

It Takes a Community to Educate a Child: A Makkovik Case Study

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Abstract: *This study was part of a larger research project examining education success across the Inuit regions of Canada. This case study highlights the insights of students, educators, and parents in considering the factors contributing to the high rate of school graduation and continuation to post-secondary education and training in the community of Makkovik, Labrador. There is additional funding for academic support and cultural programming in the K–12 school, and financial and non-financial support for post-secondary students, as well as those participating in labour market training and business development. Education success in Makkovik can be characterized by a “culture of education” where school attendance is expected, learning supports are provided, and academic success is celebrated.*

Introduction

*They always say it takes like a whole community to raise a child. And here, you know it.
—Andrea Andersen*

This case study, of student persistence and success in the Inuit community of Makkovik, Labrador¹, centers on discussions with Elders, parents, graduates, teachers, and other community members. The research examines factors influencing the engagement of students in learning and the completion of their education.

Authors Jodie Lane, Roxanne Nochasak, and Sylvia Moore interweave the stories, told by Makkovik residents, about the education accomplishments in this Inuit community. Jodie Lane is a Nunatsiavut beneficiary² who grew up and continues to live in Makkovik, where her two children attend school. She is also the Director of Education for the Nunatsiavut Government. Roxanne is also a Nunatsiavut beneficiary who grew up in Makkovik and continues to live there with her husband and children. She is a teacher and school administrator, parent, and artist. Roxanne was the research assistant for this case study. Sylvia Moore is an Indigenous mother, grandmother, and an Indigenous education researcher at the School of Arctic and Subarctic

¹ Although this writing focuses on Makkovik, the authors would like to acknowledge that there are many successful education stories in every Nunatsiavut community. The stories in communities other than Makkovik are just important even though they are not reflected in this case study.

² A Nunatsiavut beneficiary is an enrolled member of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement.

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Sections of this article have been individually authored by Jodie or Roxanne and are marked as such. This style ensures their voices, which reflect the professional knowledge and lived experience of education in Makkovik, is distinguished within the collaborative writing. These contributions expand on and contextualize the case study.

Makkovik

Makkovik is one of five communities located on the north coast of Labrador, in the Inuit region of Nunatsiavut. There is no road access to any of these, but they are all accessible year around by air or seasonally by boat or snowmobile. The Nunatsiavut Government was established in 2005 when the Labrador Inuit Association had their long-standing land claim settled. It is the first Inuit self-government in Canada (Nunatsiavut Government, 2018a) and, under the land claim agreement, the Nunatsiavut Government has jurisdiction over education. As of yet, it has chosen not to exercise that right but “is actively examining the current school curricula to determine its strengths and areas requiring change as a first step towards assuming these responsibilities” (Nunatsiavut Government, 2018b, para. 5). The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) operates the schools in Nunatsiavut, and the Nunatsiavut Government provides additional funding to NLESD for Inuit specific programming and additional supports for students.

Makkovik has a population of 377, 85% of which identify as Inuk (Statistics Canada, 2016). The community began in 1860 by Norwegian immigrant Torsten Kverna Andersen, who established a small trading post at the site (Makkovik Community Government, n.d.). In the 1950s, the Inuit communities of Nutak and Hebron were resettled, and some community members were moved to Makkovik (Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.).

History of education in the community

The first school in Makkovik was a boarding school built in 1898 with 17 students. Moravian missionaries opened the school specifically for children of settlers from the outlying areas and the teaching was in English (Procter, 2020). The school burned in 1948 and a Hudson’s Bay Company store was used until the community built a new school that opened in 1959. School attendance became compulsory after Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canadian in 1949 (Procter, 2020).

Parents argued for more community control over education and for students to be able to complete their schooling in Makkovik (Procter, 2000). In 1962, the Newfoundland and Labrador government built a new 3-room school that provided education to Grade 8. Another three classrooms were added in 1967 and in 1975 an additional classroom, two crafts rooms, and an administrative office were added (Town of Makkovik, 2017). For education beyond Grade 8, students had to attend the Yale School, a boarding school in North West River, Labrador. In 1976, Grade 9 was added to the school, followed by Grade 10 and 11 each of the following years (Procter, 2020).

Methodology

The Makkovik case study, conducted during the 2018–2019 school year, was one of several across Inuit Nunangat that examined student persistence and success. In this case study, we used a narrative approach to collect the first-person stories and knowledge from residents who have personal and professional experience with education in Nunatsiavut. Experience happens narratively through the telling and retelling of our lived stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), thus the Indigenous author Thomas King (2003) tells us that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 153).

Using guiding discussion questions, seventeen participants engaged with the researcher through one-on-one conversations or as part of a focus group. The participants are all long-time residents of Makkovik and, except for one, all are also Nunatsiavut beneficiaries. Most of the participants represent two or more of the categories of: high school graduates, post-secondary graduates, parents, teachers, retired teachers, and Elders. The audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed for themes.

In addition to talking with community members, the methods included a review of school-related documents. The study received ethics approval from the Nunatsiavut Government, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District.

Student Persistence and Success in Makkovik

J. C. Erhardt Memorial School

The current school, J. C. Erhardt Memorial School, is named after Johann Christian Erhardt who was the first Moravian explorer in Labrador (Rollmann, 2009). J. C. Erhardt was the name of the school built in 1962 and students opted to keep the name for this new school that opened in 1993. The school’s mission statement, posted in the main foyer and on the school’s website, is:

Through a safe, inclusive, and culturally relevant learning environment, J. C. Erhardt Memorial School will endeavour to provide enriching educational opportunities for students toward: academic, cultural, moral, and social development.

According to the 2018–2019 school report, there were 73 students enrolled in the school, none of whom were in Grade 12. This was the first time since 1991 that there was not a Grade 12 class. Classrooms in the K–12 school often have combined grades. During this school year, they were configured as: Kindergarten and Grade 1 combined; Grades 2, 3 and 4 combined; Grades 5 and 6 combined, and a Grade 7–9 combined home room that was split for certain courses. There were nine teachers, including a teaching principal, and three teachers for Inuit-specific programming. Additional staff members included a student assistant, an administrative assistant, and a custodian. Some senior high courses, such as sciences and advanced mathematics, are taught by the province-wide Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) with staff provided centrally.

The quality of education

Participants agreed that education in Makkovik is of good quality. Elder Annie Evans noted that two of her daughters became teachers and returned to the community to teach. Retired teacher

Joan Andersen also explained it is the teachers who provide quality education. She suggested that specialist teachers, such as music or special education, could increase the quality of teaching but that they are not available at the school.

Roxanne contributes to this idea in her writing:

Students in Makkovik tend to do well in school but they may be more accomplished if there were specialist teachers. When taught by classroom teachers, subjects such as music and art may be “pushed to the side” with teaching time given to core subject areas. In this way, students lose in the overall quality of teaching and learning. The lack of specialist teachers is further complicated because there are often not full-time positions allocated for specialists. If local teachers could secure permanent positions, they could take additional teacher training for these specializations and in this way Makkovik could “grow their own specialists.”

The nature of student success in Makkovik

In writing about the education of Indigenous students, Lane (2013) describes the notion of success as “...a subjective term ... simply graduating high school is cause for celebration” (p. 42).

High school completion

Understanding the nature of student persistence and success in Makkovik begins with the principal, Dion Rideout, reporting that no students have dropped out of school in the last 13 years (personal communication, March 28, 2019). When asked about student success, subsequent participants talked about students being successful in completing post-secondary rather than high school as it is a given that all students will graduate from K–12 school.

Jodie writes:

In Makkovik, the graduation rate has been pretty high for as long as I can remember. There haven’t been many students who have left school before graduation, so the dropout rate is low as well. I am not exactly sure why we have such a high rate of success, but I do know that the attitude towards education here is more positive than negative. It is an underlying expectation that kids finish high school and even go on to some form of post-secondary training. There is a wide range of student strengths and interests in our population so the variation in next steps after high school is quite impressive.

Roxanne contributes to the idea of community expectations: The community has high expectations for students to succeed. Although teachers support and encourage students, there may be students who would reach a higher level of success if they were encouraged to take advanced placement courses.

Post-secondary preparedness

The graduation rates for Nunatsiavut students are high compared to the national Inuit average but the biggest gap is in the “successful leap” into post-secondary (Lane, 2013, p. 43). Lane (2013) identifies some of the barriers that create what she calls a “strong, solid wall that is determined to

hold our students back” (p. 45). These barriers include financial costs, geography, academic preparedness, lack of confidence, fear, and family responsibilities (Lane, 2013).

There were mixed opinions among the participants about whether the K–12 school sufficiently prepares graduates for post-secondary. Jodie raises concerns about schooling when the Grade 12 graduates are not prepared for post-secondary. She writes:

There's something missing when your students graduate from high school and can't directly go into a post-secondary program. Something's not right somewhere along the line. A lot of our students are in general, when I believe they have the ability to complete academic level courses. Maybe if they had stronger mental math skills and stronger skills coming from the elementary system, they may be able to do better in math in high school. I rarely see advanced math on transcripts anymore. It was a given, when we were in high school, if you were good at math, you did advanced. I remember in the first few years of my job, I did see some advanced math courses, but I'd say in the past even 10–15 years I don't remember seeing any advanced math on transcripts, which means our kids aren't being pushed. I don't think the bar is set near high enough. I don't think the expectations are high enough. I don't think that students that need extra supports are getting the right kinds of supports - academically. When you have a student who's told that, although you are a Grade 12 graduate, you need to go into two or possibly three years of upgrading before you can successfully do a college or university program. To me that's not a high school graduate.

Some Grade 12 graduates attend the one-year Aboriginal Bridging Program at the College of the North Atlantic in Goose Bay, Labrador and then have the option of taking another transition program (CAS Transition) before going on to other college or university programs. The Aboriginal Bridging Program is designed to bridge the academic gap for students going into post-secondary programs or to be an academic refresher for those returning to school (College of the North Atlantic, n.d.). Participants, such as Elder Nellie Winters, pointed out that the program provided a transition year to a larger school and community settling within Labrador before getting “introduced to a bigger place.”

Roxanne writes:

Even when they do not need academic bridging, some students use the Aboriginal Bridging Program as an opportunity to become comfortable in a larger town like Goose Bay, but still feel at home in Labrador. There has been some talk in the past of financial support for a parent or another person to travel with the student to help him/her settle into post-secondary that is outside of Labrador. I agree with this idea.

Returning to the community after post-secondary

When asked about people who are role models of student success, interviewees’ answers had one thing in common—the role models had all completed post-secondary and returned to work in the community. “There’s a lot of students that came back,” said Elder Annie Evans, emphasizing the regard for such graduates.

It takes a community

Community resident Jane³ said she would consider a successful student as one who returned after completing a program of studies and contributed to the community, thus using the learning that the student achieved.

Roxanne expands on having more post-secondary graduates to return to the community:

We have many successful graduates from Makkovik. Some of them return but it would be good for more of them to return to this community or to any other community in Nunatsiavut. This might happen if there were more permanent jobs and if the housing shortage could be resolved. If there were more graduates in our communities, there would be even more role models for students.

Education and community sustainability

The process of obtaining skills and credentials for employment can impact community sustainability as described by Nadine⁴, a community member:

It's very important that we do have people who go on and do studies in heritage or archaeology or whatever, political science, whatever it may be, so that we can have people running the Nunatsiavut government... I'm glad to say that we do see more people who are training in nursing, [teacher] education, who are coming back to work in Nunatsiavut region. And I think it's important for us to be sustainable, too. To know that we have people who can take the lead.

Factors contributing to student success

Community values and expectations

Parents, community members, and educators all voiced the expectation that children and youth stay in school and successfully complete Grade 12. Former graduate Jessica Winters explained:

There's just the notion amongst everyone that you gotta go to school. You got to. You got to try. And like if a student was out, say a student was out during school hours, and they were seen by an adult, the adult might say, 'What are you doing? Go to school.'

Paul Andersen, another former graduate, further commented on the community expectations in Makkovik:

[It] doesn't seem to be such a big deal that someone has dropped out in other communities or they're not really applying themselves to the full extent. [In Makkovik] you're expected to go to school but then you're also still expected to like actually put your efforts into it, too.

Liz Evans-Mitchell was one of first two students to graduate from J. C. Erhardt Memorial School in 1979. Prior to that time, Grade 9 students had to travel to North West River to complete their education. Liz went on to become a teacher and returned to Makkovik to teach. She later became the principal of the school. Liz explained that her parents were both passionate about education

³ A pseudonym

⁴ A pseudonym

and advocated for students to be able to complete their education in Makkovik (CBC, 2020). When completing high school, she said, the value of university is not just in going to university for its own sake. “The value is you go on further—whether it's a trade or a degree. But the important thing is that you do something with your life.”

Parent support

Parents contribute to there being expectations of what youth will do after high school graduation and the importance of post-secondary education. Liz described parents as “role models who reinforce and value education,” contributing to there being

...a given expectation of what youth will do after graduation, the importance of post-secondary education. Children see their parents modeling the importance of education, so when you come to school right from the get-go, from kindergarten right on up through, then you see it's reinforced every single day from at home and at school.

Liz labelled parents as “strong supporters of the school.” She said:

Makkovik has such advantage because the parents in our community value education... having the backing of parents when you're trying to encourage your kids to go further and start thinking about what do you want to be? Where do you want to go to school?

Motivators and student persistence

Participation in extracurricular. There is a school culture and a common community understanding that students must keep their grades up in order to join in extracurricular activities. Participation in activities such as sports and drama are motivators that keep students in their academic studies. Both sports and drama in particular involve travel to other communities in Labrador and potentially beyond, to such places as Newfoundland.

Paul: “I don't know if all schools are as strict [as our school] with academics as being a priority when it comes to any kind of other extracurricular things. [I] felt like our school was always pretty strict on it.” Nancy⁵, a recent post-secondary graduate, added:

Sports is a big thing to keep kids in school. The sports teams compete in regional and provincial events. If I wanted to be on the sports team or to be on drama, [I] had to have good grades, and if [I] didn't have good grades, then [I] wasn't allowed to be on the team. And then, having those good grades, [is] like an incentive. There was rivalry between the communities for swimming events. [We'd say] “Ok, next year we're gonna beat them.” It gave us something to look forward to.

Lifestyle choices. Nancy referred to how students come to understand the connection between education and lifestyle:

The idea that's put in students' head [is that] in order to get what you want; this is what you need. If you want to be going off to your cabin in your speedboat, on your skidoo and stuff, you need to have money to afford those things. And, in order to have money to afford those

⁵ A pseudonym

things, you need to have a job. And how are you gonna have a job? You need to go to school. And how are you gonna go to school? You need to graduate high school and decide where you want to go.

Nancy refers to this process of “plant[ing] ideas in kids’ heads.” She said: “It was the biggest thing for me when I was in school, 'cause that’s what always stuck to us, like, ‘Oh yeah, if I want to have a nice vehicle, I have to.....’” In summary, Roxanne writes:

It is important to talk to children and youth about what they want in life, not just about what they want to be when they grow up. What kind of a lifestyle do they want? They need to understand that they need education and money to have things they may want.

Support for education

Academic support, financial support, and emotional support were all mentioned as factors in education success. Nancy noted that “the biggest thing to being successful was not being afraid to ask for help and utilizing all the resources that are available to you because that’s what they’re for.”

Cultural and academic support. The Nunatsiavut Government provides educational support through funding in the K–12 schools. The government annually contributes funds to the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) to promote the retention and advancement of traditional skills and the Inuktitut language and to increase the opportunity for individual student success through program support and enhancement.

Financial support. The Nunatsiavut Government also has two education funding programs. One is the Post-Secondary Student Support Program that is

...available to all Beneficiaries of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA) to assist them in gaining access to post-secondary education to obtain the qualifications and skills they need to pursue their careers. The PSSSP provides both financial and non-financial assistance to eligible students. Financial assistance includes tuition and mandatory fees, textbook costs, travel expenses, monthly living allowance, and tutorial assistance. The PSSSP also supports academic achievement by offering a number of scholarships and awards, dependent on availability of funds each year. The PSSSP also offers non-financial assistance such as counselling sessions as part of the application process, and on-going liaison with instructors and institutes regarding student progress. (Nunatsiavut Government, n.d.)

The Nunatsiavut Government’s second education funding program is the Inuit Pathways Funding Program, which supports labour market training and business development for Labrador Inuit. Inuit Pathways provides funding for programs like trades, short-term training, and adult basic education, as well as providing supports for people entering the workforce. Inuit Pathways is the implementation of the federal government’s Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) in Nunatsiavut (Nunatsiavut Government, n.d.).

Nancy spoke about the support she had from the Nunatsiavut Government when she was a post-secondary student:

One big thing with me, if your grades were falling, they were really understanding. They'd have supports there for you. If you needed to talk, they'd have like, well, Jodie Lane, the education counsellor there at the time, she was amazing, and so was Inuit Pathways... They're willing to help out, no matter how big or small a problem might be.

Emotional support is also important for students. Nancy notes:

Many people, even those that are not related, ask new graduates what their plans are and are genuinely interested in the answers. There is almost a sense of shock or disappointment if the graduate's answer is that they are taking time off or that they have no plans to further their education. This attitude is starting to change a bit now however, as more people are beginning to understand more about students needing to be ready, both academically and emotionally, to attend college or university. The support is there and when people, both youth and adult, announce their plans to leave for school, there is excitement in the community. I remember when I was in university and would come home at the end of a semester. People were always excited to see me and would ask about my semester. There was genuine interest in my time away and I felt a sense of pride in my accomplishment, by finishing another semester, and also a sense of responsibility to continue and not let everyone down.

When asked about successful students who are role models, resident April Martin named a recent Inuit Bachelor of Education⁶ graduate:

For me, just seeing her with her family, and she took her family to Goose Bay. She went to school; she had a baby while she was there. And the biggest thing for her, she kept on saying that she wouldn't be able to do it without her family and friends. So, like, that had to be a big help—or I know it was—her kids back and forth, and her whole family supported her and her friends and even the community, for her to go for five years. And now she's a teacher... I think the big thing is she had so much support and she was real determined to get it done.

Education counselling

Jodie was the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) Education Counsellor from 2000 to 2013. It is from this experience that she writes:

This position was newly made permanent when I began so I had a lot of flexibility to develop a career-counselling plan for our students. I first started out just visiting the high school students and talking to them about the PSSSP funding and how to qualify and apply for funding. It was quickly very apparent that not all the students were prepared for

⁶ The Inuit Bachelor of Education (IBED) was a teacher education program, developed and offered in a partnership of Memorial University and the Nunatsiavut Government. The IBED provided a cohort of pre-service teachers through a Labrador Inuit-centric program located in Labrador.

post-secondary and their knowledge of career options, academic requirements, program availability, expectations and the like were lacking. I immediately extended my reach to include all students from K–12 in every Nunatsiavut school. What I found in those first few visits, after asking the question “what do you want to be when you grow up?” was that the children had very little intentional exposure to the different types of careers in their world. My main responses, other than your standard “hockey player,” “actress” or “singer” was “teacher,” “nurse,” or “cop.” This made me realize early on that if we wanted our students to be prepared for post-secondary, the work would have to start in kindergarten.

It was about this time, early in my days as Education Counsellor, that the PSSSP created a mascot. Cool Ed was an inuksuk that donned a red hat and sunglasses. His motto was “Be Cool! Stay in School!” and the PSSSP office started putting Cool Ed’s image on promotional items. At the same time, I was putting together various age specific activities and presentations for our students. There were Cool Ed colouring sheets, which I still use to this day, and many different PowerPoint presentations with topics highlighting the importance of staying in school, career options, the differences between college and university, why Grade 9 is important, navigating the high school credit system and post-secondary entrance requirements, explaining funding, preparing for living away from home, budgeting, and more. We also developed a Cool Ed career focused bingo game that exposed students in all Grades (the bigger kids loved it the most I believe) to many different careers that they may have never heard of such as concrete finisher, meteorologist, auditor, massage therapist, electrical engineer and the list goes on.

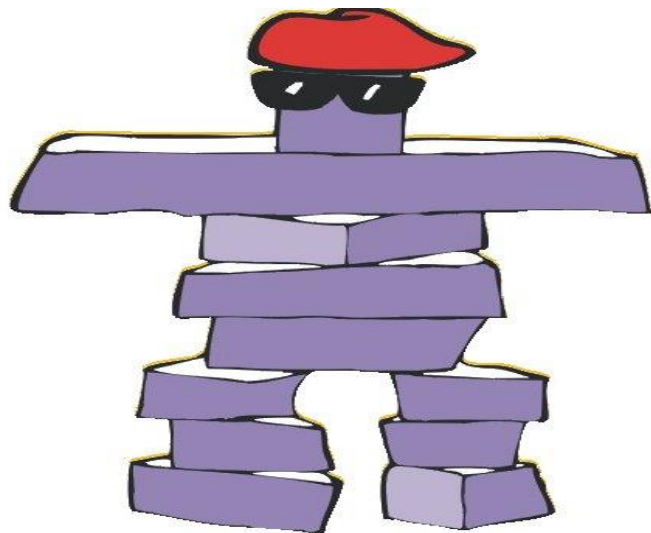


Figure 1. Cool Ed. Photo with permission Nunatsiavut Government.

Having the Education Counsellor visit their class every year to focus on careers and the importance of education really did prove to be effective. Kids in all communities recognized Cool Ed and what he stood for. They would see me on the road and yell “Hey

Miss! Cool Ed says Be Cool, Stay in School eh?!” and I would see his image all around the communities I visited on people donning their Cool Ed hat or t-shirt.

The high school students, I believe, got the most out of the Education Counsellor role. When I was in high school, I remember someone coming into our class and talking about funding and that was it. It was up to us to navigate through high school, explore career options and go through the application process on our own. I remembered this and felt that more support could and should be offered to our students. I developed more specific presentations on topics like the difference between academic and general streams in high school, the ins and outs of funding, but also the expectations of the student, as well as preparing to leave home and live on your own for the first time. I recognized the importance of Grade 9 and how it was such a crucial year for students as their performance in Grade 9 often determined their placement in Grade 10. I felt that this was the time to speak to them about their career plans and to help guide them through the high school system so that they were prepared for post-secondary. It was in Grade 9 that students were told how important the year was and what to expect in high school. I followed students each year as they progressed through the system, and once they reached Grade 12, I met with each student individually to discuss their options. Some knew they would need to return to high school the following year to pick up credits to graduate. Some knew what path they wanted to take so I would help them with their school and funding applications. And others were undecided, so the discussion often included different scenarios and career exploration tests.

These students were sometimes undecided because their options were limited due to not having the correct entrance requirements (e.g., wanting to go into nursing but not having high school chemistry). This discussion most often drifted toward the option of upgrading or transition programs, and once the student knew that they were still able to pursue their goal, there was a sense of relief and excitement in the room. Sometimes all these students needed was someone to take them seriously or to believe in them. Never once did I tell a student that their goal was too far-fetched or unobtainable. You want to be a singer? Well then let’s look for music programs or fine arts programs. Here are your best routes you could take. Let’s do this.

Cultural programming

Specific courses for Inuit programming are Inuktitut, Ilusivut⁷, Inosivut⁸, and Labrador Inuit Society and Culture, which is an Inuit-specific social studies course. Jessica reflected on the importance of the life skills and Inuit craft courses to students, noting that some students enthusiastically go home and buy sealskins or other materials to continue making products.

Jodie reflects on this, writing:

The level of cultural programming in our schools has increased over the years, and some schools actively promote and incorporate culture more than others. Whatever the level of

⁷ In Ilusivut classes, students learn Labrador Inuit crafts such as sealskin mitts.

⁸ In Inosivut classes, students learn Labrador Inuit skill such as gathering food on the land.

cultural inclusion, it positively affects the overall atmosphere of the school. When the kids see themselves in the artwork, the curriculum (however sporadic or limited the representation), the language of their school, they see the Inuit culture as recognized and validated. Too often in our schools and in life in general, Inuit have to constantly prove themselves and their knowledge. It's as if something isn't true unless it is found in a Western textbook or some other form of reference material. Even as I write this, I am struggling with the fact that I do not have academic references to validate the things I write. I only have my own experiences and the knowledge I have accumulated in this field over the past 20 years, and years prior when I was a student myself.

The Nunatsiavut Government recognizes that Inuit culture and language is important and must be a part of our children's education. As this is not a provincial responsibility, the NG contributes financially to our schools every year, through the NLESD, to provide programs and services focused on culture, language, and any other areas where the province has either cut support or has never provided support.

After completing the IBED program, Roxanne reflects on her first year of teaching and writes:

In my first year of teaching, it was so easy to teach from a textbook because then I knew I was teaching to the outcomes. But, as an Inuit teacher, I want to devote more time to planning land-based and Inuit-focussed education. I tried to arrange for my students to observe someone cleaning a seal and match the learning to the curriculum outcomes. I had also planned an activity around students watching a Kamutik [sled] being built. The students were going to take photos and create a photo story. However, both activities had to be cancelled when schools were closed due to COVID-19.

The school board is trying to Indigenize education but there is still often a disconnect between those efforts and our lived culture. For example, my grandmother is a scientist even if she does not have a piece of paper that says she is a scientist. Our Elders and knowledge holders have knowledge specific to our culture, land, and waters. There is a depth and richness of knowledge that cannot easily be captured by anyone who has not lived here and learned from local people. When it comes to understanding what culturally relevant means, it is more than a very good artist painting a nice picture of Inuit people or activities. The painting needs to have meaning and messages that an Inuit artist could communicate in a painting. Inuit teachers also teach within an understanding of the culture and the environment. That's why it is important to have local teachers with permanent positions.

Challenges in attaining K–12 education

Senior high students often want or need to take specific academic courses. If these are not available in their school, they can take them through the provincial Centre for Distance Learning (CDLI). Nancy, a recent post-secondary graduate, took high school chemistry and academic math through CDLI:

It was only me and one other student who were doing distance ed courses, 'cause we were the only two who were in academic courses... That was definitely hard, for sure. If I was

doing it on my own, without this other person, maybe I wouldn't have been so successful, I guess... It was hard not being able to see your teacher and not really being able to engage in conversation or to show them on paper, like, "This is what I don't understand" or "Can you help me through this one?" And, like those classes went ahead regardless of what was going on in the [Makkovik] school. So, like, if the school's closed for weather or something, this class would still go ahead, so then we would have missed it... I don't remember having problems with like being booted off, or any of those. They were all recorded, too, so you could go back and listen, but it wasn't the same as if your teacher was in the classroom with you.

Most of Nancy's high school courses were through CDLI and the schedule was a challenge as there is a half-hour time difference between the CDLI site on the island of Newfoundland and her location in Makkovik⁹. There was a half hour overlap if she was taking a face-to-face class in Makkovik that was followed by a CDLI class. The low bandwidth available on the north coast of Labrador at that time was also a challenge as it sometimes resulted in a loss of connectivity. She explained some of the challenges she experienced: "The time it would take to sign in and out and you'd get booted out from the internet, then you're losing like at least 20 minutes of your hour class."

The lack of one-on-one tutoring and the lack of laboratory supplies in the school were two other challenges Nancy experienced in taking chemistry. "I took chemistry instead of biology, but they didn't have the supplies to do some of the molecular models I had to do for an assignment." She said that she failed the course and the CDLI teacher did not want her to take it again. However, she persisted in her learning, adding, "I really like chemistry." She took it for two years as part of her university courses and received a B in the post-secondary chemistry studies.

Teachers

Vice Principal Colleen Pottle reported that the school has a low rate of teacher turnover, especially in the lower grades:

From K–6 we have four teachers who are kind of permanently here because they are from the community or Nunatsiavut [communities]... Two of us are from here, families, houses here, so, [we're] not really going anywhere... The longer we're here, the more relationships are being built [with students] because ...we're still seeing them in the school.

In this way, teachers from the community or those who are there long-term, can develop good relationships with students and support them K–12 even when they are not teaching them.

Teacher expectations

Paul told the story of a teacher whose high expectations convinced him to take an additional math course:

He convinced me and Jessica to choose an extra math course over gym 'cause he said it would help us with Grade 12. So, we did it, and then Grade 12 was a breeze. That was in

⁹ Makkovik is in the Atlantic Time zone. CDLI operates on Newfoundland Time, which is a half hour ahead of Atlantic Time.

Grade 11, it was like a level 3 course.... so, we took it instead of taking gym.... Then in Grade 12, [we] barely had to pay attention in class; that course just prepared for it so well... I think on the public [exam] I got like a 97 or something. He had high expectations.

He was a math teacher. He wasn't someone who was a primary teacher, teaching math... So, when he went in there, he had expectations. You knew what you were going into, and you didn't want to disappoint him. It was good. Yeah, he didn't put up with nothing. When you went in there you're going and you're doing math for an hour. There's no monkeying around or nothing like that. He knew your abilities, basically and he didn't expect, if you're someone with 70s, he wasn't expecting you to get 90s. But he's expecting you to do what he knew you could do. And you could tell he'd be disappointed if you didn't do it.

Teacher grade and subject-area knowledge

As recent high school graduates, Jessica and Paul talked about their perceptions of how teachers, who come to Makkovik from away, understand the context of teaching in the North. They began the conversation by discussing the subject knowledge that teachers bring to the classroom and the way that teacher qualifications may relate to the rate of staff turn-over.

Paul: There was a teacher I wasn't necessarily the biggest fan of, but he really knew his stuff, so, you're still going in there like, alright we're actually gonna learn stuff. He wasn't just reading from a book 'cause he doesn't know how to teach it himself. Like, he, I don't know if he ever even opened the book. [He] just knew what he was talking about. That's comforting going to a class knowing that you can ask 'em basically any question, and they'll help you with it.

Jessica: I think some [teachers] are more open-minded and adaptable, but some are kinda stuck in their ways sometimes, and then some don't even have the opportunity to be the best teacher they can be, because it might be a primary teacher teaching high school English. Like what we had, for example. We had a primary [teacher] teaching high school English. That same teacher who was teaching English, the next year she was teaching Grade 10 science, I think.

Paul: I think the main thing is make sure the teachers who teach know what they're teaching. Like, can't be having primary teachers teaching high school courses. By doing that, it seems like she's not the best teacher, really... but that's not what they went to school to learn to teach. I'd say almost every year there's a teacher teaching something that they never went to school to teach. That just creates, like, not tension, but the teacher's affected, like, for them mentally they gotta go teach something they don't know how to teach. They're probably not up to their best ability, so they're just trying to get through the year to get out of there, so they don't have to keep teaching a high school course when they're a primary teacher. It's gotta suck, like you went to school because you wanted to be a primary teacher, then you finally get to be a teacher, and it's like, alright, you gotta teach Grade 11 science. Like, I thought I was going to be teaching kids how to multiply and add.

Paul: So, then every day they're probably not really enjoying—like, they're still teaching, which I guess they're enjoying. There's gotta be a lot of stress on them; gotta make the

experience not as enjoyable so then they're probably not in their best moods when they have to then teach kids. So, it might be affecting the kids' education as well because the teachers might just not be enjoying what they're doing. And it messes with their experience too here. And then they're just like, "Oh, I'll just get my year in then go back south."

Jessica: In communities like here, as a teacher, you gotta be a part of the community - not just in school. If you go to work and then you goes home and you stays there till next morning, you're just gonna not have a good time. And there's a few teachers that does that now. You knows they're just putting in their time to get out of here. And, kids knows that. We knew that when we were young; that the teachers are here for a year and then they're gonna leave again. [When teachers do that, I feel like] I'm not going to be nice to you. You don't respect us."

Paul: You can tell the difference between the teachers there 'cause it's a job and teachers actually enjoying it. When we were in high school, we were hanging out with our teachers, go play monopoly with them and everything. The best are definitely the teachers who stick around.

Roxanne agrees:

You can tell if a new teacher does not like it here. This can cause friction between teachers and students. There can be quite a bit of turnover in the Grades 7–12 teachers and this change can be quite disruptive.

The importance of student-teacher relationships

During the teachers' focus group, there was talk about relationship, which teachers themselves have with the students and the community, as a factor in student success. Teacher Jennifer Price explained:

The teachers [in Makkovik] have a good relationship with the students right from kindergarten through to Grade 12. I know I started teaching kindergarten in 2007 and some of the students that I taught then are now in Grade 11. [They] will be in their graduating year next year. And I'm able to talk to them and kind of be supportive almost like a family member. And even though I'm not from this community, I'm not related to anybody, I think they have a feeling that they can confide in me and ask me questions if they need to. So, it's kind of like a close relationship with the teachers.

Jennifer added that teachers also have good relationships within the community: "I'm not from here and I don't have any background with Inuit culture or anything until I came here. But I feel like I've built strong relationships with people in the community and maybe there's some sense of trust."

It is important for students' learning that they have good relationships with their teachers.

Paul: If you're a small town here, you sees the same teachers—if the teacher's teaching you junior high, and now they're gonna be a high school teacher, they're adjusted to your learning abilities or the way you learn as well. So, all of a sudden, you get in high school where these marks really

It takes a community

matter now for your post-secondary, and you got new teachers coming in and you have to adjust to [everything] and learn, 'cause people learn in different ways. So, if you had the same teacher's there more often, they're gonna be able to help you better.

Jessica: And I find, too, it's just good to have a teacher that you likes. Like, same as in any - like in recreation, for example, like, we all love to travel, we all love gym 'cause [the travel's] there. It's the same in school. You got a teacher you likes, then you'll enjoy school more.

Paul and Jessica recalled one teacher with whom they had a good relationship.

Paul: Mr. X was different. He wasn't scary, like you could joke around with him but then you could also go to his house and play monopoly with him in the night. And you could still go back to the school the next day, and still have a—you know, he was the teacher.

Attending post-secondary

Nancy suggested that students need career development and life skill, such as resume writing, to improve their transitioning to post-secondary. Students also need exposure to larger centers and know how to live there, including skills such as how to take transit buses, access medical care, and shop for groceries. She told of a north coast student attending Memorial University. The student used to just go to a corner store in St. John's not realizing that, like, a [larger grocery store] was closer and that it was a lot cheaper. But they used to think those prices were cheaper because, compared to like home, it is cheaper.

Challenges

Parents and recent graduates noted several challenges related to post-secondary.

Exposure to city life

One challenge was not being prepared because of a lack of exposure and city experience, knowledge of campus life, and/or study skills. Jodie again writes from her perspective as the Nunatsiavut Education Counsellor:

In the days when I worked as the Education Counsellor, my focus was solely on the students and mature clients and preparing them for post-secondary studies. One major event that I was able to coordinate when funds were available was a Career Trip. Up until I started to assume new responsibilities and my position changed, I had taken different groups of students on these career trips approximately ten times. Each time the location changed (Ottawa, Halifax, St. John's, Corner Brook) and different groups got to experience different cities and post-secondary institutions. Common to each of their experiences was being able to take public transportation, experiencing airport security and airline travel, experiencing city life, and trying to navigate in new surroundings. These trips have not taken place for a number of years, however now that there is a full time Education Counsellor back on staff, these activities will return to the benefit of our students.

Roxanne reflects on her experience as a student:

University is a totally different experience from high school. Students would benefit from more preparation in English, especially in writing. I was not prepared for university when I went right after high school. Mental health should be a concern in high schools because students need confidence to move to post-secondary. My high school class had an opportunity to go on a career trip but one of the teachers did not want to go. That trip would have been so helpful to me. I was scared to go to Corner Brook when I was accepted for an art program following Grade 12.

Homesickness

A second challenge for post-secondary students is homesickness. Jodie elaborates on this:

Homesickness is very real for most students, regardless of their background. Homesickness for our students is oftentimes magnified due to the closeness of the communities and the feelings students experience by not just being separated from their immediate families, but also from their friends, communities, and entire region. With such a strong connection to the land and people, being separated from either for any length of time can be trying for students. It is the reason why some decide to come home before completing their studies, and it is a factor in some students' academic performance.

Many students are torn between the excitement of being somewhere new where we can go shopping, go to the movies, or do fun activities, while at the same time, still feel a longing for the isolation of their home community and the security it provides.

September was always a busy month for me in all my roles in the Department of Education and Economic Development. The bond that I have with so many of the students lasts far beyond their first week of class and I am glad that they feel comfortable reaching out when they need to talk. I have had many a conversation with students who were homesick or simply overwhelmed, and in all honesty, I did very little other than listen and remind them that they were capable. They were already doing it, they just needed to stick with it. Sometimes that's all it takes. A gentle reminder that they are already doing it.

Changes from small to large class sizes

Another post-secondary challenge is the change from small classes to very large classes.

Jodie writes:

In my graduating class there were five of us. In most of my distance ed classes in high school there were three of us, and in one class there was five or six of us. When I went to university, I knew my class sizes would be bigger, I just didn't expect my first class to have more people in it than the population of my home community!

I specifically remember arriving on campus and walking with the group of other frosh that I lived with across Johnston Green. It was full of people, and I immediately thought that the entire school was there. Little did I know that this mass gathering was only a

portion of the first-year students and that the total enrolment of my school was over 10,000. Being surrounded by so many people was overwhelming at first, but I eventually began to take comfort in knowing that there was always someone around if I needed help. I also took to observing people and finding similarities between waves of strangers and the people I knew from home. If I looked hard enough, and sometimes squinted, it was like I had lots of familiar faces there with me.

Post-secondary study skills

A final challenge is one of study skills. Nancy talked about the importance of learning study skills specifically for post-secondary. It was after she took a university course in learning strategies that she changed how she approached learning at university:

I didn't know how to study for a university setting versus high school, 'cause it's completely different. I didn't, like, no one told me that, you know how the courses are like from September to June? I didn't know it was September to December and here's your five courses, until I actually did register. So, it took a while to grasp, ok I only have four months to do these five courses. And then I was like, well, I do nine in high school, so it should be that bad, it's five. But then you're realizing that it's a lot more work, and I think it took me a good two years to actually learn how to study proper. 'Cause before [in high school] I would just read, ok, I got it. You know? Read your definitions, read the chapters that you needed that was covered, and then... So, that's what I did in university... I'd just read the textbook and not really understand the core concepts... After I took the [Learning Strategies for Undergraduate Students] course... I realize, oh man, I've been going about this the wrong way.

Discussion

A culture of education

The research examines student persistence and success in the community of Makkovik where education is highly valued. Most youth complete Grade 12 and there is a high rate of post-secondary enrolment and completion, but the question of what factors are impacting this must be more closely examined. The narratives of community members point to two influences that contribute to children and youth internalizing and enacting the valuing of education. The first influence is the messages, both explicit and implicit, that instil the value of education and the expectations for students to be actively engaged in schooling. The second influence is the motivators that are put in place specifically to nurture and strengthen academic engagement.

Messages about the value of education and expectations for children and youth

The expectations of others influence student achievement. Inuk leader Sheila Watt-Cloutier (2000) who says that when youth are not challenged, it “undermines their intelligence” (p. 115), but “when parents create a home environment that encourages and supports learning with expectations of success, and schools provide a supportive school environment, achievement in school rises” (Mary Simon in Amaujuq National Centre for Inuit Education, 2014, p. 5).

The children and youth of Makkovik grow up in an environment where the importance of education is explicitly communicated as an integral part of “doing something with your life.”

It takes a community

Former graduate Jessica explained: “There's just the notion amongst everyone that you gotta go to school. You got to. You got to try.”

The National Strategy on Inuit Education (2011) recognizes the role that Inuit parents have in education persistence and success. As a result, the strategy recommends:

The development of a program to mobilize parents that will: promote the role of parents in student success, emphasize parents' role in building healthy school communities, research and examine best practices in parent engagement and student attendance, and share ideas that promote the role of parents in student success, develop language training programs for parents, and build on the current research on Inuit parents' role in education to help inform and shape policy on mobilizing parents. (pp. 10–11)

Parents' aspirations and expectations of their children's academic success plays a role in persistence as indicated by students' high school completion and post-secondary attendance (Ross, 2016). The academic expectations of children, and the influence this has on their success, is impacted not only by parents but extends to other family members as well. Makkovik Elders discussed the academic attainment of both their children and their grandchildren. In a longitudinal study over three generations, Mortimer et al. (2017) describe a familial culture of education that is transmitted across generations, with each generation influencing the education attainment of the subsequent generation. The educational expectations of parents, in each generation, impacts both youths' self-concept of their academic ability and their self-confidence in educational success. The researchers concluded: “in the second generation, self-concept of ability was a more powerful predictor of educational attainment than educational plans” (Mortimer et al., 2017, p. 100).

The expectations of teachers also play a key part of student success (Rubie-Davis et al., 2010) and although this Makkovik case study did not specifically examine the attributes of effective teachers, such attributes were mentioned in the community narratives. A number of youth in this study, for example, recounted how teachers encouraged them in their academic growth and the positive impact this had on them as students.

Stronge (2013) noted that effective teachers know the content of what they teach, how to translate that into material students can grasp, and how students learn or fail to learn in various curriculum areas. This teacher knowledge is associated with student achievement. Jessica and Paul talked about the importance of teacher qualifications, noting that teachers may not be “the best teacher” because they are teaching in an area outside of what they are skilled in teaching. These former graduates suggested that teachers may experience stress in such a situation and may also impact their experience in Makkovik and their willingness to remain there long-term.

Participants noted that most of the K–6 teachers are from Makkovik and surrounding area. These teachers provide continuity in the school and are role models for students. Teachers who are not from Nunatsiavut, but who have taught in Makkovik over a long period of time, are part of the community. This connection to the community is evident through the teachers' relationships within the community and their involvement in community activities. Such teachers are considered more committed to the students and the community than those who stay for only a

short period of time. Jessica said students can tell if teachers do not like the community and if they do not plan to stay, resulting in students not respecting the teachers. Muller et al. (1999) found that if students perceived teachers to be caring, it positively impacted students' self-expectations and academic achievement. At the 2017 Inuit Education forum, participant Melissa Webb said, "Having locally-based teachers helps students to interact with their teacher. Students seem to have more respect for those from the community – those that went away for university and came back – it shows their level of dedication to the students" (as cited in Inuit Tapariit Kanatami, p. 10).

Implicit and explicit messages about the importance of education and the expectations of students succeeding are also communicated through role models. Educational researchers Leithwood and Patrician (2015) note that one of the mechanisms that contribute to building social capital is the "norms and sanctions within a community that promote the common good" (p. 668). This is evident in Makkovik as education graduates become role models, especially post-secondary graduates who bring back their skills and knowledge for the benefit of the whole community.

Nurturing and strengthening persistence

J. C. Erhardt School has several incentives in place for students to stay engaged in their studies. These include the requirement that students attend school and keep their grades up to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports and drama. In this way, school persistence and success are directly linked to trips away and community gatherings for tournaments and events.

Students are also supported in challenges they face. For example, the Nunatsiavut Government provides funding for additional student supports in K–12 education. In the case of post-secondary education, the Government provides both financial assistance and non-financial assistance to support student success.

And finally, students are nurtured in education success by teachers who understand their abilities and expect the students to achieve to that level. Cornell and Mayer (2010) explain that "academic success for students begins with a trusting and mutually respectful relationship between student and teacher..." (p. 11). "The hallmark of caring teachers [is that they] seek to understand the needs, hopes, and aspirations of their students" (p. 235). Jeffy-Brown & Cooper (2011) state that the student-teacher relationship is fundamental to culturally relevant pedagogy. In such relationships, "the culturally relevant teacher simply does not accept failure, but begins where students are and works hard to help them succeed" (p. 78).

Conclusion

This case study of Inuit student persistence and success revealed that Makkovik has a strong culture of education. Although there was no common definition of student success, parents and teachers alike promote the importance of education for each child. The Nunatsiavut Government provides additional funding to the K–12 school system for cultural programming and student support. Student persistence is also reinforced through the requirement to maintain good grades to participate in extracurricular activities. The Nunatsiavut Government also provides financial and

non-financial support to post-secondary students, and for labour market training and business development. There are education role models in the community who have completed education programs and returned to work in the community. Completing high school and gaining post-secondary skills is an entrenched part of life in Makkovik.

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