

Case Study on the First Inuktitut Daycare in Iqaluit: Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik

Navarana Beveridge

Jane Glassco Arctic Fellow



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The Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowship Program is aimed at young Northerners, especially Aboriginal Northerners, aged 25-35, who want to build a strong North guided by Northerners. It is for those who, at this stage in their lives, are looking for additional support, networks and guidance from mentors and peers across the North and throughout Canada as they deepen their understanding of important issues facing their region and develop policy ideas to help address them. The program was named in honour of Jane L. Glassco, Gordon Foundation trustee and daughter of founders Walter and Elizabeth Gordon. It was through Jane's direct leadership that the Foundation became deeply interested in Northern and Arctic issues, and in supporting young Northerners.

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Navarana Beveridge is currently the Director of Social Policy at the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. Prior to that, Navarana was the Education and Language Policy Analyst with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, where she played a key role in the development of the Inuit Language Protection Act, the Official Languages Act, and the Nunavut Education Act. She has also worked with the Government of Nunavut. In Repulse Bay, Navarana worked with the municipal government, coordinating a five-year land use plan and managing funding for community initiatives.

Navarana is an Inuit language advocate and is one of the founders of the first Inuktitut daycare in Iqaluit. Her work at the territorial level has included making formal submissions before the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on the Inuit Language Protection Act, the Official Languages Act and the Nunavut Education Act. At the national level, Navarana has presented before the Senate Standing Committee on aboriginal and constitutional affairs regarding the Nunavut Official Languages Act. At the international level, she has made an intervention on behalf of indigenous youth from ten different countries at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues regarding indigenous youth needs on education and indigenous languages.

Community

Navarana is originally from Qaqortoq, Greenland and has made Nunavut her home for the past fourteen years with her husband and child. She has lived in Qaqortoq, Nuuk, Denmark, Repulse Bay and Ottawa and now Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, since 2001.

Fellowship Focus

Navarana focused on the Inuit language in early childhood education in light of the recent passing of the Inuit Language Protection Act and the Nunavut Official Languages Act. The current strong state of Inuktitut in Nunavut is thanks to the use of the language in the home and amongst families. However, a language that is not used in the public domain of society is perceived as illegitimate. In order for a language to be socially viable, the language must be the foundation of the society at all levels in all areas, especially during early childhood when languages are absorbed most efficiently. Navarana has conducted comparative research amongst aboriginal jurisdictions to examine the initiatives that had the most impact in terms of strengthening indigenous language revitalization and sustainability. Navarana has particular interest in Inuit language use in daycares, pre-school systems and the early stages of the education system. She intends to use her research to partner with interested authorities to encourage systemic changes to the early childhood education system in a way that will give children a strong foundation in the Inuit language taught in their own culture and improve academic achievements.

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Introduction

This paper is possible thanks to the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, whose visionary Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowship program invests in indigenous initiatives in the most meaningful of ways. The program allows for renewed hope and empowerment at the community level. My association with the program is independent of my employer: the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, though I offer much gratitude for their fantastic support in allowing me to attend this fantastic personal and professional development opportunity.

I would also like to give a very big thank you to Natan Obed, who has acted as my mentor through the process. He has played an important role in guiding me through the technical process very patiently and acted as a big source of moral support.

Executive Summary

It is a common misconception that Inuktitut is a language of the past and that it does not have a place in modern society. This misguided viewpoint is held by many Inuit and non-Inuit across Canada. This attitude helps explain why Inuktitut does not enjoy majority status in Nunavut society even though the Inuit language is the first language of 83 per cent of Inuit or 70 per cent of the territory as a whole in 2006¹. Inuktitut is the key to success in Nunavut society. In fact, Inuktitut is the key to improving the educational achievement and improving our overall health as a people.

There is a need to invest financially and strategically in Inuit language education starting from early childhood education. The investment needs to come from within and outside of Nunavut. Inuit have demanded Inuit language investment for the past forty years with little success. Inuit political mobilization was largely a result of concerns about Inuit language prominence in society.

There is also strong evidence that investing in indigenous language and teaching it as the first language of instruction, such as Inuit language in Nunavut, results in improved educational achievements. Further evidence emphasizes the positive impacts on individual and collective well-being when strong early childhood education that is centered on the first language, culture and worldview is available to children.

The objective of the research will be to investigate ways to strengthen the way Inuit language is delivered in the early childhood education system in a more systemic and strategic manner. The purpose of this research is to draw upon people's experiences to seek information on the current status of early childhood development delivery using the Inuit language. The expected results will be to make recommendations to decision makers regarding Inuit language in early childhood development as well as to work with early childhood deliverers to ensure that the Inuit language within institutional facilities are delivered in a way that is efficient and sustainable for future generations of Inuit.

It is important to point out that the best way for infants and pre-schoolers to get a good foundation in Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun language and culture is for parents, families and community at large to teach it in the home. Children cannot be expected to learn their language and culture if it is not being taught in the home. Having said that, it is of utmost importance that the Inuit language, culture and world view be supported throughout society so that generations can clearly view it as a viable language.

¹ Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, "Nunavut Census language by community" (2006), Retrieved from <http://www.gov.nu.ca/eia/stats/community.html> May 18, 2011

Research Limitations

This paper is not a result of testing Kindergarten and school children skill levels, but rather assessments are made through teacher interviews and analysis of grades. Other research needs that this paper does not cover include: the need for more Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun-speaking teachers, the individual parental choice not to speak Inuktitut to their children, the effects of enrolling unilingual English-speaking children into Inuktitut classes on the child's quality of learning in the early years and the rest of the class. The research also does not look into the efficiency of Inuit language acquisition and academic achievement when children are looked after at home by either parents or family members as opposed to attending an institutional setting. This paper also only looks at Inuktitut, not Inuinnaqtun, as the research subject is the Iqaluit Inuktitut daycare.

Research Methodology

This research uses the case study method which is an in-depth study of a social unit, in this case, the Tumikuluit daycare. The research seeks to uncover the Inuktitut daycare's effects on children's Inuktitut language acquisition, Inuit cultural and value learning from the daycare caregiver, parental and elementary teacher perspective. This research also examines the Tumikuluit children's preparedness for Kindergarten and their performance once they have entered the elementary school. Qualitative open-ended questions were posed using the snowball method, which is collecting information that is called a convenience sample where the participants chose the next person to be interviewed for the interviewer.

Indigenous Language Centered Instruction in the Education System

The benefits of learning in one's first language was made evident in a long-term study amongst Nunavik school children in northern Quebec. The study found that learning in your first language in early childhood education can have a positive effect on the personal and collective self-esteem of minority language students, which is a benefit not achieved through second language instruction.² The study was done on Inuit, Anglophone and French Canadian students in Nunavik. The findings were that Inuit students with a good base in Inuktitut tend to do better in their studies. In fact, Inuit kindergarten students scored higher than their American counterparts on spatial intelligence tests. The findings were also that Inuit kindergarten students taught in Inuktitut almost doubled their personal self-esteem by the end of the year, compared to a slight drop if they were educated in English or French. The collective self-esteem among Inuit school children was also found to be higher when students were educated in their first language, rather than a second language.

It's been the common experience for indigenous people and minority groups throughout the world that when they are taught using their own language, culture and worldview that they achieve better academic results. The experiences have been well-documented through research. There is the lesson from Hawaii where the general evaluation of the Hawaiian indigenous language and culturally centered program showed:

"Although the program has emphasized language revitalization as opposed to academic achievement, Hawaiian immersion schooling has yielded significant academic benefits. Immersion students have garnered prestigious scholarships, enrolled in college courses while still in high school, and passed the state university's English composition assessments, despite receiving the majority of the English, science and mathematics instruction in Hawaiian. Student achievement on standardized tests has equaled and in some cases surpassed that of Native Hawaiian children enrolled in English-medium schools, even in English language arts. There is also evidence that Hawaiian immersion develops critical literacy and cultural pride."³

It's been well-documented since the 1950s that the best medium for teaching children is in their first language. It was strongly recommended by the United Nations that colonized groups such as indigenous groups be provided education in their first language as it is the system of meaningful signs that in the child's mind works automatically for expression and understanding.⁴

² Journal of Educational Psychology 1995, Vol. 87, No. 2: Identity and the Language of the Classroom, Investigating the Impact of Heritage Versus Second Language Instruction on Personal and Collective Self-Esteem, pp. 241-252

³ Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Language of Instruction Policy in Nunavut: Creating a framework for Inuit language revitalization, p. 26

⁴ UNESCO, The use of Vernacular Languages in Education, pp. 11-47

The Importance of Focusing on Early Childhood Education

Research indicates that strong early childhood programming can be just as important as learning in your first language. It is important that early childhood programs are strategically strengthened in Nunavut to allow children to enter into kindergarten with a strong foundation of learning that will allow them greater opportunities to succeed. A 2005 study of the effectiveness of the Early Head Start (EHS) program in the U.S. based on a random sample of over 3,000 families in 17 Early Headstart programs, showed that participating children had better cognitive and language development, were more capable of sustained attention, and behaved less aggressively towards others. Surveying all of these and other long-term studies, Canadian researchers Cleveland and Krashinsky conclude:

“Overwhelmingly, these studies have found that good child care can have very positive effects on these children and that these advantages can be long-lasting. In particular, good child care can compensate, at least partially, for a disadvantaged home life.”⁵

The first five years of a child’s life critically shape the rest of the life of a human being. Just one year out of those five years can have significant impact as witnessed in the U.S. *Perry Pre-school Project* that ran from 1962 to 1967 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and brought pre-school education to African-American three and four year-olds from poor backgrounds. Most of the children who were judged to be at high risk of school failure, participated in the project for a year. The results were that the inner-city African American children randomly selected for participation in early childhood education versus those who did not was that the long-term benefits were just overwhelmingly positive for the children and parents. The inner city kids who received the pre-school education were more likely to graduate from high school⁶, more likely to earn a higher salary by the age of 40⁷, less likely to be involved with crime⁸, and less likely to be depressed.

The children in the Perry pre-school project were given a strong foundation in life, which benefitted them for the rest of their lives in a number of areas. It is so important that Inuit children be given a strong foundation in life as well and that they understand who they are and their language. Giving them the ability to accept it, see it as being relevant in today’s context and take pride in it. These are all protective factors and a strong foundation for success in life, which will give Inuit children the tools to go through the inevitable hardships in life and make them better equipped to handle such situations.

⁵ Innocenti Research Center, Report Card 8: The Childcare Transition, (UNICEF, 2008), pp. 10

⁶ High /Scope Educational Research Foundation, The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions and Frequently Asked Questions, pp. 1

⁷ High /Scope Educational Research Foundation, The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions and Frequently Asked Questions, pp. 4

⁸ High /Scope Educational Research Foundation, The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions and Frequently Asked Questions, pp. 3

The Inuit Language and the Canadian Responsibility

In 2011 Nunavut had the highest incidence of violent crime and suicide in Canada per capita and the lowest rate of educational attainment. In 2008, 7 in 10 (70 per cent) Inuit children aged 3 to 5 in 16 Nunavut communities were living in food insecure homes⁹. Clearly there is need for strategic measures to combat the social ills and low educational achievements of Nunavut. Literacy levels and a higher standard of living are clearly linked. Access to adequate education that is linguistically and culturally relevant is key to achieving the success of Nunavut. Not only is it common sense to invest in Inuit education, it is also a basic human right under international law where Canada has endorsed that the protection of cultural diversity is an integral part of human rights, and without it, the full realization and enjoyment of full human rights is not possible. Inseparability of culture from human dignity implies “a commitment” to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples.¹⁰ The right to use one’s own language is recognized in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) under article 27, which states:

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

Canada ratified the ICCPR in 1976.

Inuktitut speaking children are at a disadvantage simply because there isn’t sufficient Inuktitut programming in Nunavut. This is unfortunate as this is a territory that is in the enviable position to indigenous peoples everywhere to have authority over their own education system. The federal government needs to step in and provide resources to allow Nunavummiut (people from Nunavut) to overhaul their education system starting from the early childhood education system to allow access to quality education that reflects the local values, just like other Canadians take for granted. The Nunavut Government is overwhelmed with several crises situations that are under their jurisdiction, issues such as an overburdened health care system with high costs of medical travel to access specialized care is making it impossible for the Government of Nunavut to stay within the budget. There is an acute housing shortage in Nunavut that causes social problems and respiratory illnesses. The territory is still trying to battle tuberculosis, which reached a record high outbreak in 2010, and suicide rates for Nunavut are 11 times the national average.

An overhaul of the Nunavut education system will take resources, but it is clearly an investment that is worth making. There is an appalling shortage of Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun literature in general, not to mention educational material. There is a tremendous need for Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun-speaking teachers, which the Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP) at the Nunavut Arctic College is working toward, but is unable to

⁹ Egeland, G.M. et al, “Food Insecurity Among Inuit Preschoolers: Nunavut Inuit Child Health Survey, 2007-2008” (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*, February 23, 2010), 182(3), p. 243

¹⁰ Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, articles 4 and 5

fulfill. It is also difficult to keep the NTEP graduates in the school system as it is easy for the graduates to find higher paying employment with more flexible work hours. However, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that for every dollar invested in early childhood intervention, the return can be as high as \$8. This is a greater return than investment made in the primary education system, adult education, training and policing¹¹. Inuit in Nunavut have demanded increased Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun instruction in the education system for the past 30 years from the time the national Inuit organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) obtained funding to create the Inuit Language Commission in 1974,¹² including the time the Nunavut Implementation Commission held their Language Policy Conference in Iqaluit March 1998. The message has consistently been to increase Inuit language instruction as the primary medium in the education system.¹³ The first thing that needs to happen is that Inuit in Nunavut need to take responsibility and teach the next generation of Inuit, whether it is Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun. Inuit need to be able to envision Inuktitut as the healthy main language of the Nunavut society. Secondly, Inuit leaders need to ensure that necessary resources are strategically allocated to ensure that there is access to services in the Inuit language whether it is in the education system, in the work place, media, businesses and all other aspects of society.

Funding inequity exists in Nunavut. The Canada-Nunavut Cooperation Agreement on the promotion of French and Inuit languages provides \$1.6 million for French Services and \$1.1 million for Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun community-based language initiatives, which cannot be used for government services. When factoring in the Inuit and Francophone population in Nunavut, the language accord translates to \$4,000 per French person and \$40 per Inuk.¹⁴

Social validity of our language is important to the health of our language and the loss of language rates tell us that the health of our language cannot be safeguarded by families in the homes alone. During the Supreme Court of Canada Franco-Tenois case it was concluded by the judge that Mr. Rodrigue Landry qualified as an expert in linguistic minorities. Mr. Landry is the Director of the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities in Moncton. Mr. Landry submitted an expert opinion paper called ethnolinguistic vitality that was completely accepted by the judge. Mr. Landry wrote that "the actions of government not only have a determining role on the life experience and perceptions of the members of a language group, but also on the very legitimacy of the group's language. A language that is not used in the public domain of society is perceived as being illegitimate, that is, as having no recognition within the society. This situation leads to members of that group gradually abandoning their language and seeking to integrate into the dominant language group."

¹¹ Innocenti Research Center, Report Card 8: The Childcare Transition, (UNICEF, 2008), pp. 9

¹² Harper, K., "Inuit Writing Systems: A Report to the Nunavut Implementation Commission" in *Nunavut Language Policy Conference: Report and Recommendations* (Nunavut Implementation Commission, March 1998), p. 5, On file with Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc., Department of Social and Cultural Development

¹³ Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Language of Instruction policy in Nunavut: creating a framework for Inuit language revitalization, p. 39

¹⁴ Information obtained from the Government of Nunavut, Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth staff.

Mr. Landry explained that “the more that government inaction or omissions lead to the non-recognition of a group, the more the members of that group tend to see their language as having an inferior and even illegitimate status.”

During the Residential school era, the federal government made an effort to assimilate Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Our Inuktitut language survived that attack, however, the Inuinnaqtun dialect is barely left breathing. It was a powerful moment when national Inuit leader, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Mary Simon, stood up after the prime minister’s historic apology to the aboriginal residential school survivors on June 10, 2009 and addressed the prime minister in Inuktitut. Ms. Simon stated that the residential schools failed to take her language away. Inuit have ensured the well-being of Inuktitut through the centuries; ironically, now that Inuit have their own territory to call home, the Inuit language is eroding faster than ever before. It is the responsibility of Inuit to ensure that the Inuit language is transferred to the next generation of Inuit in the home. It is hopeless to demand Inuktitut in the education system if Inuit are not going to give the gift of the ancestral language to the children.

During the Nunavut Inuit Language Standardization Symposium in Iqaluit in February 2011, a number of Greenlandic Inuit officials were in attendance. They were representatives of Oqaasileriffik, which is an independent Greenlandic institution under the Greenland Self Government. The institute speaks with authority over issues concerning the Greenland Inuit language: Kalaallisut, which includes terminology development¹⁵. One of the representatives in attendance was Carl Christian Olsen, known as Puju to many, who is the Director of the Greenland Language Secretariat and Chairman of the Greenland Language Committee, who holds a degree in Inuit Studies and linguistics. Greenland is widely known in the Inuit circumpolar region as having an Inuit language that is thriving and overcame language loss in the 1950s. In a conversation with Puju, he stated that the two main factors for overcoming language loss was the establishment of the Home Rule Government in Greenland that allowed for authority over internal affairs. The second main factor was making the Greenlandic Kalaallisut language the primary language in the education system.

The Inuit organizations and the territorial and federal government must all work together to realize this decades-old dream of being taught in our language while using our own culture and worldview. Canada’s Northern Strategy focuses on asserting sovereignty through heavy military presence in the North. Inuit were subjected to coerced relocation in the name of Canadian sovereignty to the high arctic in the 1950s and 1960s and lives were lost in the making of history. Inuit further asserted Canadian sovereignty through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement ratification. Therefore, meaningful investment to ensure the health of Canadian Inuit is needed and it is not in the form of militarizing the North.

To achieve a true North strong and free Canada must invest in indigenous education, aggressively using the Inuit language as the primary medium of instruction, starting with early childhood development. For years, education has been based on Western European language, culture and worldview with grave consequences to Inuit language and culture and to the detriment of academic achievements. Equal opportunity is what Inuit have wanted and continue to ask for.

¹⁵ www.oqaasileriffik.gl

Nunavut Examples of Successful Early Childhood Education Programs

A small institution, the Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik (sweet little footprints daycare) became the first Inuktitut-only daycare in Iqaluit when it opened its doors in 2008. It was created through a joint effort by a group of mothers who dedicated a year of their lives to create a daycare that would operate solely using the Inuit language, culture and worldview.



The official opening of the first Inuktitut daycare in Iqaluit, Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik, 2007.
Photo credit: unknown

The Tumikuluit language policy states that Inuktitut will be used at all times whether the child speaks it or not. Staff and board members are to operate in Inuktitut only.

The teachers in the Joamie and Nakashuk elementary schools in Iqaluit have observed that children who attended the Tumikuluit daycare have a very high readiness for kindergarten. In fact, the children coming from the daycare are bringing home excellent report cards in every subject. The children start kindergarten already knowing all their colors in Inuktitut and English. The children also already know their Inuktitut syllabic alphabet (i, pi, ti,ki) as well as their ABCs. The children know their numbers in Inuktitut and English as well. English is the

dominant language in Iqaluit, so the children usually learn English through television shows and from their family and friends.

The foundation of Inuit language, culture and worldview at the daycare is a reflection of the cultural pride felt by the founders of the Tumikuluit daycare. The objective is to reinforce the Inuit identity in a daycare setting. The result is confident children who are bilingual in Inuktitut and English. Even though Inuktitut is spoken all day long at the Tumikuluit daycare, and the parents are encouraged to speak Inuktitut in the home by the daycare, the children still pick up English. English is very pervasive in Nunavut society in it that the media, through television and radio as well as through technology is overwhelmingly in English. In contrast, children who attend other daycares in Iqaluit who offer mainly English instruction with a bit of Inuktitut spoken occasionally by Inuit staff tend to become unilingual English speakers. Also, it was observed where traditional foods are not served in the daycares that it is more difficult for parents to feed their children country food at home.

Having a good foundation in your first language will give you a strong tool to learn other languages. The immersion model of Tumikuluit encourages bilingualism by offering a solid foundation in the Inuit language. The cognitive benefits of bilingualism are well-established. For example, bilingual children are better able to focus their attention on relevant information, ignoring irrelevant distractions¹⁶. Other research has shown

¹⁶ Carlson, S.M. & Meltzoff, A.N. (2008). Bilingual experience and executive

that the effects of aging on the brain are diminished among bilingual adults¹⁷. Having the ability to speak fluent Inuktitut will serve the Tumikuluit children well later on in life as the *Inuit Language Protection Act* of Nunavut calls for Inuktitut language rights for Government of Nunavut employees by obligating senior managers to be able to communicate collectively with their employees in the Inuit language if employees choose to exercise their right to conduct their work in the Inuit language.¹⁸ Overall, it will become increasingly challenging to obtain employment in Nunavut without speaking Inuktitut as every organization in Nunavut will be obligated to deliver its reception, customer and client services in the Inuit language by 2012,¹⁹ with additional Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun language requirements for essential service providers to come into effect at a yet to be determined date²⁰.

The Tumikuluit example has served as an exemplary model for not only instilling Inuktitut fluency in the children attending the daycare, it has also allowed the children to enter Kindergarten ready to take their learning to the next level. Some of the Kindergarten teachers in one of the schools have resorted to separating the Tumikuluit alumni because the children tend to dominate the class in every subject.

The Tumikuluit children are allowed to take their early childhood education without being made to choose between their Inuit identity and the Western European culture normally imposed through the early childhood education institutions, the school system and the workforce. This system not only allows cultural and linguistic reclamation, but also allows a healthy self-esteem in one's own and collective Inuit identity.

The Tumikuluit success is not the first Nunavut example of Inuit centered Early Childhood Development. The Igloodik Early Intervention Project (IEIP) in Igloodik, in the Qikiqtaaluk region of Nunavut, offers child-centered and family-oriented activities to foster the healthy development of children and their families. The central part of this project is the Head Start Program for four year olds, designed to be a child-centered developmental program reflecting the values, traditions and culture of Igloodik. The staff at the IEIP evaluated their own programs and found that the early childhood program was able to intervene with programs amongst pre-schoolers with behavioral issues and deal with them before the child enters the elementary school system.²¹ The feedback from the parents on what their children learnt at the center included increased Inuktitut vocabulary, color recognition, learning to count, and the learning of songs.²² The Igloodik kindergarten students who had attended the Head Start program showed that, with a few exceptions, that the vast majority of students had improved attendance in kindergarten.²³

functioning in young children. *Developmental Science* 11(2), pp. 282–298.

¹⁷ Bialystok, E., Craik, F.I.M., Klein, R. & Viswanathan, M. (2004). Bilingualism, aging, and cognitive control: Evidence from the Simon task. *Psychology and Aging*, 19(2) pp., 290–303

¹⁸ Inuit Language Protection Act, s. 12(2)(f)(i)

¹⁹ Inuit Language Protection Act, s. 3(1)(d)

²⁰ Inuit Language Protection Act, s. 3(2)

²¹ Kristiann Allen, Carolyn MacDonald, Building our strengths together: An Evaluation of the Igloodik Early Intervention Project Igloodik, Nunavut, pp. 4

²² Kristiann Allen, Carolyn MacDonald, Building our strengths together: An Evaluation of the Igloodik Early Intervention Project Igloodik, Nunavut, pp. 14

²³ Kristiann Allen, Carolyn MacDonald, Building our strengths together: An Evaluation of the Igloodik Early Intervention Project Igloodik, Nunavut, pp. 16

The Igloolik early childhood program has been in existence since the 1990s with efficiently communicated success to the Government of Nunavut. It is unclear as to why the models are not strategically multiplied to other communities to emulate success. Sadly, the *Inuit Language Protection Act* does not obligate daycare, pre-schools and other early childhood institutions to deliver their services in the Inuit language. The only obligation for the Government of Nunavut is to promote early childhood Inuit language development and learning by producing childhood educational materials that are consistent with licensing standards, training and certification.²⁴

²⁴ Inuit Language Protection Act, s. 9(a)(b)(c)

Case study on the Tumikuluit daycare

The Tumikuluit daycare was established in August 2007 by a group of Inuit mothers who wanted a daycare where quality care was provided in Inuktitut and Inuit culture. Upon its creation, it became the first Inuktitut-only daycare in Iqaluit. It was a year-long process that involved the complete gutting and renovation of an existing building in downtown Iqaluit and intense proposal writing and fund raising. The core funding for its creation came from the Government of Nunavut through the Department of Education, Early Childhood Division, Kakivak Association and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated provided in-kind contribution. Qikiqtaaluk Corporation gave a reduced lease on its building for the first several months of operation. Local stores such as the Arctic Ventures and Northmart donated free kitchenware and essential items. Caregivers were hired based on their Inuktitut capabilities and their passion for passing on Inuktitut and Inuit culture. There was less emphasis on formal early childhood education, more on experience.

One of the first priorities for the daycare board was to create a language policy for use by daycare staff and board members. Unfortunately, the language policy is not a requirement by the Government of Nunavut. The Tumikuluit language policy is complete Inuktitut immersion. Inuktitut is to be spoken at all times by caregivers regardless of whether the children understand Inuktitut or not, unless there is a case of emergency that may harm a child or children. The board members are expected to function in Inuktitut. Everyone is expected to be respectful and embrace any dialects of Inuktitut spoken at the daycare. One of the daycare staff told a story of how a child had been surprised to learn that her daycare caregiver was in fact able to speak English when the child observed the daycare caregiver speaking in English outside of the daycare. The child had asked approached the daycare worker and asked in Inuktitut: “summa qallunaatituurpi? Why are you speaking in English?” This question captures the daycare staff commitment to speaking only in Inuktitut within the daycare. One daycare staff stated that she sometimes pretends not to understand English from a child to make the child reformulate the question in Inuktitut.

Interviews with the Tumikuluit daycare staff indicate that it takes about two weeks on average per child to start understanding Inuktitut. The older children in the daycare have tendencies to translate for the younger children who do not yet fully comprehend Inuktitut. The Tumikuluit example has served as an exemplary model for instilling Inuktitut fluency in the children attending the daycare. Parents are encouraged to speak Inuktitut at home to their children as well. The daycare staff noted that they can always tell which parents speak English in the home and which speak Inuktitut based on the language ability of the children.

When the daycare staff was asked what they felt was weakening the Inuktitut language, their response was consistently that there is so much English in the media, whether it be the radio, television, Internet or even video games. The response was also that children are picking up a lot of English from schools and their friends to the detriment of Inuktitut.

When asked what was strengthening the language, the response was consistently that Inuktitut use in the home is what is keeping the language strong. The elders play a big role as they tend to be unilingual or prefer Inuktitut, which makes other people speak Inuktitut.

The second priority for the Tumikuluit board was to develop a daycare curriculum for use by the daycare teachers to provide age appropriate learning for the children attending the daycare. This was to give the children an opportunity to learn about their own culture and to be in a setting that has a foundation in the Inuit values. There was no daycare curriculum in existence that the board was aware of, so the Pirurvik Center of Iqaluit was hired to develop a curriculum for the daycare upon obtaining project funding from the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth with the Government of Nunavut.



Tumikuluit daycare children being taught traditional Inuit games
Photo credit: unknown

A telephone conversation took place with a Nunavut government official who is in charge of early childhood education in March 2011. The official confirmed that there is not any curriculum nor an early childhood strategy in place for daycares in Nunavut. The *Nunavut Daycare Act* does not recognize Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (Inuit traditional knowledge) as having an importance in daycares. Unfortunately it is also not required to provide Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun services in daycares.

It is currently not known what the ethnicity ratio is for children attending daycares in Nunavut, however for schools it is 96 per cent of the 10,000 school children in Nunavut that are Inuit.

The Tumikuluit daycare follows a curriculum that is based on Inuit language and culture that the daycare had developed through the Pirurvik center after successfully obtaining project funding from the Government of Nunavut. The center is a unique, non-government centre of learning dedicated to Inuit Language, Culture and Wellbeing. Pirurvik creates and runs programs, provides services and develop innovative productions and is located in Iqaluit²⁵. Pirurvik means a place of growth. Part of the project was for daycare staff to get training to deliver the curriculum consistently. Interviews with daycare staff showed that the curriculum is used and that there is an emphasis on Inuktitut literacy at Tumikuluit with heavy emphasis on learning Inuktitut songs on a daily basis. A lot of body language is used to illustrate the meaning of the songs, which can be anything from the translated version of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star to actual traditional Inuit songs. Government of Nunavut Inuktitut flashcards are used diligently for two purposes. One, to have children learn the Inuktitut syllabic writing system and other flashcards are used to build Inuktitut vocabulary on a consistent basis. Each child's name is always written in syllabics on flashcards to have children recognize their own written name and other children's written names. The daycare staff also teach colours in Inuktitut as well as numbers and counting in Inuktitut. The daycare staff also help the children build their vocabulary by encouraging discussion on what the children see and hear while outside. The daycare workers have monthly themes.

²⁵ www.pirurvik.ca



Tumikuluit daycare children rehearsing Inuktitut songs about seal hunting games

as a qarmaq, which is an area where legends and stories are told. The qarmaq was traditionally an Inuit sod house made of stone, sod and skins. It was a traditional dwelling place for Inuit, which was an alternative to iglavigait (known to non-Inuit as igloos).

The daycare has the usual toys found in any typical daycare, but includes such things as children sized amautiit for the children to carry their dolls in. An amautiq (amautiit in plural) is the traditional Inuit parka designed to carry an infant or young toddler in the same garment on the back of the parent. There are both store bought dolls and homemade Inuit dolls for the children to play with. There are also small qilautiit (drums) that were used specifically to encourage traditional drum dancing. Throat singing lessons are also provided occasionally by volunteers. Wooden toy rifles are also used at the daycare if the children decide to role play hunting practices. Traditional Inuit roles are explained through such songs as Nattirmik qiniqpunga, which tells about the traditional seal hunt and explains the role of hunting and preparation of the seal for Inuit.

The diet in the daycare consists mainly of traditional Inuit country foods, which include caribou, seal, fish, whale and ptarmigan, three times a week. This is possible through limited funding, however, whether there is funding or not, the program is consistent as the daycare parents, grandparents and community members donate country food to the daycare to ensure that the children eat a traditional diet. There have also been instances where a grandfather of one of the Tumikuluit children caught a seal and brought the whole catch to the daycare to teach the skinning process as well as teaching the different Inuktitut names for the various seal parts and finally feasted on the deliciously nutritious seal that according to Inuit belief gave up its life and allowed itself to be caught so that we can nourish our bodies and minds with its flesh. Within that belief is the teaching of Inuit worldview where respect and gratitude is felt towards the life of an animal that was taken to sustain human life.

The Tumikuluit daycare also runs a number of cultural programs in addition to its core curriculum, as funding permits. It is an institution where board level parents are very involved with their children's early childhood education through proposal writing and design of programs. As funding becomes available, Tumikuluit runs Inuktitut music programs by inviting local musicians to sing songs in Inuktitut with the children. Elders have also been hired when funding is available to tell traditional stories and legends which teach Inuit values and morals. Inuit traditional games such as Inugait are also taught by the elders, which is a children's game using a

mix of seal flipper bones and bird bones. Part of the daycare is symbolically shaped



In this picture: caribou and narwhal skin and fat.

Traditional food is served regularly at the Tumikuluit Daycare through lunch programs.

Inuit throat singing and drum dancing is taught to the children. People with expertise in those areas have been invited to the daycare on a volunteer basis, so this does not take place very often. However, the children do learn these customs and Tumikuluit have been invited to a number of performances for a small fee.

The daycare staff unanimously stated in the interviews that they felt there is insufficient Inuktitut books and resources

available to the daycare. They resort to creating a lot of their own material from scratch. There is a small book shelf with Inuktitut books from the Department of Education and a select few from the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. However, toddlers cardboard sturdy style books in Inuktitut are non-existent.

The staff also indicated that it is sometimes a struggle to obtain training. Even when training is available, it is difficult for staff to take the time off from the daycare to take the training due to lack of casual replacement staff. It can also be an issue of insufficient funding to pay for casual staff. It is widely known in Iqaluit that there is high turnover rate of daycare staff in general. This is largely due to poor salaries. The Tumikuluit daycare has been lucky that three out of the four staff have been the same individuals since the daycare opened its doors in 2007.



Tumikuluit daycare children berry picking

Essentially, the Tumikuluit children are allowed to take their early childhood education without being made to choose between their Inuit identity and the Western European culture normally imposed through the early childhood education institutions.

The parents of Tumikuluit all have one thing in common: they are employed, Other than that the backgrounds, household incomes, levels of education, relationship situations and Inuktitut language abilities are vastly different. The parents that were interviewed said they spoke Inuktitut in the home for majority of

the time, however, some had partners who were either non-Inuit who did not speak Inuktitut or Inuit who preferred the English language. All parents interviewed felt that it was very important for their children to speak fluent Inuktitut, they also felt that English was important for their children to learn. All parents credited the Tumikuluit daycare as having played a tremendous role in laying a strong foundation in Inuktitut. Comparisons were made by the parents between siblings who attended Tumikuluit and the siblings who attended other daycares.

Readiness of Tumikuluit Daycare children for Elementary School

Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers were interviewed in Iqaluit. It was apparent that the Inuktitut kindergarten teachers were able to point out which children had gone to the Tumikuluit daycare. However, Grade 1 teachers were not able to distinguish which background the children came from based on which daycare the children had gone to.

Inuktitut kindergarten teachers stated during interviews that the children coming from the Tumikuluit daycare have been fluent in Inuktitut. They have very good motor skills, are very calm, and ready to face anything that the teachers present to them. The teachers described their writing skills as superior. The Tumikuluit children were very ready to do independent work, whereas other children needed more one-on-one time. The Tumikuluit children in last year's class ended up being divided into separate tables as they were dominating the class as a group. The separation took place to allow the Tumikuluit children to help their classmates during class. The Tumikuluit children were described consistently as being "very smart, academically advanced, and beyond ready for kindergarten". The kindergarten teacher noticed that the Tumikuluit would encourage other children to speak Inuktitut as well and openly and generously sharing their knowledge for the language. One unusual behavior amongst the Tumikuluit children was their openness and respectfulness to other dialects. If they heard another dialect, they would ask what the word means and compare the word to their own dialect in a very natural manner. Inuit children having a respectful and organic conversation about Inuit dialects was an absolute delight to hear.

The teacher stated that the only negative behavior from the Tumikuluit children was over confidence. There had been instances where some of the Tumikuluit children had put down other children and that the Tumikuluit children can become very competitive and really challenge one another.

In kindergarten, the children with the Tumikuluit experience academically outperformed their peers. The Inuktitut kindergarten teachers stated that the Tumikuluit children were very strong and their Inuktitut was fluent, although the children whose parents spoke mainly English at home had slightly weaker Inuktitut language skills. The Inuktitut kindergarten teachers indicated that the Tumikuluit children were big advocates for Inuktitut and were constantly reminding other children in class to speak Inuktitut when other students spoke English in class.

Inuktitut Grade 1 teacher interview stated that Tumikuluit children are stronger academically, finish their work faster and speak stronger Inuktitut.

The Tumikuluit success is not the first Nunavut example of Inuit-centered Early Childhood Development. As previously mentioned, the Igloolik Early Intervention Project (IEIP) in Igloolik, the Qikiqtaaluk region of Nunavut, offers child-centered and family-oriented activities to foster the healthy development of children and their families. The central part of this project is the Head Start Program for four year olds, designed to be a child-centered developmental program reflecting the values, traditions and culture of Igloolik. The staff at

the IEIP evaluated their own programs and found that the early childhood program was able to intervene with programs amongst pre-schoolers with behavioral issues and deal with them before the child enters the elementary school system.²⁶ The feedback from the parents on what their children learnt at the center included increased Inuktitut vocabulary, color recognition, learning to count, and the learning of songs.²⁷ The Igloolik kindergarten students who had attended the Head Start program showed that, with a few exceptions, that the vast majority of students had improved attendance in kindergarten.²⁸

²⁶ Kristiann Allen, Carolyn MacDonald, Building our strengths together: An Evaluation of the Igloolik Early Intervention Project Igloolik, Nunavut, pp. 4

²⁷ Kristiann Allen, Carolyn MacDonald, Building our strengths together: An Evaluation of the Igloolik Early Intervention Project Igloolik, Nunavut, pp. 14

²⁸ Kristiann Allen, Carolyn MacDonald, Building our strengths together: An Evaluation of the Igloolik Early Intervention Project Igloolik, Nunavut, pp. 16

Recommendations

The Tumikuluit daycare success is an excellent example of an Inuit-specific early childhood education model, and there are other examples of success scattered across Nunavut, however, it is time for the Government of Nunavut and the Government of Canada to abandon its current inadequate and sporadic support of Inuit early childhood education in Nunavut and create a systematic strategic approach through the implementation of legislation, programs and services with adequate support from the federal government to ensure a healthier people in Nunavut with equal access to quality education in the Inuit language across the Territory. So long as people are unhealthy, trying to gain economic success for our territory will continue to be an uphill battle. The following is a list of recommendations based on the interviews and literature review:

1. Message to parents and Inuit

The responsibility of passing on the Inuit language lies first and foremost within us as individuals, mothers, fathers, family members, friends and members of society. If we as Inuit are not to pass on our language to the next generation, then we are to blame for the demise of our language. Individually, we have a responsibility to pass on our knowledge. Having said that, there is also a governmental responsibility, which is elaborated in recommendation number two. There are undeniable systematic barriers in existence that make it easy for Inuit to choose English or the colonial language over their own language. In this day and age, even with the creation of Nunavut, it is still commonly known by parents that if you teach English to your child, your child will be guaranteed an education, job and place in modern society. This will never change unless as Inuit and society members we do not insist otherwise. The health and sustainability of our language is a government and systemic responsibility, but none of that will work if we don't take individual responsibility to love our language, to respect it and allow it to be transferred to the next generation. Sure, one can blame the systemic attack on our language and culture, but at the end of the day, how we react to that attack is what matters. We can succumb to that attack or we can overcome it and defeat it, and this is our very own individual choice to make.

The immersion of English in our children, especially in the larger communities of Nunavut, is overwhelming and I know firsthand, and have felt it in my body and mind, how much easier it would be just to give up in the midst of our busy lives, just to go with the flow and pick the easy route of speaking English to each other and our children. There was a time a unilingual elder relative of ours came to visit our house and brought his grandchild. This is a person I respect very much and was happy to have in my house. However, his grandchild refused to speak Inuktitut to me and my daughter, which I thought was rude given her closeness between the grandparents and the child. These were relatives we didn't see often and it was the child's first time visiting our home and so I thought perhaps the child thought she entered the home of qablunaat (white people) as mine and my husband's race have been mistaken as such before by fellow Inuit. Out of respect for the elder, I chose not to correct the child into speaking Inuktitut to us in my home, instead I spoke only Inuktitut to her, but she kept coming back in English. Finally, I said to her politely, "Inuktitut tusarnirittiaqtara" (I really enjoy the sound of Inuktitut), to which she responded: "I do not speak that language". I didn't say anything further out of respect for the elder, but my heart broke into a thousand pieces that day. I felt so completely defeated

and questioned why I insist on the Inuit language for my child after that experience. It was a breaking point for me. I was somewhat depressed about it for some time. It is difficult to understand how a beloved grandchild of unilingual elders can be unilingual English speakers. After giving the situation much thought, finally I came to the decision that if I give up, then I become a part of the problem. I chose to be part of the solution and continue to speak Greenlandic and Inuktitut to my child. She is going through a phase of loving her learning of the English language. It is so cool to her and her friends, and she responds to me in English most of the time these days, but will respond in Inuktitut when the situation requires it. My job right now is to pass on my knowledge of the Inuit language, to the best of my ability, no matter how imperfect that may be. I will do my part and I urge my fellow Inuit to do the same and make it their own personal mission to speak Inuktitut to fellow speakers, passing on the language and learning the language to the best of their ability.

2. Systematic investment into the Inuit language starting with early childhood

The Inuktitut Language Protection Act needs to be strengthened. S. 9 of the Inuit Language Protection Act states that the Government of Nunavut shall promote early childhood development and learning. S. 9 goes onto stating that the Government of Nunavut shall develop and provide early childhood education materials and programs in the Inuit Language²⁹; and that they will monitor the availability, use and outcomes of the materials³⁰ and that the Government of Nunavut shall develop and implement licensing standards, training, certification and professional development for child day care and other early childhood education providers. Nowhere in the Inuit Language Protection Act does it state that the daycares and other early childhood providers must provide their services in Inuktitut. The legislation should require a strategy and the testing and monitoring the implementation of the strategy. The Government should have a clear objective to support Inuktitut in the important early years of learning.

Nunavik (northern Quebec) early childhood education system is a great example of government having decided to invest, as they definitely are known for their large beautiful centres where parents are only paying \$7/day vs. Nunavut parents who pay \$42/ day for our small little centres that can barely survive.

3. Support for daycare caregivers and early childhood educators

- The Government of Nunavut allowed me to attend the Early Childhood conference in the spring of 2011. Daycare caregivers and early childhood instructors expressed a number of concerns. The concerns were mainly that there isn't sufficient material in existence such as Inuktitut books, crafts and other activities in the Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun language. It was also stated that there was insufficient access to training for caregivers and that there is no language training to upgrade Inuktitut language skills for early childhood development caregivers and instructors. In fact, the early childhood educators were very keen on getting their hands on Inuktitut material displayed by the Government of Nunavut. The educators also displayed amazing creativity to make up for the lack of Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun materials.

²⁹ Inuit Language Protections Act, s. 9 (a)

³⁰ Inuit Language Protection Act, s. 9 (b)

- Furthermore, the educators at the early childhood education conference held in Iqaluit in the spring of 2011 did not appear to have a clear understanding on how and where to access Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun books and resources. There was also very little sharing between communities regarding the Inuktitut books, resources and materials that are developed by caregivers and early childhood teachers. The Inuktitut caregivers and teachers are very creative and resourceful; it would be beneficial if there was a one-stop online resource centre where ideas and resources can be shared. This centre would also contain information about the Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun resources that the Department of Education could have readily available for early childhood institutions. This should of course be expanded to secondary and post-secondary programs in Nunavut institutions.

4. The role of the federal government

The federal government has \$1 million for 53 Aboriginal languages in Canada. This is inadequately atrocious. The Canada-Nunavut Cooperation Agreement on the promotion of French and Inuit languages provides:

- a) \$1.6 million for French services
- b) \$1.1 million for Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun community-based language initiatives. The \$1.1 million is limited in its scope and cannot be used for government services

The language accord translates to \$4,000/French person vs. \$40/Inuk (singular for Inuit). Clearly funding inequities exist between minority languages. Yes, French is recognized as an official language of Canada, however, the Inuit language is also a founding language of Canada before French or Anglo-Canadians ever set foot on Canadian soil. In fact, Inuit from Nunavik (northern Quebec) were coerced into relocating to the High Arctic and much hardship was suffered as a result of that move in the name of sovereignty.³¹ Lives were lost as a result of that piece of Canadian history. It is important that adequate resources are allocated from the federal government to allow for Inuit in Nunavut to catch up with the educational disparity that currently exists. Education is a jurisdictional responsibility, however, there is a role to play for the Canadian government to ensure that Inuit are given adequate resources to steer its population towards success and self-reliance through investment in education. There is an urgent need to overhaul and renegotiate the Canada-Nunavut Cooperation Agreement to correct this inequity.

5. Need for educated early childhood development teachers

There is an urgent need to increase the amount of early childhood development teachers. There is currently an Early Childhood Educator Certificate and Diploma program through the Nunavut Arctic College. However, graduates of this program are lacking and the pay and benefits are quite poor at the daycare and pre-school levels. It is recommended that the Government of Nunavut invest into raising the salary of its daycare workers to ensure that young children in Nunavut receive the best possible educational programming in critical years.

³¹ Qikiqtani Truth Commission Final Report, p.

6. Research , strategy and monitoring needs

Inadequate research and monitoring currently exists for early childhood programming. There is a need for a strategy to ensure that the Government of Nunavut has a clear goal as to the type of programming they would like delivered in the education system.

There needs to be a basic philosophy about why we as a society should be delivering early childhood education beyond basic requirements. We are educating our children for the betterment of our society. There needs to be goals and standards on how our children are going to learn and what it is we want our children to know and what we teach them. The Nunavik (Northern Quebec) is a great example of that, as is the Meeqperivitsialak strategy which the Greenland Home rule Government has in place. Meeqperivitsialak means the place of great child care. The strategy was developed in conjunction with the Atuarfitsialak strategy, which means the school of excellence. The strategy is fairly new, but according to Homerule Government officials has been implemented, evaluated and modified based on the results. The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that Greenlandic culture, language, values and worldview is the basis of the education system starting from the daycares. It is a conscious effort to replace the education system with one that will nurture Greenlandic Inuit. The model was derived from the system adopted by the indigenous people of Hawaii.

7. Making media work for Inuit

All interviewees spoke to the erosion of Inuktitut in Nunavut through media, such as television, radio and Internet. It is recommended that the Government of Nunavut and other organizations jointly invest into increasing Inuktitut programming in all media outlets. Other Inuit jurisdictions have done it. Our own television network is needed across Inuit jurisdictions. There also needs to be an investment into existing Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun publishers.

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Pirurvik is a centre of excellence for Inuit language, culture and well-being. Founded in the Fall of 2003, and based in Nunavut's capital, Iqaluit, Pirurvik has developed a reputation for taking on some of the most innovative initiatives in the territory www.pirurvik.ca accessed December 2011.

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Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation • 11 Church Street, Suite 400 • Toronto, ON, M5E 1W1
tel: 416-601-4776 • fax: 416-601-1689
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