

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and the Transformation of High School Education in Nunavut

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Abstract

The National Strategy on Inuit Education argues, “there is almost no data or evidence supporting any of the major policy shifts in Inuit education” (p. 90, National Committee on Inuit Education (NCIE) 2011). This mixed-methods research, conducted with partners at the Nunavut Department of Education and the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities (CNDEA) in Nunavut, begins to create evidence of performance measures and factors that influence high school graduation in Nunavut, one of the highest priorities of both the Nunavut Government and the NCIE. The research establishes an approach to gathering longitudinal information on high school education and reveals practices that contribute to students’ ability to be successful. The research offers support for legislative and policy changes within high school education in Nunavut. Data gathered in 2011-2012 from a cross section of Nunavut youth with diverse educational backgrounds was used to create a bilingual documentary video in Inuktitut and English, *Alluriarniaq-Stepping Forward: Youth Perspectives on High School Education in Nunavut* (Walton et al. 2013), which offers valuable insights about how high school education has affected the lives of Nunavut youth. The involvement of Inuit high school students and recent graduates as well as Inuit participants in the UPEI Master of Education and PhD in Educational Studies, builds research and leadership capacity within Nunavut. In addition, the ten-year historical and statistical profiles of the high schools in Pangnirtung, Clyde River, Rankin Inlet and Kugluktuk reveal patterns and challenges related to educational outcomes and indicators at the high school level across Nunavut, data that was unavailable prior to this ArcticNet research (McGregor 2011, 2012, 2013).

Key Messages

- Participants identify the need for strong cultural, linguistic and academic programs in Nunavut high schools, delivered by caring and effective teachers.
- Family support is a key factor in achieving personal and academic success for young people attending high school in Nunavut.
- The negative impacts of peer-pressure and the inappropriate classroom behavior of unmotivated peers are identified by participants as obstacles to achieving academic success in high school.
- Recent high school graduates attending post-secondary education in southern Canada did not feel academically prepared for the challenges they faced in university and college programs.
- Young people interviewed in the research remained confident that positive change is taking place and that education can and will change the future for generations of Nunavummiut.
- These findings are captured in a bilingual documentary film *Alluriarniaq-Stepping Forward: Youth Perspectives on High School Education in Nunavut* (Stepping Forward).
- The wide dissemination of bilingual (Inuktitut/English) documentary video as a medium of communication with parents, educators and the public across Nunavut, enables the research findings to reach a large segment of the population in Nunavut.
- Findings address the mandate for implementation of culturally rich programs based on Inuit *Qaujimaqatungit* as described in the Education Act (Government of Nunavut 2008), as well as priorities related to bilingual education identified by the Department of Education, Government of Nunavut.
- The research responds to the goals expressed in the National Strategy on Inuit Education (National Committee on Inuit Education (NCIE) 2011).
- Amplifying youth perspectives through documentary video ensures that the opinions and perspectives of young people related to education in Nunavut are shared with all stakeholders.

Objectives

- The documentary film *Stepping Forward* will be widely disseminated to reach stakeholder across Nunavut and activity promoted using electronic, print, and social media sources.
- Using the documentary video as a focus for discussion, a larger segment of Nunavut youth will be engaged in an active discussion on education using a bilingual Facebook page in Inuktitut and English. Within this Facebook group, researchers will supply guiding questions and engage youth in dialogue, while encouraging deeper reflection on educational changes that support academic and personal success.
- The research relationship with the post-secondary program, Nunavut Sivuniksavut, will be strengthened. An Inuit instructor in the program, Rebecca Mearns, will continue to work with the research team and take on the role as an Inuktitut mediator and role model in the online environment. Current students and graduates across Nunavut will be involved in the social media discussions.
- Contribute to the limited literature on Inuit education by disseminating research findings in articles and book chapters co-authored with Inuit educational researchers in Nunavut.
- Organize and deliver presentations by and with Inuit researchers at a variety of public, professional and scholarly venues and publish research findings in accessible, bilingual on-line environments, ensuring Inuit in Nunavut are aware of the findings.
- Contribute knowledge and data to ArcticNet's Integrated Regional Impact Studies in Regions 1 and 2.

Introduction

This research on high school success in Nunavut builds upon research from Pangnirtung and Clyde River (2010/2011) which profiled two Inuit educational

leaders and their impact upon high school education. The two case studies illustrated the positive impact of parents, teachers, Elders and community members working together to provide personal and academic support on student success in high school. Having seen the findings, one partner in the research, the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities (DEA), requested that the research team shift the focus to youth perspectives on high school education. The current research is a direct response to this call.

Research on youth perspectives began late in the 2011-12 when five youth from Pangnirtung and six from Rankin Inlet were video-recorded during semi-structured interviews focused on their experiences of education. The research continued in 2012-13 with the interviews of three young Nunavummiut studying in Ottawa, as well as five young people in Kugluktuk. The cross-sectional approach to sampling provided a rich group of participants ranging in age from 17-25 with diverse educational backgrounds.

The research uses a case study approach and both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. From a quantitative perspective it creates longitudinal, historical, statistical and present-day profiles of the high schools in Pangnirtung, Clyde River, Rankin Inlet and Kugluktuk. The statistical and historical information gathered in four communities from all three regions across Nunavut, is starting to highlight patterns of attendance, graduation and withdrawal from high school in these contexts. From a qualitative perspective, interviews in Pangnirtung, Rankin Inlet and Kugluktuk enrich and contextualize the statistical findings as youth explore their experiences of education.

The research gathered valuable opinions and experiences of Nunavut youth, who are seldom heard from within the limited educational research conducted in Nunavut. Engaging youth in conversations about educational reform is important, as children between under the age of 14 make up a much greater percentage of the population of the territory than elsewhere in Canada, at 32 % of the total population of the territory

(Statistics Canada 2012). The sheer number of children who are currently within, or about to enter, the school system highlights the importance of youth voices in shaping education for the future. The current research has, and will continue to engage this under-represented portion of the Nunavut population in research.

Activities

In the second year of this research grant, from April 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013, the following activities took place or are planned for the final quarter of the fiscal year:

1. Knowledge Dissemination:

- In April, 2012, team members provided copies of the documentary video, *Going Places: Preparing Inuit High School Students for a Changing, Wider World* (Faculty of Education, University of Prince Edward Island, 2011) to community members, school teachers, and school principals in Kugluktuk, Nunavut to showcase previous research and demonstrate the kind of film to be produced following the videotaping of interviews within the community.
- Copies of *Going Places* were also distributed to the Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS) College Program in Ottawa, Ontario to demonstrate alternative forms of knowledge dissemination to college students, as well as exemplify the documentary style to be produced from interviews conducted with students at NS.
- *Going Places*, was introduced and presented by Jukeepa Hainnu and Fiona Walton at the International Polar Year (IPY) Conference in Montréal, Quebec, during a session chaired by Thierry Rodon on access to post-secondary education.
- Results from 2011-12 ArcticNet High Schools research, including case study research and bilingual data collected in Clyde River and Pangnirtung, were presented as a poster session at the IPY by Inuit researchers Jukeepa Hainnu and Fiona Walton.
- In September 2012, partners at the Nunavut Department of Education screened the first cut of the new documentary film, *Stepping Forward*, for feedback.
- In October 2012, the second-cut of *Stepping Forward* was screened for the 45 executive members and community representatives attending the Annual General Meeting of the DEA Coalition of Nunavut in Iqaluit. The Coalition is also a partner in the ArcticNet High School research.
- Danny Ishulutak, an interview participant, travelled from Kingston, Ontario, where he was attending post-secondary education, to Iqaluit, Nunavut to introduce and speak to the themes in *Stepping Forward* with the DEA Coalition. Danny provided a background on his experiences in high school in Pangnirtung, Nunavut and spoke about his hopes for the future. An engaged discussion with members of the DEA Coalition took place following Danny's comments.
- Feedback on the documentary was overwhelmingly positive from the Coalition members with representatives stating that their understanding of youth experiences was deepened, and the importance of improving education was more powerful when it comes directly from young people.
- DEA Coalition representatives thanked the research team for documenting the findings in a way that was accessible and provided helpful information for their work across Nunavut communities. Representatives pushed for the film to be released quickly and emphasized the importance of wide distribution. This feedback led to the decision to allocate additional resources to extensive dissemination of the research.
- The second-cut of the film was also screened for a carefully selected group of influential educators and one interviewee. Feedback was uniformly

positive, and included confirmation from the film participant that the documentary accurately depicted his experiences in education. Minor suggestions were provided to improve the final version of the film.

- Mary Simon, past president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the National Inuit organization in Canada, was invited to screen the second-cut of the documentary film, and commented that she felt the film made a valuable contribution to the efforts of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami to improve Inuit education in Canada. She asked that copies of the final version of the documentary be shared with ITK.
- In November 2012, Fiona Walton presented research findings at the ArcticNet Regional Meeting held in Iqaluit, Nunavut. Though the documentary was shared towards the end of the meeting, the feedback was positive and a lively discussion took place, much of it focusing on issues related to bilingual language learning.
- In December 2012, Fiona Walton presented research findings and a short segment of the documentary video during a plenary session, Alluriarniaq Stepping Forward: Youth Perspectives on Education in Nunavut, at the ArcticNet Annual Scientific Meeting in Vancouver, BC.
- In January 2013, the documentary film, Stepping Forward, was completed and the duplication process started with an anticipated official date of release being April 1, 2013.
- Copies of the film in Inuktitut and English were uploaded onto YouTube and Isuma TV, and the documentary film is now featured on the UPEI Nunavut research website <http://education.uepi.ca/nunavutmed>.
- In February 2013, short thematic videos of additional footage from interviews will be posted to YouTube and Isuma TV. These videos will target specific topics, including the role of Elders,

experiences in post-secondary education, and the impact of teachers on high school students' success.

- In February 2013, the executive director of the Nunavut Coalition of DEA's will deliver or post copies Stepping Forward, to all DEA members in every community in Nunavut.
- During the week of February 18 – 22, 2013, Fiona Walton (Network Investigator) and Naullaq Arnaquq (Doctoral student) will travel to Iqaluit to attend the ITK gathering focusing on Inuit educational research related to implementation of the National Strategy on Inuit Education (NSIE).
- In March 2013 promotional kits which include the documentary videos on DVD and promotional materials related to the film will be prepared and distributed to community organizations, schools, research partners and Inuit organizations and agencies at the territorial and national levels.

2. Descriptive Statistical Report and History of the High School in Kugluktuk:

- Heather McGregor, PhD student, University of British Columbia, has completed the draft report on the history of high school education in Kugluktuk. The report documents graduation and attendance rates, staff turnover, numbers of Inuit educators in schools and patterns of educational attainment from the period 2000 to 2011. The draft is presently being reviewed by the high school principal in Kugluktuk and will then be discussed with member of the DEA to seek feedback before the report is finalized.
- The historical and statistical report on the high school in Rankin Inlet received an initial review by the high school principal but regrettably his health concerns have prevented final review and approval by the DEA members. Researchers are planning to travel to Rankin Inlet following the ITK meeting in Iqaluit in February to support the approval process.

- The profiles and histories completed in the communities of Pangnirtung and Clyde River are complete and once the Rankin Inlet and Kugluktuk reports are ready, a final report will draw together the common findings. Following approval from the Department of Education, who funded this part of the research, publications will be prepared and submitted to journals in the 2013-2014 fiscal year.
- This statistical and historical data contributes information to the ArcticNet Integrated Regional Impact Studies (IRIS) process.

3. Engagement of Youth in Kugluktuk, Nunavut and Ottawa, Ontario:

- Members of the research team, Fiona Walton (Network Investigator), Mark Sandiford (Filmmaker), and Kerri Wheatley (M.Ed. student) engaged several groups of youth in Kugluktuk in an interactive video workshop and five individual interviews to determine their views on education and identify factors contributing to their personal and academic success.
- Members of the research team introduced the current research on high school education to post-secondary students at Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS) and engaged students in a discussion about education. Two current college students, and one university student were interviewed on their experiences.
- A graduate of NS, who is presently completing a MA at Carleton University acted as the bilingual narrator for the Stepping Forward documentary.

4. International Indigenous Knowledge Exchange

- Suzanne Thomas (Network Investigator) was supported by the current research for the development of the international partnerships required to sustain her emerging project, which maintains research between youth and Elders in Clyde River. In late March 2013, Jan Erik

Kuoljok, Sami Language and Crafts and Culture Teacher, travels from his home in Jokkmokk, Sweden to Clyde River, Nunavut. Jan Erik will work closely with Jukeepa Hainnu (Northern Research Staff) and staff at the Piquisilirivvik Cultural School and the high school to develop research partnerships focused on the transfer of knowledge and wisdom related to cultural practices and Inuit identity and called for by young people in the ArcticNet High School research.

Results

1. Youth Identified Concerns

In 19 semi-structured interviews, young people identified their opinions on high school education in Nunavut. Research findings include:

- The need for a strong cultural grounding in school programs to support Inuit identity development; fully developed language and academic programs delivered consistently across Nunavut to prepare students for post-secondary education and their future after high school.
- The importance of caring and effective teachers, and particularly Inuit role models, who understand students and make an academic and personal difference in their lives.
- The role of family support in achieving academic and personal success.
- The negative impact of peer-pressure as well as the lack of motivation and off-task behavior of some students in classrooms, particularly at the junior-high and grade ten level, was an issue of concern.
- Post-secondary students felt their high school experiences had left them academically unprepared, particularly at a higher level in English writing, the sciences and mathematics.

- While young people expressed both their struggles and successes, they remained confident that positive change is taking place and that education can and will change the future for generations

2. Engaging Youth in Knowledge Generation

This research has engaged a segment of the youth population in Nunavut who will play a vital role in the future of the territory, yet whose voices are seldom heard at the academic level. Interviewing young people has led to documented testimony that reveals a unique perspective on high school education in Nunavut. These data are invaluable as they add to a body of knowledge which, to date, was largely informed by the experiences of educators and Elders and can be enriched and deepened by opinions from the young people who are going through the educational system at the high school and early post-secondary levels. The research data can inform education policy and program development at both at a local community level and at a territorial level within the Government of Nunavut and has implications for other Inuit educational jurisdiction across Canada.

3. Empowering Youth and Amplifying their Voice

In addition to providing much needed data on the perspectives of youth in Nunavut, the research has also benefitted participants. Through the interview and documentary filmmaking process, researchers have maintained a focus on the opinions of the participants and will begin more detailed analysis and interpretation of the interview data with great care over the next months. The voices of the young participants have been strengthened and been given value through this research process but the findings must now be shared more widely through academic publications. The documentary has demonstrated, both to the young people of Nunavut and to key decision-makers, that Nunavut youth are knowledge holders and that their perspectives need to inform policy and program decisions related to high school education. Viewers comment on the passion and hope that young

people articulate for the future of the territory. In the documentary video, Nunavut youth reveal their confidence, courage, honesty, and above all, resilience.

4. Skills Development in Participants

Prior to beginning interviews with youth within the three Nunavut communities involved in the second phase of research, film skills development workshops took place in Pangnirtung, Rankin Inlet and Kugluktuk. Documentary filmmaker, Mark Sandiford, held a day-long, hands-on workshop teaching participants about the process of making a film. Participants acted, directed, and filmed a short scene before learning the basics of editing and cutting on a computer and then sharing a finished short segment of film with the group. After the workshop the equipment used in the workshop, including a video camera, microphone, camera bag and basic software were donated to the youth centre in each community to encourage interested participants to continue expressing themselves using film as a medium.

5. Raising Awareness and Generating Knowledge

This research includes data from schools in the Kitikmeot, Kivalliq and the Qikiqtani regions, providing case studies from all three regions of Nunavut. It has raised awareness as well as levels of accountability with respect to high school education in Nunavut. The ten-year historical and statistical case studies provide detailed records of data over an extended period of time for four Nunavut high schools. This is long-term data that has never been gathered and analyzed before. The findings reveal inconsistencies, gaps, inaccuracies and errors that impact the way attendance, truancy, withdrawal from school and graduation are reported. The final report will document Nunavut-wide patterns that may be very helpful for both the Department of Education and all the high schools with respect to the accurate reporting of all data that is gathered at the high school level. Inaccuracy of data leads to the inability to track success and target specific areas for improvement. Erroneous data is of little value in a school system

facing serious issues with respect to graduation from high school. When data accurately reported, processed and shared, this contributes to valuable knowledge that is vitally important when trying to make decisions to improve education in Nunavut.

6. Reaching Communities, Educators and the Public - Documentary Video

The decision to make a bilingual documentary video in Inuktitut and English was based on the importance of reaching community members, parents and students, as well as educators and scholars when sharing and disseminating research findings. Completing this documentary was a demanding and time-consuming process requiring constant negotiation as the bilingual production developed. Our research team is very proud and pleased with the results and the dissemination process has only just started.

7. Supporting the National Strategy on Inuit Education and Government of Nunavut Priorities

The documentation of youth experiences and opinions of high school education in Nunavut has offered support for the National Strategy on Inuit Education by using mixed methods to provide qualitative and quantitative data that address the key issues raised by the National Committee on Inuit Education (NCIE) including a call for increased information to enable high school graduates to access post-secondary education. The current research explores supports as well as limitations to success within high school that directly affect access to post-secondary education.

8. Building the Capacity of Inuit Graduates and Students

When ArcticNet funding directly builds and enhances the capacity of Inuit researchers to conduct, lead and manage research, it takes their emerging skills to a new level by applying them in the field. Nunavut M.Ed. graduates and current students acted as community-based researchers and played a vital role

in this project. Without the support of trusted and respected individuals within the research communities, the breadth and depth achieved in this research would simply not have been possible. Community-based researchers build connections between participants and researchers, add valuable insights based on their observations and interpretations of the findings and as they develop a strong sense of ownership of the research process and data, they develop valuable research skills to be used in the future.

9. Expanding Research to the International Level

Creating international research partnerships across the Circumpolar world enables community leaders in Clyde River, Nunavut to learn from the experiences of Sami in Sweden as they share knowledge. Contexts differ in many ways, yet the progress Sami are making with respect to the integration of traditional knowledge, crafts and history within their upper secondary school programs can significantly inform Inuit policy and practice in Nunavut. At the same time, Inuit in Nunavut can share their experiences of developing and operating a culture-based school. This exchange will enable the partner-communities to share established and considered best practices learned through experience.

Discussion

The National Strategy on Inuit Education (NCIE, 2011) brought all four Inuit regions in Canada together to develop a unified vision for Inuit education, focusing on key priorities for change. The groundbreaking document begins with a personal message from Mary Simon, then president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the National Inuit organization in Canada.

“Too many of our children are not attending school, too few are graduating, and even some of our graduates are not equipped with an education that fully meets the Canadian standard. This is the greatest

social policy challenge of our time. Some 56 % of our population is under the age of 25, so improving educational outcomes is imperative” (p. 6, NCIE 2011).

Mary Simon’s statement highlights the importance of educational improvements for Inuit students. Regrettably, “there is almost no data or evidence supporting any of the major policy shifts in Inuit education” (p. 90, NCIE 2011), which makes it very difficult to measure changes in student performance or make evidence-based decisions.

Attendance rates in Nunavut schools continue to remain low. Over the past ten years across the territory it has averaged approximately 70 %. In the course of a child’s 12 years of education in school, this amounts to almost three years of missed classes (Nunavut Statistics Bureau 2012a). Also, while graduation rates in the territory have increased from 22.8 % in 2001 to 39.3 % in 2009 (Nunavut Statistics Bureau 2012b), they remain well below the Canadian national average graduation rate of 81 % (Statistics Canada 2009). Nunavut graduation rates are also among the lowest in Canada for the Aboriginal population (Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) 2009). Systemic challenges of disengagement from school, high levels of staff turnover, and difficulties implementing complex bilingual, culturally based education (Aylward 2007, 2004, 2003, Berger 2006) continue to limit the ability of Inuit to participate fully in the knowledge economy and prepare for the impact of climatic and social change on Inuit society.

This research on high school success in Nunavut, ongoing for the last three years in Pangnirtung and Clyde River (2010/2011), Rankin Inlet (2011/2012), and Kugluktuk (2012-13) reveals important perspectives from 19 Nunavut youth on high school education in the territory. Qualitative data from Nunavut youth highlight both the challenges students face, as well as challenges schools face in providing high quality bilingual programs at an academic level that prepares young people for post-secondary education. Youth have highlighted the need for schools

to deliver programs that prepare students for life after high school. These programs must be delivered by caring and skilled teachers if they are to be effective. It is very difficult to maintain high standards and provide a range of bilingual programs that fully engage students when literacy levels and motivation are low. Relationships with teachers were identified as key elements in motivating students, but high turnover and discipline issues can undermine the best efforts of schools to provide quality programs at the high school level.

Interviews also revealed the importance of family support in order for young people to succeed academically. Families in Nunavut are facing issues including poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and intergenerational impact of residential schools and cultural and linguistic losses. All these issues impact the ability to effectively and confidently parent children.

In spite of the many challenges, young people expressed both their struggles and successes and remained confident that education can and will change for the future of generations of Nunavut. The powerful testimony of young and engaged Nunavut youth is shared in the documentary video, *Stepping Forward: Youth Perspectives on High School Education in Nunavut*, to be heavily promoted and widely disseminated in Nunavut.

Research is also starting to address the lack of data regarding the performance of high school students in Nunavut, while also revealing challenges in the way information is being managed. By establishing a research-based approach to examining a ten year period in three Nunavut high schools, the historical and statistical case studies document patterns of student enrollment, attendance, graduation levels, drop-out rates, staff-retention and turnover and the representation of Inuit educators in the schools. They also document success and improvements in the performance of students in high schools over a significant period of time.

Conclusion

Education is a key determinant of health and raising high school graduation rates will lead to improvements in the overall well being of Inuit in Nunavut. Engaging youth in research on high school education is identifying factors, practices, approaches and strategies that make a difference for student achievement and well-being. Additionally, valuing the knowledge young people hold, and encouraging open and honest communication about pressing issues in education opens the issues to intergenerational and cross-sectoral discussion and dialogue. Research in the fourth year of the project will continue to engage all stakeholders in a discussion of the findings on educational change in Nunavut.

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We would like to express our gratitude to Morley Hansen and Murray Angus from Nunavut Sivuniksavut for their support of this project and for providing time for Rebecca Mearns and Maata Kayak to play vital roles in the narration of the bilingual documentary video. Naullaq Arnaquq, PhD student in Educational Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island, provided expert guidance and support with decisions related to the findings and the quotations selected to support the central themes. Her expertise related to the quality of translations was greatly appreciated.

Above all we would like to thank the 19 young people who courageously shared their experiences on camera, allowing us to share their stories with the people of Nunavut and beyond.

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Publications

(All ArcticNet refereed publications are available on the ASTIS website (<http://www.aina.ucalgary.ca/arcticnet/>)).

F., McAuley, A., Wheatley, K., O'Leary, D., Sandiford, M., McGregor, H. and Mearns, R., 2012, Alluriarniaq Stepping Forward: Youth Perspectives on Education in Nunavut, Plenary presentation. ArcticNet Annual Scientific Meeting, Vancouver.

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