolled in the program are homeroom teachers in the early primary grades where the language of instruction is Inuktitut or they are subject specialists who teach at the upper primary and secondary levels in Inuktitut. There is also a physical education concentration in the certificate program.

Courses are taught in Inuktitut by trained Inuit instructors. Graduates of the 60 credit program receive

the Brevet d'enseignement du ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (provincial teaching diploma) as well as the McGill Certificate in Education for First Nations and Inuit.

The teaching diploma is the teacher's legal qualification to work in schools where the language of instruction is Inuktitut. Graduates of the certificate program may apply for admission to the McGill B.Ed. for Certified Teachers program. Courses in the B.Ed. program are also offered in Inuktitut in Northern communities. For students who wish to study full-time, similar courses are offered in English at McGill University.

Nunavut Sivuniksavut

Nunavut Sivuniksavut is a unique eight-month college program based in Ottawa. It is for Inuit youth from Nunavut who want to get ready for the educational, training, and career opportunities that are being created by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and the new Government of Nunavut.

Students in the NS program learn about Inuit history, organizations, land claims and other issues relevant to their future careers in Nunavut. They also gain valuable life experience by spending eight months in the south and learning to live on their own as independent adults. The program is open to youth from Nunavut who are beneficiaries of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. It runs from September until May. Approximately 20 students are chosen each year.

Building on Culture: Reclaiming Our Sinew

Reclaiming Our Sinew is a 24-week full-time program, with six core courses. One part of the program prepared learners for further upgrading programs, towards entering the workforce and enhancing their employability. In the other side, learners gained skills in traditional sewing, which allowed them to outfit their

families.

Mornings were spent teaching and learning traditional sewing techniques in a large room at Maani Ulujuk School. A large group of Elders guided the learners as they learned the art of preparing, tanning, cutting and sewing skins. By the end of the program, learners had made caribou parkas, pants, mitts, and seal skin pants and kamiiks.

Learners spent the afternoons at the Community Learning Centre where they focused on academic upgrading. They received language instruction in English and Inuktitut, as well as math, computers and typing. One of the objectives of this program was to assist in preparing participants to enter the job market and/or develop the skills to enable them to pursue sewing as a means of self-employment.

This holistic program tries to integrate these two parts so that learners will develop practical skills, self-esteem and cultural pride. The idea for *Reclaiming Our Sinew* came from the Kivalliq Inuit Association and is an excellent example of putting Inuit traditional knowledge into practice. It is also a strong example of partnership between territorial and federal government departments, Inuit organizations, hamlets, schools and Nunavut Arctic College.

Post-Secondary Student Support Program- Labrador Inuit Association

Labrador has the highest rate of graduates of Inuit students in post-secondary schools than any other Inuit region. This could be a result of how Labrador has developed an excellent support system for their post-secondary students within their *Post-Secondary Student Support Program*. The objective of the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) is to assist full resident members of the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) in gaining access to post-secondary education.

It encourages LIA members to graduate with the qualifications and skills needed to pursue individual careers and to contribute to the achievement of Inuit self-government and economic self-reliance.

The PSSSP provides financial assistance to eligible Inuit towards the costs of their post-secondary education at a public post-secondary institution.

Issues Arising

Fully 59% of Inuit in their early 20s have not finished high school. Literacy has been a rising issue, and Inuit require the ability to read, write and speak in Inuktitut/Inuvialuktun as their first language and English and French should be seen as secondary languages; The cost of living up North is three to five times higher than in southern Canada, making it difficult to secure adequate funding to develop and sustain learning programs; 53% of Inuit live in overcrowded conditions compared to 7% of the rest of the population. This no doubt hinders an individual's ability to study and learn in all environments. In addition, there is the need to train more Inuit teachers and educators to empower all Inuit.

Literacy

Literacy is the cornerstone of education and includes not only reading and writing but the fluency to be able to communicate fully in a language. Inuit need to be fully able to not only read and write but fluently speak their traditional language as well as English/French. As one of the strongest aboriginal languages in Canada, Inuit are to be applauded for the strength of their language but further support is required to ensure that the language remains strong.

The importance of first language literacy training in the student's dialect to the well being of Inuit and the success of other language learning cannot be

overemphasized. Language skills need to be taught with supporting materials that are understandable by the students. Not only are there minimal appropriate learning materials but a lack of expertise to develop and produce them. This hampers not only literacy and language programs but all learning programs. Dedicated Inuit have produced Inuktitut learning materials for use in classrooms and learning programs. These and other entrepreneurs need to be trained and supported in order to continue to produce quality Inuktitut materials.

English/French literacy is also important in Inuit communities so that people can interact with those outside their communities and successfully gain employment. English and English as a Second language training is a priority need for a population whose present literacy level is below the national average. Inuit specific English/French literacy documents need to be created. Funding of community literacy and language programs also presents a difficulty. Single year, proposal based funding allows for little continuity in the programmes. There is also a lack of coherent or consistent planning and design. The lack of adequate facilities, learning aids and instructors only enhances the problem. The issue of literacy in Inuktitut and English/French at all levels of learning, from infancy through adulthood, must be addressed.

Creation of a National Inuit Education Resource and Research Centre

The creation of a National Inuit Education Resource and Research Centre, to aid in the sharing and development of Inuit-specific curriculum between the four Inuit regions, acting as a clearing house of information, and having a role in the professional development of teachers and administrators. It would be a place where information and materials would be collected and stored.

Support for Language and Culture

A longer term element of an improved Inuit education

system would ensure that language and culture are integrated and protected within the Inuit education system, while simultaneously ensuring portability of degrees and certification attained (maintaining provincial standards) to allow for greater entry and success within the post-secondary system. Inuit organizations suggested that creating an Inuit Education Act, or some supportive legislation, could be helpful (some spoke of the Mi'kmaq Education Act example).

Support for Capacity Building

The need to build capacity within an Inuit education system was identified as key to attaining better educational outcomes.

- Short term intervention, supporting Inuit to become teachers, administrators and curriculum developers
- The creation of a resource and research centre to support schools (may in the short-term take the form of a partially virtual entity.)
- Need for an increase of Inuit Teachers. Between 10 and 25 per cent of the territory's Inuit teachers are expected to retire in the next five years, said Minister of Education Ed Picco. Thirty-eight per cent of Nunavut teachers are Inuit, according to Picco.

Curriculum Development

National action oriented Inuit Working Group/Steering Committee on education for lifelong learning.

- Based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangiit (Inuit Knowledge/way of life), determine 'things' that should make up curriculum (must include evaluation, be in tune/balanced)
- Legislation to ensure Inuit language rights and to preserve and enhance vitality of language and culture

throughout a 'bilingual' system

Identification of potential partners

Inuit Secretariat

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington, North Tower
Gatineau, Quebec
Postal Address:
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0H4
1-800-567-9604

Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association

131 Bank Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 1W8
613-238-3977

National Aboriginal Health Organization

130 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON
K1P 5G4
ph: 613-613-233-1543 Toll Free: 877-602-4445

Inuvialuit Regional Corporation

P.O. Box 2120
Inuvik, NT
X0E 0T0
(867) 777-2737

Kivalliq Inuit Association

PO Box 340
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut
XOC-OGO
867-645-2800

Makivik Corporation
P.O. Box 179
Kuujuaq, Quebec J0M 1C0
(819) 964.2925
1.877.625.4825

Government of Nunavut
Department of Education
Government of Nunavut
Bag 8000
Arviat, Nunavut
X0C 0E0
Tel: 1-877-860-0680

Nunavut Sivuniksavut
368 Dalhousie Street 2nd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1N 7G3
613-244-4937

Inuit Circumpolar Conference
504- 170 Laurier Ave. W
Ottawa, ON K1P 5V5
613- 563-2642

Labrador Inuit Association
12 Sandbanks Road
P.O. Box 70
Nain, NL, Canada A0P 1L0
Tel.: (709) 922-2941

Kitikmeot Inuit Association
P.O. Box 18
Cambridge Bay, NU
X0E 0C0
(867) 983-2458

Qikiqtani Inuit Association
P.O. Box 1340
Iqaluit, NU X0A 0H0
Phone: (867) 979-5391
Toll-free: 1-800-667-2742

Nunavut Tungavik Incorporated
P.O. Box 638
Iqaluit, NU
X0A 0H0
(867) 979-3232
1-888-236-5400

Kakivik School Board
9800 Cavendish Blvd.
Suite 400
Saint-Laurent, QC
H4M 2V9
(514) 482-8220
(514) 482-8278

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<http://www.nstraining.ca/>

<http://www.nunatsiavut.com/>