
Nurturing Inuit Education Leadership in Nunatsiavut

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Abstract: This case study of Inuit teachers, in the Inuit-governed region of Nunatsiavut, is part of a larger research project across Inuit Nunangat examining the preparation, resiliency, and experiences of teachers working in K-12 education. In the past, Inuit who worked in schools were teachers of Inuktitut (Inuit language) or Ilusivut (Inuit crafts and life skills). Now, many Inuit educators are certified teachers who work at all grade levels to infuse Inuit knowledge and pedagogies in Nunatsiavut area schools. In collaboratively exploring the professional lives of teachers, the co-authors examine educators' dedication to these efforts. Regardless of their position within Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) schools under the Department of Education, these educators are de facto educational and cultural leaders, guiding the next generation with a profound commitment to celebrating and preserving Inuit cultural identity. They engage in self-directed and collaborative professional learning that builds their knowledge and skills in promoting Inuit education. Encouraging a more holistic, practical and meaningful way of teaching that connects to Inuit ways of knowing and being rather than the rigidity of the colonial systems in which they were educated is at the core of these teachers' beliefs. This also includes understanding the existing structures and ways in which they can modify curriculum and how it is delivered to better fit the needs of the students to be more engaging, relevant, and meaningful. The writing style of the article privileges the voices of Inuit educators and highlights the Inuit co-authors as education leaders in the region.

Introduction

We begin this writing by acknowledging the lands and waters of Nunatsiavut and recognize this place as the homelands of the Labrador Inuit who have ancestral and continued ties to this land.

Inuit communities in Canada face distinct challenges in their formal education system. Their rich culture, which emphasizes community, connection, and identity, demands educators who truly understand these aspects. Teacher leadership is emerging as a key solution in these areas, allowing Inuit educators to enhance the current curriculum to better reflect their history, language, and values. This case study explores the vital role of teacher leadership in Inuit communities within Nunatsiavut. Through collaboration, determination, and research, Inuit educators are not only reshaping education in their communities but also laying the groundwork for future generations of teachers.

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Education within Inuit communities often struggle with a disconnect from cultural understanding. Many Western education systems overlook Indigenous knowledge, which can lead to students feeling disengaged. In addition to the teacher shortage, educators who have the knowledge, confidence, and passion to teach in these often remote and isolated communities are in high demand. Subsequently, culturally relevant and accessible university programs preparing teachers have never been more essential. When educational pathways reflect the unique experiences and needs of Inuit students, they can pursue teaching careers that are grounded in their culture.

Collaboration is essential to effective teacher leadership. Many Inuit educators are now directly involved in educational research whether that be through their own pursuits or through their graduate or PhD work. Their roles as collaborators and advisors allow them to gather meaningful data that aligns with the needs of their communities. Participation in research has grown significantly, with Inuit educators becoming increasingly involved. This engagement amplifies their voices and emphasizes the importance of Inuit perspectives in shaping education.

Despite progress in leadership development, significant challenges remain. Factors such as geographic isolation and resource limitations hinder educators in realizing their full potential. However, the movement for teacher leadership in Nunatsiavut schools is a proactive step toward creating educational environments that value Inuit culture.

Nunatsiavut is an Inuit-governed region on the north coast of Labrador and is one of the four Inuit regions which together comprise Inuit Nunangat. There are K-12 schools in each of the five Nunatsiavut communities. The Nunatsiavut Government works collaboratively with the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education that administers the schools. It is within Nunatsiavut that a group of dedicated educators are spearheading a movement that transcends Western teaching paradigms.

The importance of Inuit teachers for Nunatsiavut schools and the current need for Inuit teachers is addressed by co-author Jodie Lane, Director of Education, Nunatsiavut Government. *I am always looking for more Inuit teachers, not just Inuktitut teachers but I'm looking for more Inuit teachers, period. I want more of our regular curriculum to be taught through an Inuit perspective, whether they're trained that way or not. Hopefully, moving forward, we'll have more IBED (Inuit Bachelor of Education Degree) deliveries so that it'll be almost like the standard to have that training when you go to become a teacher up here. But I would love to see more Inuit-specific teacher education because there needs to be more focus on language. We can have all the local Inuit teachers that we want, but if we don't have any who are teaching or speaking the language, we are not going to hold on to our language. We're struggling with validation of our knowledge, and that seems to be the struggle everywhere. It's a lot of the same struggle over and over again, and I'm finding that with our teachers, too, that they're not given*

the freedom that they sometimes need to reach that level of learning and connections with our students that we need them to reach.

The National Strategy on Inuit Education (National Inuit Committee on Education, 2011) promotes Inuit educators as leaders in education. Recommendations in the report on the Inuit Education Forum (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2017) include the need for greater shared decision-making in schools (p. 9), and an expansion of community-based teacher education programs and reforms in hiring practices to ensure a larger proportion of teachers are Inuit or long-term Northerners (p. 10).

Locating Ourselves

The co-authors are five educators, all of whom are Nunatsiavut beneficiaries and four have Master of Education degrees while one is currently working towards a Master of Education degree. Jodie Lane is the Director of Education, Nunatsiavut Government. Colleen Pottle is a grade 5/6 teacher. Ola Andersen is a retired educator and currently works as an education consultant. Shannon Dicker is a Program Specialist for Inuit Education with NLSchools working specifically with the five Nunatsiavut schools. Doris Dicker is an Inuktitut teacher at a school in Nunatsiavut. Shelley Tulloch and Sylvia Moore are university-based researchers in Anthropology (Tulloch) and Education (Moore). They have long-standing collaborative relationships with the Nunatsiavut Government and Inuit teachers of Labrador.

These educators continuously expand their repertoire of skills and knowledge to champion Inuit education. Through this process, they cultivate leadership through learning. As Snow et al. (2018) stated, “Inuit who have successfully negotiated the challenges of education to become teachers became important bridges between parents and the school because of their relationship to both”. In this sense, representation is invaluable. Students are able to see themselves in their Inuit teachers. Parents and the community have a connection with these teachers not only as educators, but also as fellow community members. The teachers also have that lived knowledge and experience that they can apply to building relationships with their students and their families and making those vital connections to culture and identity. This research and writing prioritize Inuit voices and, therefore, the writing of Inuit co-authors and the quotes of Inuit participants is italicized to clearly distinguish their words.

Research Context

The first schools in northern Labrador were established by the Moravian missionaries in 1914 in Makkovik and 1929 in Nain (Procter, 2020). Missionaries learned Inuktitut and taught students to read and write in their language. Young women were also brought from England to work as teachers. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador joined the confederation of Canada in 1949, after which there was pressure on the schools in northern Labrador to use English as the language of instruction and to adhere to the provincial curriculum (Procter, 2020).

Inuit teacher education has been offered, in Labrador, through two programs. In 1978, Memorial University began the Teacher Education Program in Labrador (TEPL) to provide a teacher education diploma program to Inuktitut and Innu-aimun language speakers in Labrador (Moore,



Yeoman & Flood, 2021). The courses were offered in various communities throughout Labrador. TEPL gave language speakers some preparation, through pedagogical knowledge and skills, to teach in the K-12 schools. However, graduates were not eligible for teacher certification in the province unless they continued their studies and completed a Bachelor of Education degree (Moore and Tulloch, 2020; Moore, Yeoman & Flood, 2021). The Native and Northern Bachelor of Education was offered on Memorial University's campus in St. John's and accepted credits from the TEPL program (Moore, Yeoman & Flood, 2021). In 2010 Sophie Tuglavina, retired Program Specialist for Native Education for the Labrador School Board, noted that many Inuktitut language teachers were retiring and that the TEPL program was no longer

offered (Tuglavina, 2010). Sarah Townley, Program Specialist for Inuit Programming at the time with NLESD (Newfoundland and Labrador English School District - now known as NLSchools), also spoke about the concerns regarding the need for Inuktitut teachers and for teacher education courses (Yeoman, 2013).

In 2014, the Nunatsiavut Government, College of the North Atlantic, and the Faculty of Education at Memorial University collaborated to develop an Inuit-specific Bachelor of Education (IBED) offered in Happy Valley Goose Bay, Labrador. The Nunatsiavut Government provided a concurrent Inuktitut language program that students took along with the teacher education courses (Moore & Galway, 2020; Tulloch et al., 2017). One cohort of Nunatsiavut beneficiaries completed the IBED and these graduates are certified teachers in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Currently, those interested in becoming certified teachers must travel outside of Labrador to obtain a degree. The closest teacher education program is at Memorial University's Faculty of Education located on the main campus in St. John's, on the island of Newfoundland, and it offers an in-person Bachelor of Education program. However, moving away from their families and cultural communities is a challenge for many students (Lane, 2013).

Methodology

The research is a response to the educational research needs and priorities of the Inuit communities as reflected in the National Strategy on Inuit Education (National Inuit Committee on Education, 2011) and recommendations in the report on the Inuit Education Forum (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2017). The research is a collaborative endeavor of Inuit educators, leaders, and researchers and was approved by the Nunatsiavut Government Research Advisory Committee.

In 2020, research conducted through individual interviews with Nunatsiavut Inuit teachers examined the opportunities for teacher training and the level of preparation that teachers receive. Participants also shared their thoughts on the professional learning they experience, the support they need as educators, and the leadership opportunities they have within the education system. This research promotes the lived experiences of Nunatsiavut Inuit educators and highlights not only their experiences working in the K-12 education system, but also their passion, commitment, and efforts in strengthening Inuit culture, knowledge, and values in the formal learning of children and youth.

The research privileges the Inuit educator's voices through the use of conversational methods, which honors oral traditions and collectivist ways of sharing knowledge (Kovach, 2010). A total of 14 Nunatsiavut Inuit educators responded to the invitation and became participants in the research. Eight participants were graduates of the Inuit-specific Bachelor of Education program in Happy Valley Goose Bay, and six were graduates of the Bachelor of Education program in St. John's. One of the participants is a retired teacher, who was also the only participant who is a fluent Inuktitut speaker. The participants engaged in discussion of what brought them into the education profession; their teacher training experiences; and the supports and professional learning needed to support the resiliency, retention and progression of Inuit teachers as educational leaders in their schools. At the time of the research, eleven of the participants were teaching in Nunatsiavut schools. Participants are named in the results with their permission.

The conversations took place in the spring of 2020, during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers were interviewed by phone as face-to-face interviews were not possible under pandemic restrictions. The interviews were audio recorded, and the files transcribed and reviewed by participants before being finalized. Transcripts were coded and analyzed for themes. The Inuit co-authors advised on the themes and contributed to the analysis and writing.

Ethics for the research was approved by the Nunatsiavut Government Research Advisory Committee, NLESD (now NLSchools), and Memorial University's Ethics Committee.

Becoming a Teacher

Teachers' stories about becoming teachers tie back to the legacy of Dr. Beatrice Watts who was the first Labrador Inuk teacher. She attended Memorial University's main campus in St. John's, Newfoundland to earn her teaching degree and, after graduating she taught in Nain where she initiated an Inuktitut program. In 1975 she became the Program Coordinator for Native Education with what was then the Labrador East Integrated School Board. She worked with Memorial University of Newfoundland to create the Teacher Education where she developed Inuktitut language programming and created resources for teaching traditional Inuit skills and crafts otherwise known as Ilusivut (Moore & Tulloch, 2020).

Dr. Watts would sometimes talk to Inuktitut speakers in the communities and tell them that they were needed to teach in the schools. Retired Inuk teacher, Nancy Ikkusek, became a teacher through Beatrice's encouragement. Nancy's first language is Inuktitut and, at age 15, she began teaching Inuktitut at the school in Nain. She told us, *"I loved it automatically. I really loved it because I was teaching my language."* Nancy enrolled in courses through the Teachers Education Program in Labrador (TEPL) where most of the courses were taught in English. Nancy recalls struggling with the courses because of the language challenges. She persevered and, once she finished the diploma program, she took additional teacher education courses at Memorial University, St. John's campus, to obtain a teaching degree.

The opportunity to gain Inuktitut language training was an important consideration for some applicants to the IBED program. For example, IBED graduate Julie Flowers described the concurrent Inuktitut program as

... the main thing that drew me in. I never thought about being a teacher before but... I wanted to know the language so bad that I was like... I'm going to go through and see what happens. After being in the classroom and spending time there, I loved being with kids. It just makes me so happy. At the beginning of the day, [the kids were] all smiles. That's what really draws me back to teaching. I want to be in the classroom.

Inuktitut and Ilusivut teacher, Alanna Edmunds, was also in the IBED program and explained that Inuktitut is... *"so lost on the coast. There are not very many speakers left and we just want*

to bring it to our children" (Tulloch et al., 2017, 3:17-3:27). The focus on language learning for Inuit youth echoes the conclusion that *"... Inuktitut language teachers can nurture youth's positive self-identity, their sense of belonging, and their well-being through language learning"* (Moore, 2019, p. 5).

Participants emphasized their relationships with children and youth and their desire to work with the next generation of Inuit. IBED graduate Marina Andersen grew up in Nunatsiavut and said she dreamed of returning to the coast to teach. *"It was something that all along I kind of knew I*

wanted to do, but it wasn't really until I had my son that I realized how important it was to feed into a child's education."

Julie Dicker, a teacher in Nain, said that she always wanted to work with youth, so she decided to go into teaching. It is her relationship with students that keeps her teaching. It is also important to highlight the fact that Julie is the first Inuk principal in Nain and she was awarded the 2023 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) award for Inuit excellence.

I'm staying here as a teacher because I'm connected with the students... Even though there's hard times in teaching and it's a challenging job, it's the students and the kids that actually keep you there. The connection you have with them, not just teaching them, it's the connection outside... what you develop with them. It doesn't matter the grades. I have a connection with all the students. When you see them outside the school, they're all really happy to see you, like, "Hi Miss!" I can be having the worst day ever, like I don't want to go to work, it's just tiring. But there's always at least one or a few times in every day where the students will pick you up without even trying. They make you happier. It's part of their nature, I guess. They're kids and they're always happy and they want to make sure everyone's alright. It's the kids that actually keep the teachers in their positions, I think.

As an Inuktitut teacher, Doris Dicker is also motivated by her sense of commitment to youth, as well as a sense of responsibility to ancestors, Elders, and the community for Inuit cultural continuity (Moore & Dicker, 2024). She describes her work as not only teaching the Inuktitut

language, but also the culture and supporting students in having strong Inuit identities. *"It's so important not to just be teaching Inuktitut. Yes, it's an Inuktitut driven class, but to also incorporate being Inuit as a whole, like your culture, your language, they're just pieces of who you are and how students should be so proud that they're kind of like the torchbearers for carrying on the language"* (Moore & Dicker, 2024).

Teaching through an Inuit Lens

Roxanne Nochasak also incorporates culture into her teaching. Before becoming a certified teacher, she was a cultural teacher, teaching sewing and other craft skills within the school. *"I grew more and more loving the environment in the school. Then an opportunity came up with the Inuit Bachelor of Education and I just took it on*

*The IBED class poses for a group picture on the day of their graduation.
Photo: Rich Blenkinsopp (June 2019).*



Inuktitut and Ilusivut teacher Alanna Edmunds, spoke about keeping the Inuit culture strong through her teaching. *“It’s all about traditional crafts, working with sealskin, moose hide, beading... we call it Illusivut or lifeskills. I like to bring Ilusivut and Inuktitut together and that”* there is more emphasis on speaking Inuktitut in the language classes but that she also brings the language into Ilusivut. For example, if the students are learning

to make footwear, she teaches them the language about the footwear, the sewing, and the materials. *“We make cultural food. We make cultural things. The grade 9’s made dickies this year – or atigik. We learn cultural ways in Inuktitut, but a lot of it is shown in Ilusivut. [The courses] weave into each other all the time.”*

Julie Dicker emphasizes the central role that Inuktitut has in teaching and the way that she incorporates culture into her physical education class.

When I teach my Inuktitut class, it’s obvious that the language is part of the culture. They’re intertwined. You can’t have one without the other. You know? They survive on each other. But for phys ed, the Inuit games are a big part. I teach Inuit games in my phys ed classes, and Inuit games are a part of coaching, and a part of sports meets; that part of the culture is in phys ed and coaching.

Colleen Pottle described the support she believes educators need for cultural programming:

“Teachers need more access and opportunities for professional learning in Indigenous education and education needs to stem from Inuit from different regions in Inuit Nunangat including both theory and on-the-land training. We need to collaborate more with community members and other Inuit and identify what strategies they use to encourage their culture because there is little happening between schools in Nunatsiavut. As an Inuk teacher in Nunatsiavut, I feel like the only way to find this information out is by venturing on my own. There should be mandatory opportunities scheduled annually for educators in Nunatsiavut because as educators, we know collaboration has many benefits. I would love to travel north to another Inuit region and visit a school. A few years ago, Inuktitut teachers had a wonderful opportunity to visit schools in Iqaluit and when our local Inuktitut teacher arrived back home, she had so many ideas and resources to share with us. Visiting schools in northern communities, such as through virtual meetings or physical visits, would provide valuable insights and ideas for embracing and incorporating Inuit cultural practices in education.”

Challenges in the school system

The Nunatsiavut Inuit teachers discussed some of the challenges they face in teaching through an Inuit lens while working within a school system that is not designed to promote, value, or centre Inuit worldviews.

Nancy Ikkusek discussed her experience of the education priorities that may compete with and ultimately devalue Inuit knowledge in K-12 learning. She recounted teaching grade 1 Inuktitut immersion and having to follow the English curriculum, which included translating all teaching resources to Inuktitut for her students. This translated material was for subjects such as mathematics, social studies, and science. In addition to immersing students in Inuktitut learning, Nancy explained that she was to teach the students to read and write in English. She recounted hearing parents being advised, by non-Inuit curriculum leaders, that if their children were in Inuktitut immersion, they would not learn to read and write in English. Nancy said: *“I was really glad I was teaching them Inuktitut [but] it felt like I was losing out to English,”* thus

highlighting

the tensions and challenges in which Inuit-based teaching exists. There is no longer an immersion program in Nunatsiavut schools since Nancy retired in 2018. Inuk educator Christine

Nochasak is the recently retired Program Specialist for Inuktitut and Ilusivut programming for the Nunatsiavut region. In discussing the challenges teachers have in bringing Inuit culture and tradition into the school and into their teaching, she explained that there have been changes since the time when the local school board personnel supported Dr. Watts in developing Inuktitut language and programming for the schools. School boards in the province were amalgamated and the Labrador School Board became part of a province-wide school board system, resulting in changes. Christine told us:

Different authorities have different ideas maybe. And maybe even the new system with the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the provincial curriculum may have changed towards our culture and our language, to probably make it a little bit difficult to have Inuktitut teaching and language and culture in the schools... the environment in the schools for the teachers may have changed in some ways... scheduling, for example. Scheduling for core Inuktitut teaching for K-9 has been reduced or decreased over the years. ...Being reduced or decreased in the 14-day cycle, which hindered us a bit and discouraged us, of course. Because we would have liked to have more time on the 14-day schedule to teach K-9 to improve or increase the structure of the language. And because of those reasons, there's probably... I suppose I could say... less interest to try for these positions [as Inuktitut teachers] in the school.

Christine continued to work in the school system because Inuktitut is important to her. *The reason, I guess, I stay is because of the Inuktitut language. We need to keep it going.*

We're in a situation where a lot of the beneficiaries or the people who would like to speak the

Inuktitut

language either can't speak it or are losing it. If there were a stable situation where somebody could help in that area, it would be important to support such language learning. This job

Inuit Program Specialist] is ideally situated to support schools, Inuktitut teachers, and cultural skills instructors in schools from Rigolet to Nain.

However, for Inuktitut teachers who are not fluent speakers, it is a challenge to find opportunities to continue to learn the language. Julie Dicker and another teacher in her school were both teaching Inuktitut and continuing to learn it themselves. Julie explained that *“When we first started teaching, me and [the other teacher], we felt like we had to learn on our own.”* Other Inuktitut teachers also spoke of the limited opportunities teachers have to learn the language. An anonymous teacher in the research reported being frustrated when the school board denied her the opportunity to attend a language workshop that was external to the K-12 education system, although there are no such opportunities offered within the board.



Julie and Doris Dicker were two teachers who enrolled in the Master Apprentice program that

was offered by the Nunatsiavut Government. Doris stated: *“ We have at least 10 hours a week of one-on-one support with a fluent Inuk so we got together whenever time permitted and it provided a kind of informal Inuktitut lesson. We were supposed to be tested in May, but due to Covid, everything stopped. The Master Apprentice program was really good.”*

Challenges for Cultural Teachers

The current need for Inuktitut and Ilusivut teachers cannot be met by the number of certified teachers. Instead, these teaching positions can be filled by Inuktitut speakers and knowledge holders who become cultural teachers within the school system. Cultural teachers are those with cultural expertise, but they do not have the required teacher education degree to meet qualifications for teacher certification. It is also important to note the pay scale is considerably lower for cultural teachers than that of certified teachers who are members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association. The participants emphasized that their knowledge, skills, and fluency in Inuktitut are invaluable and their salaries desperately need to reflect that. In order for the next generation to flourish, these teaching positions require incentive not only to recruit and retain candidates, but to value their knowledge and willingness to pass that on to the next generation.

Inuit cultural teachers have different experiences working in the K-12 school system. For example, by provincial requirement, cultural teachers must have a certified teacher present in the

classroom when they are teaching. Within the organization of schooling, this positions the cultural teacher in a place of less power, authority, and professional knowledge. Some additional challenges for cultural teachers is that there is no scaffolded, planned curriculum to guide their teaching, and resources available to support their teaching are limited. There is no basic training on how to administer age appropriate lessons, how to manage classrooms, and how to deal with diverse learners. Jodie Lane explains that although not every speaker can be a teacher, the lack of an Inuktitut curriculum increases the burden on cultural teachers.

Jodie: We can expect some level of [teaching] ability if we provide the right supports. Just like any person who's a substitute. You don't have to be a university graduate with a degree in teaching to be a substitute teacher. But when you walk in as a substitute teacher, everything is provided for you. Our Inuktitut teachers are not provided for at that same level and our expectations of them are higher.

They're expected to walk in and teach a whole language without a structured program and supports and materials, and have to do it on their own. So not only are they expected to be a teacher, they're expected to be a curriculum developer, too. Whereas anyone who walks in off the street with a clear code of conduct can... or even a first year teacher, you know, can walk in and teach grade 2. Every single curriculum package is waiting for them. Lessons are planned out for them if they don't want to do it themselves. So those things are put in place, and you compare our Inuktitut teachers... they're compared to certified teachers who have all these supports. And our teachers are looking like they can't do it. And then it goes back to oh they don't have the training. Not only do they not have specific training, it's that they don't have anything to work with and what they teach isn't as highly valued.

But the NLTA (Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association) certified teacher is sometimes treated differently. So, if they have the motivation to move forward with language and culture activities, then they're often supported a little bit more. But again, it seems to be that language and culture is not validated in some schools.

If you get an Inuit teacher who's a certified K-12 teacher, any of the regular initiatives like just a literacy initiative or numeracy initiative, or other initiatives, those are supported. No questions asked. But when it comes to doing cultural activities, especially things that involve land-based learning, there's a lot of barriers that go up. And again, that varies heavily by school.

More can be done in the sense that all Inuit teachers need to be validated right from the start. The certified teachers have less of a struggle than the ones who don't have the degree. For cultural teachers, their knowledge is not validated, and they're not treated the same as other staff in the schools. They're seen as lesser because they don't have their degree or are not certified. But their knowledge, like with the language teachers, their knowledge is the language, which is huge. Inuktitut is a class that schools don't mind saying there's a presentation coming

in, or an assembly, and we'll just use Inuktitut time. It's the first class scratched, you know, and replaced with an outside activity. It's not considered as important as the core subjects, like math and science, English, whatever. That mindset needs to change. They need support and encouragement... encouragement being the bigger one here. The encouragement and support of land-based learning needs to be increased in all schools because regardless of whether the teacher is a certified teacher or a cultural teacher without certification, the land-based learning is rich, and they should all be encouraged to do more of it. Let them take the kids out on a boil-up. Let them go out berry-picking. Let them do things without putting up the barrier all the time to say no, it's a liability. That's a huge thing for me. I think if we start allowing and encouraging teachers to do more land-based learning, you're going to see a difference in culture-based learning and culture-based education for sure.

The cultural teachers are knowledge holders who are highly regarded in the Inuit communities for their language skills and traditional life skills. Others look to them for cultural teachings, to teach and strengthen the language, and to pass on traditional Inuit skills to the next generation, especially in the schools where there may not be others with such knowledge. However, in the Euro-Western school system, cultural teachers, without university degrees, do not meet the qualifications to be certified teachers and, therefore, are marginalized within the education system. In essence, this can be viewed as another way of colonizing Inuit and devaluing the rich culture and language needed to maintain their cultural identity.

It is often difficult to recruit and retain cultural teachers in the K-12 school system, resulting in positions sometimes going unfilled in schools. One reason for this is that Inuktitut speakers and cultural knowledge holders often find good employment opportunities in other sectors. Such opportunities may offer better pay and a work environment where the person's knowledge and skills are more highly regarded.

School Administration

Jodie says that she would like to see more local teachers take those school administrative roles.

I think coming from the communities, and more than likely, being a former student in one of those schools, experiencing the barriers and limits as both a student and a teacher, and then getting into the administrative role, I think they'd have a different way of thinking about how to approach some of these problems and barriers, to try and solve them... they would have come from being the complainer as the student saying I wish I could do that more, or even as a teacher saying I wish I could do this, and putting them into the administrative role, to say okay how are you going to fix this?

However, there are challenges for Nunatsiavut Inuit in taking on leadership positions within the educational system. Tracey Doherty, who was a teaching principal for a year, noted that the school board is administered from the province's capital on the island of Newfoundland and directives are not necessarily reflective of Labrador communities and needs. *"I wasn't*

comfortable with the administration, and I could so clearly see even from my short time working how the directives were coming from St. John's. It was so centered outside of the communities, the Inuit communities. Many educators in the region feel that the amalgamation of the school boards and now the absorption into the Department of Education create more obstacles for those living and working in Nunatsiavut. Being responsible for an entire province and being so far removed from those on the north coast of Labrador can cause tension and misunderstandings which can lead to an us versus them mentality. Snow et al. (2018) stated that, "they are role models of resilience, but need ongoing professional development and support to continue to navigate a system that sometimes feels hostile, while continuing to push for innovations that will improve student success". It goes both ways. Educators need professional development opportunities, but senior administrators may need cultural awareness and sensitivity training. It would also be beneficial for them to visit Indigenous and rural or isolated communities and schools to better understand the challenges and the supports needed for student success.

Ann2: I contemplated maybe applying for the principal position. But what kind of stops me from wanting to be in a leadership role or administrative role in the school system now, is that I don't really agree with NLESD education... working here, I'm under NLESD, but I would rather have our own school board. There's like a clash there. Even if we tried to do whatever we wanted to do with education, to make it better for us, and the students from here, for Nunatsiavut, there would be challenges, because it doesn't fall under NLESD policy, or guidelines

When asked about examples of what cannot be done, Ann began by talking about Inuktitut teachers and Ilusivut teachers who are not certified teachers and how a certified teacher has to be in the classroom when the cultural teachers are teaching.

The Inuktitut teachers were very fluent, and they were very capable in the life skills and Ilusivut, but the things they wanted to do as part of their teaching, they couldn't do everything they wanted to do. The Ilusivut teacher, life skills, she wanted to skin seals in the school as part of her class, but it was denied. I don't know why it was denied, really. And the Ilusivut class is part of life skills, they would be hunting and fishing and skinning animals, all these wonderful things that we do in our daily lives as part of our culture... kids can't use sharp knives; kids can't use the ulu [in schools].

Some Inuit educators have chosen to take on positions of school administration and program leadership, and to create change from within the system.

Shannon Dicker is the Program Specialist for Inuit Education working specifically with the five Nunatsiavut schools. Growing up in Nain, she described what it was like to be a student versus

an educator in the same school. *“As a student, I did not realize that my surroundings did not reflect my culture. Other than Inuktitut and Ilusivut class, there was really nothing visible to let you know that you were in a school in an Inuit community. Much of the curriculum was created for kids in other places where there were school buses and things we only learned about in books. I didn’t always feel connected to what I was learning and often had to use my imagination to put the pieces together. Fast forward to when I became a teacher and there were now resources, books, artwork being displayed in the school. I reflected on the disconnect I felt as a child to the curriculum and I knew that it was imperative that I integrate as much as I could into my lessons and the physical environment to allow my students to see themselves represented, to connect with what I was teaching, to feel valued and seen. Now in my role, I get to specifically do just that, working inside the system for change if you will. I get to help teachers connect the curriculum to something the students will know and relate to. I get to help schools realize the beauty in working with locals and taking their learning to new heights. I get to help schools with their vision in creating a welcoming environment or doing a project by helping them with proposals to secure funds. I get to fight for some of the struggles educators are facing with liability issues surrounding some of the cultural activities that they would like to implement. But with the lack of time that I had in the position thus far due to teacher shortage, I have not been able to maintain this momentum. Building relationships with the communities, with the teachers and students are of utmost importance and I hope to bridge the gap between those ‘on the outside’ to better understand and work together towards the common goal of engaging our students and guiding them to reach their full potential. What better way to do that than to connect them with their culture, language, and community?”*

Roxanne Nochasak shared that she sees school administrators as having *“to tow the school board line, do what the school board says, and there’s not a lot of flexibility. With that kind of structure and decision making in place, that makes it even harder to bring in any kind of Inuit ways, but also Inuit decision making.”* She said that although there is verbal support for Inuit education and reconciliation, enacting Inuit knowledge and values in curriculum may look different and cause administrators to question the educational value of activities such as being outside on the land. *“I know that we could take a curriculum outcome and make it Indigenous or Inuit. But it doesn’t need to be that way. Why can’t it already be there? Instead of taking something and trying to make it our own. [It’s] making it harder for”* says Roxanne, referring not only to the experiences of individual Inuit teachers, but also to the great effort required to create Inuit curriculum and teaching resources.

The Nunatsiavut Government Education Division led the development of *Labrador Inuit Society and Culture*, a social studies credit course for senior high. This locally developed course is in response to the lack of Inuit and Nunatsiavut content in senior high courses. The course has been approved by the provincial government as an elective for all provincial schools to offer. The Education Division is also leading the development of other social studies student resources and Colleen Pottle is contributing to that work.

The Torngat Wildlife, Plants, and Fisheries Secretariat is a co-management board established as part of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement. An important initiative of the Secretariat's education outreach is developing K-12 Nunatsiavut-specific learning resource kits for schools. Ola Andersen and Colleen Pottle are leading this work. These kits, in lendable form, are being developed for the five Nunatsiavut schools. Four kits (caribou, polar bears, crab, and salmon/char) will focus on Inuit culture, identity, and stewardship of ecosystems for these species. This encourages students to explore and use Inuit knowledge passed on to them from Elders and other community members. Using both scientific Western views and local Inuit knowledge systems, students will be free to explore their family connection to animals and the land. Maintaining and developing a sense of environmental stewardship surrounding animals is an important cultural practice for Inuit. Built into these learning activities is time for students to explore and document Elder stories, food security, and sustainability of this resource. Most importantly, learning activities have an Inuktitut language component to be taught simultaneously with the activity.

Supporting education leadership in Nunatsiavut

NLSchools currently has two Inuit leadership positions: Program Specialist for Inuit Education, and Program Specialist- Inuktitut and Ilusivut Programming. In the five Nunatsiavut schools, there is one principal and one vice-principal who are Nunatsiavummiut. There are also Inuit education leaders in the Nunatsiavut Government as there is a Director of Education and an Assistant Director of Education, both of whom are Nunatsiavummiut.

There continues to be a need for geographically accessible, culturally relevant, and flexible university programming for Inuit who want to be teachers. This is, in part, being addressed by the Nunatsiavut Government's continued efforts to break down the barriers to post-secondary education and to support students, including providing funding for expenses such as travel, tuition, books, accommodations, living expenses, and childcare. The School of Arctic and Subarctic Studies, Labrador Campus of Memorial University, is also offering a graduate program in Arctic and Subarctic Futures (Master's and PhD), which the province has approved for an increase in the level of teacher certification. Ola, Colleen, Doris, and Jodie, all co-authors on this paper, as well as five other Nunatsiavut educators, are all enrolled in the inaugural cohort of this graduate program.

All the co-authors and many other Inuit educators in Nunatsiavut have been, and continue to be, involved in education research. As Preston et al. (2015) stated, "Aboriginal people should control their own knowledge, do their own research, and if Aboriginal people enter a research with non-Aboriginal researchers, the research project should benefit Aboriginal communities and cultures, not just the researchers and their institutions". The educators have roles as collaborators and advisors on developing and designing research projects, gathering and analyzing data, and

disseminating results. Their involvement in research has not only increased research capacity in education, but also amplified Inuit voices in the education literature as well as developing a sense of agency and sovereignty.

Nunatsiavut educators have also been co-designing and leading professional learning (PL) for other teachers. Ola, Colleen, and Shannon co-developed and co-delivered a two-day PL workshop on culturally nourishing pedagogies for all teachers in Nunatsiavut (Tulloch et al., 2023) and they subsequently developed another two-day PL session that was open to all teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador. In this work, the Inuit educators provided leadership as participants explored ways for Inuit culture to be incorporated into K-12 education. Preston et al. (2015) stated, “a savvy leader would be mindful of the significant role that family members and Elders play in their students’ education. Creating climates of collaboration and community within the formal structures of a school setting mimics the interconnectedness and interdependencies inherent in the somewhat harsh, yet always bountiful, Arctic terrain”.

Colleen’s desire to visit another northern school and learn from other educators came true in the spring of 2023. She, along with Ola, Doris, and Shannon enriched their own professional learning when they travelled with Shelley and Sylvia to the Sámi University in northern Norway. The Sámi educators and teacher educators shared how the Sámi have reclaimed and strengthened their language and culture, which has resulted in Sámi-focused curricula and Sámi being the language of instruction for all levels of education. There were discussions of language and education as key aspects of self-determination and the challenges of maintaining a strong culture while immersed in a dominant society. The Inuit educators returned to Nunatsiavut inspired in their advocacy for more Inuktitut language programming and with renewed enthusiasm in on-going efforts to develop education that reflects Inuit culture.



Ola explains that travelling to the Sami University of Norway inspired Inuit educators to collaborate on prioritizing what the next steps could look like for K-12 education in Nunatsiavut. *Collectively, we decided to write actionable plans involving becoming more active leaders in education in our homeland. Jodie, Colleen, and I have decided to pursue PhD studies focusing on educational governance, an Inuit framework for assessment, and creating Inuktitut language learning opportunities in the home as well as the school. New relationships have been forged between us. Collective efforts between all parties on this trip have led*

to strengthening the working relationships that will affect change within education in Nunatsiavut.

Their collective passion, lived experiences in Inuit communities, and a strong commitment to preserving Inuit knowledge and language is evident in their upcoming research.

Conclusion

Education shapes society and influences individual growth. As our world becomes more connected, the importance of including Indigenous perspectives in educational systems grows significantly. A remarkable partnership has emerged in recent years between Inuit educators and researchers, focusing on incorporating Inuit cultural knowledge into teaching practices. This effort strengthens educational practices and nurtures Inuit educators as key players in the cultural revitalization of their communities. These educators are committed to blending traditional knowledge with modern teaching methods, recognizing that culture is essential to the learning process. By weaving Inuit voices into academic settings, they highlight the significance of identity and belonging among students.

Teacher leadership is essential in Inuit education. Educators serve as powerful role models for students and aspiring teachers alike. Their experiences reflect educational practices that align with their community values. When traditional values are included in curricula, students experience a culturally responsive learning environment. Such methods empower students to embrace their heritage, which extends beyond academic success. By developing lessons that reflect their students' lived experiences, educators facilitate connections between cultural heritage and contemporary knowledge. As a result, students learn about their culture's relevance in today's world, deepening their sense of pride and continuity.

The effects of these educational initiatives extend beyond the classroom as, "a community, after all, is built on collective contributions" (Buley, 2023). This highlights the need for strong community ties, with educators acting as key players in fostering engagement among families and local leaders. This connection not only honours past traditions but fosters a sense of belonging among students, creating a path toward sustainable education. Preston et al. (2015) stated "when it comes to Inuit leadership, it's not one person. It's people". Inuit educators motivate community members to participate actively in the educational process. This involvement creates classroom environments that celebrate Inuit cultural practices and traditions. For instance, community events that include storytelling or traditional crafts can effectively extend classroom learning into the community, enriching students' overall educational experiences.

Even as the world changes rapidly, education remains a key factor in shaping society. The journey toward a transformative educational narrative in Nunatsiavut is in its early stages. With ongoing commitment and cooperation, the seeds planted by current educators will flourish into an enriched landscape where Inuit voices lead the way, inspiring generations to come.

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