



Post-secondary Case Studies in Inuit Education

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Submitted by Silta Associates

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Executive Summary

Increasing the level of Inuit participation in post-secondary education and training opportunities in Canada is a primary concern for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. This paper comes from an examination of the related literature and case studies within the four Inuit regions in Canada, for the purpose of highlighting some of the key factors which are contributing to current Inuit success.

A review of official reports and related literature reveals that there has been considerable discussion and interest in this area, by governments, Inuit organizations and institutions, and that some progress is evident. It is also clear that there is very limited research in this area.

From the literature review, six key factors were identified as critical indicators of success. Through interviews, conducted with educators involved in the delivery of programs in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut, the same factors emerged as descriptors used to identify characteristics of successful programs.

Key factors:

- 1) Program design and delivery;
- 2) Innovative governance and partnerships;
- 3) Enhanced culturally unique student supports;
- 4) Program funding;
- 5) Unique and adequate study to work transition; and
- 6) An investment in useful and appropriate program accountability.

This paper covers a range of programs that have achieved success as a result of being innovative in design, collaborative in nature and pragmatic in their ability to provide for the immediate and varied needs of Inuit students. With a focus on building capacity and working from an Inuit-centered, community-based foundation, these programs provide valuable lessons and models for increased Inuit participation in the future.

Key findings:

- 1) Program design must be bold, innovative, generous and all-encompassing with a focus on successful student learning rather than on the perpetuation of colonialistic and sometimes rigid institutionalized systems.
- 2) The most innovative programs that achieve the best results for Inuit students are a result of partnerships that bring together various paradigms, and represent students, Inuit organizations, employers, educational institutions and government.
- 3) Programs must be delivered in a decolonizing environment that is respectful and empowering.
- 4) Programs must be developed, delivered and administered by Inuit educators or non-Inuit who have lived and taught successfully in Inuit communities, who support student-centered learning and understand the nature of Inuit education and culture.

- 5) It must be recognized that education for many Inuit adults is transformative and incremental in nature. Their learning may begin with recovery, regaining strength, identity, and courage as they absorb the content of the courses.
- 6) Governments are first accountable to Inuit to provide them with excellent, responsive, educational opportunities. This will require generous financial support resulting in an invaluable investment for the future.
- 7) Programs must be holistic in nature providing personal, academic, cultural and financial support for the students and their families. This support must start before the students enter the program and continue on as they make the transition from education to further productive choices, either in further education/training or employment.
- 8) Inuit adult students must receive funding that is adequate to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle for themselves and their families.
- 9) Decision makers must recognize the intrinsic value of Inuit post-secondary education and training that leads to empowered, stronger citizens who will lead a productive, positive lifestyle for the benefit of their families and their community.
- 10) Successful Inuit post-secondary education and training focuses on building capacity within the Inuit community. With this focus, other factors and barriers are diminished.
- 11) Inuit culture and values must be foundational in post-secondary education and training for Inuit adults.
- 12) Community-based programs increase the accessibility of programs for Inuit adults who have extensive family and community commitments, increase opportunities for inclusion of cultural knowledge and language, reduce the possibility of culture shock, provide authentic work experience, and contribute to the retention of graduates in their chosen professions.
- 13) Post-secondary education and training programs for Inuit must be adequately funded, thus allowing staff to focus on program delivery rather than on fundraising.
- 14) Research in the area of Inuit post-secondary education and training is required urgently.

Conclusion:

The case studies in this paper show that Inuit students do succeed in post-secondary education and training programs that are innovative, supportive and empowering. Successful models, described here, identify the critical factors and on-going challenges that must be considered when programs are designed and delivered. We must follow the example that these case studies offer us because, as Thomas Berger (2006) has said, the price of failure is too great. Generous investment in existing and new programs will be the greatest investment that could possibly be made for the future.

Introduction

Four Inuit regions currently exist in Canada spanning two provinces and two territories: the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories; the Territory of Nunavut; Nunavik in the province of Quebec and Nunatsiavut in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Each region is administered through provisions outlined in their individual land claims, with education being delivered differently in each area.

Role of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) represents all Inuit of Canada on matters of national importance as mandated by its Inuit board of directors. ITK's primary role is to secure a more equal and equitable place for Inuit within Canada. Within that role, it is also committed to working on specific issues such as Inuit education in Canada. Currently, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, through funding provided by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, has organized a National Summit on Inuit Education to be held in November 2007. The Summit on Inuit Education is intended to develop consensus among participants from the four Inuit regions towards the development of a National Strategy for Inuit Education.

As part of the Summit on Inuit Education, ITK is undertaking research to examine both examples of initiatives and reforms that have had a measurable impact on the educational success of Inuit from early childhood to the post-secondary level. By doing this ITK will highlight success stories and gaps in overcoming barriers to education and setting education standards for Inuit. This research also explores other models of educational reform developed by indigenous peoples in Canada and internationally. The overall intent of this research is to provide forward thinking discussion material for the Summit.

Purpose of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to describe two post-secondary or adult training programs in each of the four Inuit regions in Canada and to identify success factors. This paper is structured into six sections: introduction, literature review, case studies, key findings, policy recommendations and a summary.

Literature Review

The following section summarizes data collected from a literature review on Inuit and Aboriginal post-secondary and adult education. This review has been conducted in order to determine common factors or reforms in programs that have led to success in Inuit post-secondary education and training. The purpose of this section is to gain a greater understanding of those unique factors which empower programs, policies and initiatives and break down traditional barriers to post-secondary education and training for Inuit adults.

The Six Factors

The following six factors have emerged from a literature review and will be further explored in this paper:

- 1) Program design and delivery;
- 2) Innovative governance and partnerships;
- 3) Enhanced culturally unique student supports;
- 4) Program funding;
- 5) Unique and adequate study to work transition; and
- 6) An investment in useful and appropriate program accountability.

Program Design and Delivery

Four critical aspects of program design and delivery - Inuit-centred curriculum, program accessibility, culturally sensitive staff, and student assessment - have come to the forefront as a result of this literature review. Each aspect should be examined separately and yet, to achieve positive results, must be considered in combination during delivery.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) stated that in order to achieve Inuit goals of self-determination, the integrity of Aboriginal cultures and languages through innovative **curriculum**, both in schools and post-secondary programs must be achieved. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2004) echoes this belief and takes it further by calling for harmony and balance between traditional knowledge (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit) and educational practices, and a Western scientific approach using mainstream teaching methods.

In order to understand successful education for Inuit, it is important to first consider the Inuit concept of education and how it differs from mainstream education. *Isumaqsayuq* focuses on Inuit values and identity, developed through the learner's relationship with others and the environment. High value is placed on group cohesion and interpersonal relationships where learning is contextualized and acquired cooperatively, knowledge is shared, and teaching and learning roles are regularly exchanged. *Iisayuq*, or mainstream

education, on the other hand, involves abstract concepts removed from daily life, and demands individual excellence and productivity (Stairs, 1995).

An education system that connects with a traditional approach to learning, reflecting the wishes and dreams of Inuit, has the greatest chance of success; on the contrary, a system that repeats the methods and approaches of the past will instead create a neo-colonial system with devastating results (Walton et al, 2006). A positive and successful learning experience for Inuit adult students, then, demands a decolonized, Inuit-centred environment away from the contentious and confusing ideological positions and differing world views that exist in many Nunavut schools (Berger, 2006).

In order to meet the needs of Inuit in the education system, Berger (2006) calls for Inuit language and culture to be foundational in programs designed to prepare “a legion” of Inuit teachers who are strong in their Inuit identity, and equipped to develop and deliver a bilingual curriculum. He adds that Inuit educators are needed in adult education and post-secondary programs as well as in schools and early childhood education.

Inuit adults, who study and work in the four Canadian Inuit regions of today, need to be strong and confident in their Inuit identity so that they can resolve the ever-present contradictions and discontinuities between their own values and beliefs and those of the Canadian mainstream. Ultimately, the effectiveness of Inuit education, therefore, must be measured by how well it prepares Inuit to handle the opportunities and challenges of life in their own time and place. Today’s young Inuit are as hungry for opportunities to build character, as were their ancestors to build the necessary survival skills of the past. They want control of their own lives using their innate power and this empowerment can be achieved through life-long learning, or what the Elders refer to as wisdom (Watt-Cloutier, 1993).

In Inuit post-secondary education and training, teaching methods, administration and counseling services must reflect the values and beliefs of Inuit, generally considering the whole person, where relationships and respect are essential for learning (Haig-Brown, 1995). Ultimately, the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which calls for curricula that will transmit decolonizing history, culture and language of Aboriginal peoples together with adequate financial resources, still applies today.

Part of making a curriculum responsive involves creating mechanisms that meet the real needs of Inuit students, many of whom are returning to education after some absence. It is important that **transitional programs** are available to provide a bridge from previous school experience to post-secondary education and training (Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2004). To bring about success however, transitional programs must be decolonizing in nature and accessible to avoid repeating past negative schooling experiences.

Improving access for adult learners in remote Inuit communities is essential, and requires creative solutions through coordinated efforts, Inuit specific policies and new partnerships (Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, 2004); however, these programs must also be responsive to the specific needs and capacities of communities and

individuals (House of Commons Canada, 2007). Considering the number of adult Inuit students with extensive family and community responsibilities, all options ranging from community-based programs to distance education need to be explored to allow for the delivery of programs as close to home as possible (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004). Community-based program delivery can be credited for much of the success in Inuit teacher education, and that experience can be applied to other forms of post-secondary education and training (Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2004).

Excellent curricula cannot bring about success for Inuit without **qualified, culturally sensitive instructors, student counselors, administrators, and policy makers**, all of whom would ideally be Inuit. However, until there is an adequate pool of Inuit teachers at all levels of education, Berger (2006) recommends that the immediate focus should be on increasing the supply. This means that in the short-term, non-Inuit teachers who are culturally sensitive, prepared to adapt to new teaching environments and social contexts and prepared to use a student-centred approach will be needed. Ideally, these will be teachers who have experience or a predisposition toward holistic and participatory educational approaches (Spronk, 1995).

Teachers of Inuit students are called upon to be cultural brokers, synthesizing aspects of two value systems, two kinds of knowledge and two approaches to learning and teaching. Both successful Inuit and non-Inuit teachers are constantly defining and redefining their roles as they move from internal cultural conflicts to creative reconciliation (Stairs, 1995). According to Taylor (1995), when there is a strong and trusting student-teacher relationship, there is a foundation for demanding higher standards of achievement, whereas, a weak student-teacher relationship often results in students choosing to withdraw or resist.

In Inuit education, as in all education, **student assessment** is most effective when used in a formative way, advising the teacher how best to meet the learning needs of the students. Various learning styles and alternate ways of measuring learning need to be considered. This change in emphasis then has the potential to allow for broader admission criteria and expectations within a program (Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2004).

Innovative Governance and Partnerships

The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People stated that there was a need to restore full control of Aboriginal education to Aboriginal people, a recommendation repeated in 2004 by the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples' Round Table Report. The report went on to say that Inuit should pursue the development of Inuit institutions including colleges and cultural centres, administered by Inuit boards. Such a change warrants serious consideration requiring long-term planning and resources, but for the interim, it is important to look at some unique alliances and partnerships which are working.

There are successful partnerships that bring together disparate organizations, both Inuit and mainstream, with differing agendas and world views. Haig-Brown (1992) describes this "place" between Aboriginal cultures and mainstream higher education as the "borderland" where various power struggles exist, where people challenge the

mainstream approaches and yet must also co-exist with them. Those that are successful forge new paths that may come at the price of complexity and uncertainty resulting in unusual and unique creations (Tymchak, 2006). Watt-Cloutier (1993) reminds Inuit that they are at a particular advantage since they are not constrained by long established Inuit institutions and so the opportunity is there to explore new alternatives.

Unprecedented collaborations and partnerships appear to be common in successful Inuit post-secondary education and training as a number of the case studies show in this report. Whereas creativity and innovation can be constrained by cumbersome institutional and government systems, partnerships can be instrumental in recognizing, naming, disrupting and deconstructing these influences, in order to find new ways of looking at Inuit education (Walton et al, 2006). To fully understand these collaborative and decolonizing processes, research, consultation and analysis is urgently required.

Enhanced Culturally Unique Student Supports

Official reports and case studies unanimously agree that a wide range of supports – personal, academic, and financial - are integral to successful Inuit post-secondary and adult education, a concept that fits comfortably with traditional Inuit education or *isumaqsayuq*. “Robust” support for students and their families, according to Berger (2006), means providing whatever is required for a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Qualified counselors, family support services, wellness courses for students and their families and infrastructure development including daycare and family housing are all part of an all-encompassing network (Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Round Table, 2004). The need for healing from the impact of colonization cannot be underestimated in Inuit post-secondary education (Arnaquq and Pitsulak, 1999; Fortes, 2001) and is a necessary step in the decolonizing process that opens the door for people to move ahead (Walton et al, 2006).

Support begins when program staff makes personal connections with potential students in their home communities, providing information and assistance with applications and deadlines. Maintaining that connection, with an orientation to programs, institutions and new environments, can make a student feel immediately welcome. On the contrary, neglecting these vital connections can leave students feeling totally isolated and alone. The value of Elders in residence cannot be overestimated as they add a rich dimension by helping to reduce the sense of cultural, emotional and physical isolation too often experienced by Inuit students in post-secondary education and training. Ongoing, dedicated personal and academic counseling services that are available when needed are essential and anything less must be considered inadequate. These support services must include student’s families and provide contingency options for family emergencies. (Malatest and Associates, Ltd, 2004).

Since the majority of Inuit post-secondary and adult education students are mature and have family responsibilities, their financial needs must be met in order to relieve the stress that comes from inadequate resources. The majority of students in the four Inuit regions do receive financial assistance from the federal government, territorial/provincial governments, or Inuit organizations; however, for many the amounts do not support a healthy and well balanced lifestyle. Berger (2006) proposes supplementing existing

financial supports with scholarships targeted at professional designations in the areas where the Nunavut Government now recruits 90% outside Nunavut: education, accounting, the sciences, health, engineering, architecture, trades, policy.

Program Funding

According to Roberta Jameson, President and CEO, National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, no First Nation, Metis or Inuit young person should be prevented from going on to post-secondary education and training because of lack of financial resources (House of Commons, 2007). This sentiment is strongly echoed by Berger (2006) who points out that Canada cannot afford to miss the opportunity of providing a post-secondary education for all Inuit that want it.

The current reality is that in order to provide a holistic approach, most Aboriginal post-secondary education and training programs must combine financial support from several sources. Unfortunately, the alternative to such partnerships may be under-funded, one-dimensional programs that are not likely to be successful. There have, however, been some remarkable successes due to shared resources by partnerships where individual agendas and paradigms are suspended for a collaborative effort focused on empowering students.

The Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Round Table Report (2004) identifies short-term, inadequate funding as a real barrier to program delivery and recommends increased and sustainable funds reflecting real costs. Secure funding would reduce the energy expended annually writing multiple proposals followed up with multiple reports. Until these funding issues are resolved, however, the current reality demands pragmatic, innovative, coordinated approaches that bring together positive partners willing to pool funding sources.

Unique and adequate study to work transition

Inuit who successfully complete their post-secondary or adult education may still experience challenges as they make the transition to the culture of a working environment. Berger (2006) proposes extensive summer student and internship programs that will introduce Inuit to government employment opportunities. The experience of Inuit teachers is worth noting where relatively significant numbers have entered the schools system in recent years. In a 1999 survey of beginning Inuit teachers in Nunavut, more than half said they would have benefited most by having experienced mentors in their first year of teaching (GNWT, 1999). The experience of some Inuit teachers is that the ongoing and pervasive effects of colonization continue to be perpetuated (Walton et al, 2006) leaving them caught between mainstream and Inuit expectations. Having learned to be Inuit teachers, they enter schools that call upon them to speak and act in ways that challenge and oppose their Inuit values. Cultural conflict and stress is often the result for these Inuit teachers who become silenced and frustrated within the dominant mainstream authoritarian structures that demand a very different form of communication (Walton et al, 2006).

In the broader context, ongoing continuing education, staff development and skills training for Inuit in all employment sectors including trades, education, health, environment, and justice (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004) would contribute greatly to the transition from education to work.

An Investment in Useful and Appropriate Program Accountability

Within the area of Inuit post-secondary education and training, accountability exists on two levels involving both governments to Inuit in the long-term and programs to funding agencies in the short term.

Federal, provincial/territorial and Inuit governments are accountable to Inuit communities and individuals to provide an effective education system. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) describes this desired system as research-based and well planned, providing active support for life long learning in all its aspects and phases. Canadian Aboriginal people have asked that accountability be measured through a type of progress report that is formative, where successes are measured against the past and the emphasis is on strategies and solutions for the future (Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Round Table Report, 2004). As Berger (2006) points out, the cost of not succeeding is so enormous that it does not bear consideration and so the focus must be on moving ahead, making progress and ultimately meeting government obligations to Inuit in all areas of education for the long-term.

The current and short-term reality is that most Aboriginal post-secondary education and training programs are under-funded and continue to depend on limited budgets that very often are a combination of “money pots” from various sources. Each of the funding partners, who may be working from different paradigms, requires regular reports based on varying criteria. Most often, those criteria are focused on quantitative results that fail to recognize the many qualitative and intrinsic successes celebrated within Inuit post-secondary education and training. Tensions and conflicts are inevitable in situations where external, non-Aboriginal institutions and agencies are part of the equation; however, it is through open discussion, trusting relationships and a shared desire by all partners that progress will be made (Haig-Brown, 1995).

Summary

In summary, this review of official reports and literature points to the holistic nature and connectedness of successful Inuit post-secondary and adult education. Successful programs show how the six factors highlighted are interdependent and most times depend on complex and sometimes disparate partners that have the will to find common ground and focus on the success and self-actualization of students as their ultimate goal. The final measure of success will be fully participating, responsible Inuit citizens who are proud of their language and heritage, fully equipped to meet the needs of their families, their communities and the obligations of their land claims agreements (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004).

Case Studies of Post-secondary Education and Training in Inuit Regions

The following section summarizes two case studies of post-secondary programming in each of the four Inuit regions: Inuvialuit region, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut. The relative order of the following sections does not imply a priority listing.

Inuvialuit Region

1. Occupational Standards and Certification - NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment

The Northwest Territories Occupational Standards and Certification Program provides a unique alternative to apprenticeship training for people who have proven work experience but lack formal training. Participants are evaluated on their knowledge and performance, as well as on the job assessment. When required, short courses are provided to fill in specific knowledge gaps. When participants complete the program, they receive a Certificate of Competence from the NWT Apprenticeship, Trade and Occupations Certification Board with the same status as a journeyperson.

The benefits of this program are immense considering that participants can complete most of their training while employed, close to home, and under the guidance and support of a counselor who records their required hours and experience. They are allowed to track their hours of work experience retroactively, which means they can move toward completion more quickly and any short courses they need can be taken locally through the Aurora College community learning centres.

The NWT has 24 certifiable occupations under this program, all of which are available to the Inuvialuit, but it is the Environmental Monitor certification that is of particular interest. In the Beaufort-Delta Region, there is high demand for people to work in this area, which typically attracts men with extensive experience on the land and who choose to work seasonally in combination with a traditional lifestyle. Employment is available within the areas of oil and gas, mining, tourism, scientific research, transportation, forestry and site clean-up and requires competencies in traditional knowledge, safety, navigation and observation skills.

In support of training and employment opportunities for Inuvialuit, the NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment responded to a request from the Inuvialuit Land Administration to develop a certification process for Environmental Monitors. The motivation was to increase the formal recognition of the skills and experience of people working in the occupation and expand the employment opportunities for Inuvialuit. A unique and impressive partnership was formed to first develop standards for the occupation and then design the certification requirements. The partners included representatives from the industry, the federal government, community representatives, educators/trainers, Aboriginal groups and the Building Environmental Aboriginal Human

Resources (BEAHR) Project along with the initiators, the Inuvialuit Land Administration and the NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

The Inuvialuit were a driving force in this process by being proactive and open to forming a workable partnership in the best interests of their beneficiaries. The formation of such a partnership was quite an achievement ensuring that all interests were heard and that the Environmental Monitors Certification process would meet the requirements of all interests. This partnership has resulted in a process that is strongly supported and respected and most importantly, provides a unique opportunity for Inuvialuit to receive training and certification on the job in an occupation that is interesting and attractive to many of the beneficiaries.

The greatest challenge for participants in this program is the part-time or seasonal nature of employment in this area which means it will take longer to accumulate the required hours of experience for certification.

Since this program was only initiated in 2005, and considering the time it takes to become certified, success cannot yet be measured quantitatively. The success however, can be determined by the initiative of the Inuvialuit and the uniqueness of the process and strong partnership that has evolved.

2. Traditional Arts Program, Aurora College

The Inuvialuit and Gwich'in of the Beaufort-Delta had been concerned for some time that skills in their traditional arts and crafts were being lost. The beautiful and practical products that had been created and perfected for generations were disappearing with the passing of each Elder and both the older and younger generations realized steps must be taken quickly to avoid further loss. They were also aware that there were related employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for people with interests and natural talents in this area. To look at the possibility of offering a traditional arts program, Inuvialuit and Gwich'in representatives joined with the Aurora College Campus in Inuvik and the regional Department of Education, Culture and Employment to form a steering committee.

The result was a Traditional Arts Program, jointly funded by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) and the Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC); Aurora College and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment agreed to provide supplementary funding through specific funding allocations.

The steering committee explored options and settled on a Traditional Arts Program from Portage College in Lac La Biche, Alberta, which was brokered for the first year. This model provided a framework from which a unique Aurora College Traditional Arts Program emerged. Through the experience and skill of the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in instructors, courses in cultural history, traditional and contemporary arts and crafts combined with marketing and computer skills came together as an excellent and very popular program.

This program has now been offered for four years and continues to be guided by an Advisory Committee representing the original partners and governed by the Aurora College Board of Governors. Besides being on the committee, members of IRC and GTC offer hands on support through their interest in the program, encouragement of the students and provision of raw materials when available.

The program, first offered outside the main campus, has gained a great deal of energy and credibility by moving into the main building where students have ready access to all College resources and supports. Instructors note a remarkable personal growth and cultural pride in the students as they receive constant encouragement and reinforcement from College faculty and students from other programs, who come to admire their work. Students are eligible for student housing and GNWT Student Financial Assistance to meet their living costs.

Students benefit from this program on a number of levels. Firstly, they are actively involved in preserving and passing on the traditional arts and crafts of the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in. Secondly, they move into employment in art galleries, museums, cultural centres or in the area of clothing design. Thirdly, they gain knowledge and pride in their cultural identity and traditional skills. Finally, some gain the skills, confidence and a sense of empowerment they need to continue on into further education and training.

Nunavut

1. Master of Education Program for Nunavut - University of Prince Edward Island in collaboration with Nunavut Department of Education, Nunavut Arctic College, and St. Francis Xavier University

The Master of Education in Leadership in Learning is a unique and groundbreaking opportunity for Inuit educators to receive a graduate level education in Nunavut. In one sense it is a culmination of a long process of determination and perseverance and at the same time, it is the opening of a new doorway to Inuit leadership and research opportunities in Nunavut.

The impetus for the program came from a 1994 survey and resulting document, *Pauqatigiit: Professional Needs of Nunavut Educators* (1994), which indicated that 44 percent of the 294 Inuit teachers at the time, were interested in completing a Master of Education degree. Ten years later, a long time Inuit educational leader and senior administrator, speaking on behalf of her Inuit colleagues, declared that she had waited long enough. In response to this renewed interest, a university based team from the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) and Saint Francis Xavier University, with experience in Nunavut and Inuit education, met with Inuit educators in Iqaluit to discuss the possibility of a Master of Education. In the meeting, which was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Inuit educators expressed their desire for the opportunity to explore more deeply their own

experiences as educators, reflect on best practices in Inuit education and examine the broader philosophical questions related to decolonizing education in Nunavut.

The University of Prince Edward Island enthusiastically supported a proposal to deliver a Master of Education in Nunavut as a pilot and subsequently, the Nunavut Department of Education offered its support with the view that this was an opportunity to build Inuit educational leadership in Nunavut.

This innovative program, designed specifically for Nunavut, focused on creating a community of learners who could reconnect, while building trust and solidarity, in a decolonizing environment of reflection and dialogue. Courses would be offered on a part-time basis, the majority of which would be face-to-face, to fit in with the extremely busy and demanding lives of the participants. It was essential that all instructors would have experience both living and teaching in Nunavut and share a common philosophy and understanding of Inuit education and the Master's program. An integral part of the face-to-face courses included Elders who would provide a critical depth of culture and language, as well as a highly trained and experienced counselor with extensive experience in Indigenous contexts. The ten courses touch on all aspects of educational leadership – curriculum, language and literacy, critical pedagogy, research theory and methods, technology – and are delivered so that students can make meaningful connections related to their own experiences in Nunavut education.

The program is made possible by the extensive financial support and staff commitment of the Nunavut Department of Education. The University of Prince Edward Island provides the program and the services of one professor. Nunavut Arctic College provides overall guidance in the program as well as accommodation, classroom space and the use of college facilities.

Student supports, which are built into the courses, are extremely responsive to the requests and anticipated needs of the students and include the Nunavut Department of Education Leadership Coordinator who organizes the details of delivering the courses as well as providing personal and professional support for each student. Local monitors provide immediate academic and technological support as well as a critical personal connection, during the three distance courses.

One of the greatest strengths of this program is the willingness of the instructors to enlist and respond to ongoing student feedback during each course; all possible structures are in place to support success. Students have asked the professors for more, critical feedback and assurance that the courses will be rigorous and academically demanding. A Master of Education Advisory Committee meets regularly to review progress and respond to any challenges that arise.

The M Ed is being offered to one cohort of twenty-seven Inuit students between 2006 and 2009. Courses will run over three years and anyone missing a course will be offered a make-up opportunity near the end. Interim assessment of the program to date is anecdotal from the students who describe the courses as refreshing, providing time for

personal reflection, an opportunity to share and hear the views of others, and an opportunity to grow professionally. They repeatedly express appreciation for the personal concern shown by the professors, describing them as respectful, organized, kind, enablers, flexible, thought provoking, empathetic, powerful, and very responsive to the demands and needs of the group. The students appreciate that the instructors are culturally aware and have experience either teaching in the North or working with Inuit. All along, the program is being researched so that the story of its evolution, its successes and its challenges, can be recorded.

The main challenge for students, who are all women, is the extremely busy nature of their demanding lives as full-time educators, with extensive responsibilities for their immediate and extended families as well as within their communities. Also, since English is the second language of the majority of students, some face added challenges of self-doubt and insecurity related to negative schooling experiences in English. The distance courses also present unique challenges for students who do not have a strong background in computers although an exponential growth in technological skills has taken place since the start of the first course.

The professors, students and partners believe that none of these challenges are insurmountable and the rewards of taking each course and completing the program far outweigh the challenges. Solutions could involve more paid release time for less condensed courses, increased Inuktitut instruction by Inuit instructors or co-instructors, an orientation course prior to the start of the program, and computer workshops in advance to prepare for the distance courses.

2. Language and Culture Program - Nunavut Arctic College

The Nunavut Arctic College Language and Culture Program evolved from an identified three-fold need to preserve Inuit language and culture, to strengthen Inuit identity through a deeper understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that make up the culture, and to connect the traditional with the contemporary in today's world. The result is the Nunavut version of a liberal arts program.

This program was designed and developed by long term Nunavut educators under the guidance and advice of Elders with specific areas of expertise, Inuit students in Nunavut Arctic College, and researchers from Southern Canada. The resulting program provides two options which share a block of core courses. The Interpreter/Translator option is designed for students interested in the technical aspects of Inuktitut, who wish to pursue a career in this field. Inuit Studies, the second option, emphasizes the traditional aspects of Inuit language and culture and explores these in relation to the social, economic and political environment of contemporary Inuit life.

The Language and Culture Program has received remarkable benefits and support from a longstanding and active partnership with the Iqaluit Elders' Society. During the program development phase, extensive interviews with Elders were recorded and later transcribed by students in the program. The transcriptions were later used to produce five textbooks

which were published by the Elders' Society and are now used as textbooks within the program. The Iqaluit Francophone Association has also been a research partner in the past and assists by partially funding an annual student exchange to the University of Paris.

A unique and innovative feature of the Language and Culture Program, which is particularly motivational for the students, involves two student exchanges. Each year one student is chosen to assist with the delivery of an Inuktitut course, offered at the Institute National aux Langues et Civilisations Orientales, at the University of Paris. A second exchange takes place with the Cultural Anthropology Department of the University of Leiden in Holland. In this case, students from the program make presentations about Inuit culture and identity. These experiences offer students the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of the world, make significant contributions to the international understanding of Inuit language and culture, and deepen their own confidence and identity as Inuit.

Students receive seventy-five percent of their instruction in Inuktitut from Inuit staff in a supportive and empowering learning environment that reflects Inuit culture. The instructors are caring and empathetic, offering as much flexibility as possible to students with extensive family responsibilities and sometimes challenging life circumstances. They consider it important to be good listeners and to serve as a liaison to counseling services when needed. They know how important it is for students to have a sense of belonging and to that end, activities such as a weekly sewing evening and family potlucks are arranged, to give them opportunities for positive social interaction outside class.

Students are recruited into the program, to a large extent, by its reputation which has grown steadily since it began and instructors take advantage of every publicity opportunity through the local media, to let the general population know about the student activities and achievements. Finally, the students become walking advertisements around the community when they wear the sealskin parkas they produce as a second year project.

Before leaving the program, the students prepare resumes and receive career counseling, choosing either further education or employment. Those who advance to other education opportunities say that they have gained invaluable knowledge and skills, enhanced by incredible growth in personal self-confidence that has prepared them to take advantage of the opportunities Nunavut has to offer Inuit today. As a result of this program, graduates have moved into the Akitsiraq Law School, Teacher Education and the Social Work Program. An agreement with the University of Manitoba allows students to receive two years of transfer credits into their Native Studies Program and transfers to other universities can be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Graduates also find employment in the area of language services as translators and interpreters and as researchers. Specifically, graduates work in the Nunavut Research Centre, the Department of Culture, Language and Youth, and as Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit (IQ) Coordinators with various government departments. Employment opportunities are also available in the private sector.

For most graduates, the intrinsic value gained in the program enhances and enriches their lives making them more positive and productive citizens, much the same as the gains made by students in other liberal arts programs.

Nunavik

1. Inuit Teacher Training Program - Kativik School Board and McGill University

The Nunavik Inuit Teacher Training Program, founded in 1975, has had a remarkable impact on the entire Nunavik education system, providing graduates who are now employed at all levels of education. Inuit teachers make it possible to deliver K-3 Inuktitut programming in all schools across the region thus contributing significantly to the preservation of the Inuktitut language.

A longstanding, successful partnership between the Kativik School Board and McGill University makes it possible for trainees to complete a Certificate in Education for First Nations and Inuit followed by a Bachelor of Education for Certified Teachers. All decisions regarding the program are made collaboratively by a steering committee representing the partners while a Joint Committee representing the Kativik School Board, McGill University and the Quebec Ministry oversees the orientation, implementation and evaluation of all training activities.

Graduates of this program maintain a very high retention rate in Nunavik schools, an achievement which can be directly attributed to this method of training which first places Inuit interested in becoming teachers in training positions under the supervision of experienced Inuit teachers. After one year, they move into K – 3 classrooms as teachers-in-training as positions come open. If no openings are available, successful trainees are assigned to a different teacher at a different grade level to give them a broader experience. Both trainees and teachers-in-training attend courses (one in the winter and two during the summer) until they complete graduation requirements.

Trainees and teachers-in-training do not have to contend with culture shock since their instructors are Inuit, the language of instruction is Inuktitut and cultural knowledge and values are foundational to the program. The instructors remain strong and current in methodologies and academic information through on-going professional development, and in cases where non-Inuit university consultants co-teach or develop curriculum, care is taken to ensure they are culturally sensitive and adaptable. Elders have an integral role in several courses, providing traditional knowledge and language expertise.

A critical feature of this program is the continuous personal, professional and academic support provided by Inuit teacher-training counselors who are graduates of the program and located in each community. Regional teacher-training counselors, also employed by the Kativik School Board, travel to provide support and also evaluate the progress of the trainees and teachers-in-training. These community-based teacher-training counselors also provide induction support to the new teachers in their first years immediately following graduation. Transitional issues are minimal for Inuit in this program since they

remain in their communities within their home support networks and receive a salary throughout their training.

Of course there are challenges for some trainees and teachers-in-training when they attend courses away from home, even for a short while, but this is made easier by the staff who arrange childcare during summer courses. A second challenge is related to the extensive demands on Inuit teachers and teacher training counselors, who are called upon to teach in schools and teacher education as well as develop curricula and resources. The solution here appears to be the training of more Inuit teachers as quickly as possible. A third challenge results from a very limited pool of potential trainees in the smaller communities and a serious lack of Inuit men who are interested in the teaching profession.

2. Nunavik Post-secondary Student Sponsorship Program - Kativik School Board

The Kativik School Board clearly wanted its students to be successful in post-secondary, university and professional programs in southern Quebec when they established the Nunavik Post-Secondary Student Sponsorship Program in 1978. The Board knew that in order for students to succeed, they needed an all encompassing transition and support network that would first make connections in the Nunavik communities and then follow students through their education.

The program is successful because it was designed by experienced Nunavut educators, who understood Inuit education and the Inuit culture, and the program consistently employs people with that same background. The strength of this program comes first from the program counselors who make regular personal contact with high school students in all the Nunavik communities. Through conversations and a promotional video, they provide career guidance and information about post-secondary opportunities. The counselors then maintain connection from Montreal to answer questions as the students consider their options. It is important to note that the final selection of students is based on personal interviews, input from teachers and school administration, and consultation with the local education committee.

Nunavik students, generally must first raise their academic levels before entering post-secondary education and so attend either a French or English CEGEP. Very successful partnerships with both John Abbot College (English) and College Marie Victorian (French) were formed by the Kativik School Board making it possible for students to complete the program which focuses primarily on language proficiency. Also, it is to the students' advantage and through special arrangement, that they can fulfill the CEGEP language requirement by taking two compulsory Inuktitut courses.

Students receive a great deal of support and protection from the program, especially in their first, and to some degree, the second year away from home. They must live in supervised residence in their first year and, after proving academic and social competence, may apply for a Student Services apartment for the second year.

The wide range of academic supports offered is exceptional. Students are required to attend study sessions and in some cases counselors shadow students in their classes so that they can tailor study sessions to individual student needs. Tutors are also provided when needed. Students in French colleges are completely sheltered in Inuit-only classes during their first year. By the time most students have completed the two-year CEGEP, they are qualified to apply to university or other training with the confidence to handle the associated social and personal demands.

Nunatsiavut

1. Nunatsiavut Government Community-Based Adult Education and Training for Inuit

Inuit Pathways operates through an agreement with the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement (AHRDA) and the Nunatsiavut Government, to offer community-based adult education and training for Inuit. Partnerships are formed with various institutions and government departments, to offer training in specific areas where future employment opportunities are available for the graduates.

Training is provided within Nunatsiavut communities in the land claims area or at the College of the North Atlantic in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Programs at this campus still offer students the opportunity to study within Labrador, and maintain some ties to their communities and culture. Programs have been offered over a number of years in the areas of carpentry, crane operator, driller blaster assistant, heavy equipment operator, marine emergency, conservation officer, early childhood education, community health worker, office administration and computer studies.

Since students receive training in their communities or close to home, they remain within or close to their home support networks and do not have to contend with culture shock and adjustments required when moving to a larger centre. In this setting, students also benefit from a low student/teacher ratio and the infusion of Inuit cultural elements, such as presentations by Elders and community leaders. Community-based programs also allow students to gain insight and make connections between the past and the realities of today.

Students benefit from first hand knowledge of the working environment, its organization and expectations, in their chosen field through fieldwork and on-site visits thus easing their transition following graduation.

The greatest challenge, for most students who are returning to education after a long absence, is the need to develop good study habits and set priorities while balancing the demands of home and school.

2. Post-Secondary Student Support Program, Nunatsiavut Government

The Nunatsiavut Government introduced its Post-Secondary Student Support Program to increase opportunities and improve accessibility for Inuit who want to go on to post-secondary and adult training. Three interconnected features of this program are now bringing about positive results for Inuit students.

First is the **career and guidance program** where counselors make regular visits to the five Inuit communities in Labrador. They advise and monitor Inuit students throughout high school, recommending required courses for entrance into specific post-secondary programs and later helping them with the application process. Each year, 15 – 20 high school students travel to visit a number of post-secondary institutions where they receive an introduction to various programs and an orientation to the new environment.

A second program, **the transition program**, was introduced to help Inuit students overcome the academic and social challenges they experienced coming from small high schools. This program, offered in Nunatsiavut by the College of the North Atlantic, gives Inuit students an opportunity to strengthen their academic background and complete the specific academic entrance requirements they need for particular post-secondary programs.

A third program, the **University Transfer Program**, allows students to stay in Nunatsiavut one more year while beginning their post-secondary education. Through one of several campuses within Nunatsiavut, the College of the North Atlantic offers courses that can be transferred to institutions outside the region, thus easing the eventual transition.

The three Post-Secondary Student Support Programs described have been shown to improve student success rates at the post-secondary level and increase the number of students who choose the academic stream in high school. There has been an increase in the number of high school students taking academic level courses since the guidance counselors began traveling to Nunatsiavut communities and the numbers of students taking post-secondary programs has also increased since the introduction of the transition and university transfer programs. Students taking the university transfer programs have an 80 percent graduation rate.

In 2007-08 there are 200 students registered in the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, the majority of whom are in Labrador but others are scattered across Canada. Sixty-seven, located in Happy Valley Goose Bay, are registered in a wide range of programs. Forty-eight percent of students in the program are classified as mature students often with five or six children.

Key Success Factors

The following section summarizes findings, drawn from the literature review and exploration of regional case studies outlined above, into 14 key factors relating to successful post-secondary programs for Inuit. The key findings are:

1. Program design must be bold, innovative, generous and all encompassing with a focus on successful student learning rather than on the perpetuation of colonialistic and sometimes rigid institutionalized systems.
2. The most innovative programs that achieve the best results for Inuit students are a result of partnerships that bring together various paradigms, and represent students, Inuit organizations, employers, educational institutions and government.
3. Programs must be delivered in a decolonizing environment that is respectful, and empowering, giving students the opportunity to recover from possible negative schooling experiences, and regain self-esteem and confidence.
4. Programs must be developed, delivered and administered by Inuit educators or non-Inuit who have lived and taught successfully in Inuit communities, who support student-centered learning and understand the nature of Inuit education and culture.
5. It must be recognized that education for many Inuit adults is transformative and incremental in nature. Their learning may begin with recovery, regaining strength, identity, and courage as they absorb the content of the courses.
6. Governments are first accountable to Inuit to provide them with excellent, responsive, educational opportunities. This will require generous financial support resulting in an invaluable investment for the future.
7. Programs must be holistic in nature providing personal, academic, cultural and financial support for the students and their families. This support must start before the students enter the program and continue on as they make the transition from education to further productive choices, either in further education/training or employment.
8. Inuit adult students must receive funding that is adequate to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle for themselves and their families.
9. Decision makers must recognize the intrinsic value of Inuit post-secondary education and training that leads to empowered, stronger citizens who will lead a productive, positive lifestyle for the benefit of their families and their community. Focusing only on quantifiable results will fail to acknowledge an equally valuable aspect of education.
10. Successful Inuit post-secondary education and training focuses on building capacity within the Inuit community. With this focus, other factors and barriers are diminished.

11. Inuit culture and values must be foundational in post-secondary education and training for Inuit adults.
12. Community-based programs increase the accessibility of programs for Inuit adults who have extensive family and community commitments, increase opportunities for inclusion of cultural knowledge and language, reduce the possibility of culture shock, provide authentic work experience, and contribute to the retention of graduates in their chosen professions.
13. Post-secondary education and training programs for Inuit must be adequately funded, thus allowing staff to focus on program delivery rather than on fundraising.
14. Research in the area of Inuit post-secondary education and training is required urgently.

Ongoing Challenges

There continues to be a number of ongoing challenges that persist within Inuit post-secondary education and training that must be addressed so that opportunities can be made available to a greater number of Inuit adults in a wider range of program areas.

1. Financial support that will allow adult Inuit students and their families to maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle.
2. Paid release time and expenses for Inuit adults who are taking post-secondary education/training part-time, while employed.
3. Reliable, high quality, affordable childcare that will allow parents to study without concern for the safety and wellbeing of their children.
4. More Inuit men entering teacher education.
5. Sufficient, sustainable program funding which will allow staff to focus on program delivery rather than on fundraising.
6. Focus on decolonizing approaches in all Inuit post-secondary education and training programs.
7. Transitional challenges – social, academic, cultural - experienced by Inuit students who must leave home to access the programs they require.
8. Need for recognition by all partners that post-secondary Inuit culture and language programs provide benefits, similar to liberal arts programs, that are far beyond immediate employment opportunities, by strengthening Inuit identity and purpose through a deeper understanding of traditional and contemporary Inuit knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary in today's world.

Policy Recommendations

The following section outlines key policy recommendations based on the above success factors and lessons learned from the literature review and exploration of regional case studies of post-secondary Inuit education. The nine policy recommendations state:

1. That governments and funding agencies recognize the intrinsic value of education for Inuit adults, over and above the employment outcomes.
2. That research is undertaken to identify success factors and best practices in Inuit post-secondary education and adult training.
3. That colleges in each Inuit region offer a liberal arts program in Inuit language and culture.
4. That Inuit teacher education programs be expanded and graduate studies be made available in each Inuit region.
5. That funding criteria and formulas recognize the holistic nature of Inuit post-secondary education and training which includes a continuum of supports both for the students and their families that is enough to facilitate a healthy, balanced lifestyle.
6. That post-secondary education and training programs focus primarily on building capacity within Inuit communities and regions.
7. That all post-secondary education and training programs are delivered in an empowering and decolonizing environment.
8. That all post-secondary education and training programs are taught by Inuit instructors or co-taught by Inuit educators/Elders with non-Inuit subject experts and that this is supported with additional program funding.
9. That when non-Inuit instructors teach in post-secondary education and training programs, they must either have successfully lived and worked in Inuit communities, have a thorough understanding of decolonizing Inuit education and/or have received a thorough orientation to all aspects of Inuit education and culture.

Summary

Inuit in post-secondary education and training are succeeding as a result of innovative, collaborative and responsive programs that are designed to meet the holistic needs of the students. These programs are grounded in a foundation of Inuit culture and language that affirms and reaffirms a strong sense of identity. Further education opportunities should work to offer a wider range of choices.

Using the six key factors that have been identified in this paper and the examples described in the case studies, models working for Inuit today have been revealed. Based on this information and combined with a willingness to collaborate for the collective benefit of Inuit today and in the future, much more can be accomplished. The key is really quite straight forward - we must keep the ultimate personal fulfillment and self-determination of Inuit as our goal.

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