

A Hunger to Teach: Recruiting Inuit Teachers in Nunavut

Summary Research Report
March 2nd, 2017

Authors:

Paul Berger	Chair, Graduate Studies & Research in Education, Lakehead University
Karen Inootik	Former Nunavut Teacher Education Program Student
Rebecca Jones	Former Nunavut Teacher Education Program Student
Jennifer Kadjuk	Former Nunavut Teacher Education Program Student



Co-authors (L to R) Jennifer Kadjuk, Karen Inootik & Rebecca Jones in Akureiri, Iceland where preliminary findings from the research were presented at the 7th International Congress on Arctic Social Sciences.

Our thanks to Emma Pauloosie and Terry Aknavigak for assistance with this research and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding.

It is almost impossible to say you are running an Inuit school system when the majority of teaching staff comes from elsewhere and does not speak the local language or understand its culture.

(Joanne Tompkins, Teaching in a Cold & Windy Place¹)

Addressing the urgent need for large numbers of Inuit throughout the school system remains the single most important factor in the success of bilingual education in Nunavut.

(Government of Nunavut, *Pinasuaqtavut 2004-2009*²)

When teachers and students have little or no shared background, students' opportunities to learn worthwhile knowledge are at risk.

(Noordhoff & Kleinfeld³)

If there were more Inuit teachers maybe we would learn more of Inuit culture instead of Qallunaat culture.

(Participant)

Introduction

In 2010-11, a team of six education researchers undertook a study of recruitment, barriers, and awareness of teacher training in Nunavut. The team interviewed 128 Inuit youth in Iqaluit, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet, Coral Harbour, Rankin Inlet, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven, Clyde River, Nauyasat, Taloyoak, and Kugaruuk. The findings were presented at the Nunavut Research Institute in 2013 and are published here in a report format for the first time.

Background

Teachers who share the worldviews of their students and who structure learning in culturally optimal ways are more effective teachers⁴. Most Nunavut students start school with Inuit teachers and receive instruction in an Inuit language, but are then thrown into educationally hazardous all-English classrooms in grade 3, 4 or 5⁵. Nunavut needs more Inuit teachers⁶. The call for Inuit teachers has been consistent, including: The Arctic Institute of North America in 1973⁷; *Learning, Tradition and Change* in 1983⁸; the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut call for an Inuit school system in 1988⁹; the 1996 NWT Department of Education Inuit Employment Plan¹⁰; Government of Nunavut sponsored studies by Aylward in 2004¹¹ and the Nunavut Department of Education in 2006¹²; the GN *Qalattuq 10 Year Educator Training Strategy* in 2006¹³; and education and language laws in 2007 and 2008¹⁴. It is implicit in the Uqasivut Plan of 2012¹⁵; without many more Inuit teachers the erosion of language and culture is certain.

Objectives

Our research explored:

1. what attracts Inuit youth to teaching
2. what barriers exist to them becoming teachers
3. ways to attract more Inuit youth to teaching
4. whether interacting with a teacher-education student could raise high school students' interest in becoming a teacher.

Methods

Three Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP) students collaborated with Dr. Paul Berger in Iqaluit in 2010 to create a semi-structured interview guide for exploring the research questions with Inuit high school students and recent graduates. Five NTEP students were trained to conduct interviews and then interviewed 128 Inuit youth in 11 Nunavut communities in 2010 and 2011. NTEP students transcribed, and where relevant, translated, all interviews. Interview data were coded and analysis completed by the co-authors of this report.

Key Findings

Inuit youth want to teach

More than half of all participants—58%—said they had, at some time, thought of becoming a teacher, and 39% that they had considered applying to NTEP. Most participants thought schooling would be different with more Inuit teachers and most said one or more teachers had inspired them.

There was much celebration of teaching from the participants. For example, one said: *"They're one of the people that have the biggest impact on my life,"* and another that the best part about teaching would be: *"Probably seeing the kids faces when you teach them something they like or something they're interested in."* The large number of Inuit youth who see teaching as a possible career suggests that the critical shortage of Inuit teachers can be addressed.

Barriers to teaching

Despite the high level of interest expressed in teaching as a possible career, we found serious barriers that stop most Inuit youth from pursuing teaching. The barriers are language, academic, financial, and family and housing related. Connected to, and compounding, these problems, is a lack of knowledge of postsecondary education including NTEP. Our data suggest that the problems are widespread, but not inevitable.

The language barrier. *"Once you hit high school there's no more talk in Inuktitut, nobody talks it anymore,"* said one participant. Though most participants did not explicitly name language as a barrier, its salience was clear. The current model of 'early exit' from Inuktitut

instruction impairs students' learning¹⁶ and their ability to develop language competency¹⁷. This becomes a barrier to post-secondary education¹⁸. As schooling erodes Inuktitut¹⁹, new Inuit teachers may be less capable of teaching in Inuktitut, creating a dangerous circle. Immediate and committed action is needed by the federal and territorial governments to prioritize Inuktitut and Inuit teachers in a bilingual, bicultural school system²⁰.

Academic barriers. Though most participants felt they were academically prepared to do well in college, answers to several questions suggest many youth are afraid that they would not excel in a teacher education program. Participants said things like, "*I wanted to try but I thought it would be too hard.*" Most felt that the academic demands and intensity would be the hardest part of NTEP. Math and English were cited as particularly challenging.

Lack of academic preparedness is due, in part, to the current Eurocentric school model²¹ where the structure of schooling reflects EuroCanadian priorities and values²² and much of the curriculum—including high school curriculum from Alberta—lacks relevance for Nunavut students²³. This creates a chicken and egg dilemma and the cycle will not easily be broken; it will require resources and vision, without the blinders Eurocentric thinking imposes²⁴. Work should proceed as fast as possible to create a school system based in Inuit language and culture.

One more immediate partial remedy would be to raise awareness of the foundations year in NTEP—an academic upgrading year meant to help prepare students for the demands of the program. Learning about this and the tutoring, counselling and writing support available to NTEP students might help ameliorate prospective NTEP student concerns about not being academically capable of succeeding. A more robust solution would require moving towards an apprenticeship model of teacher education or the mentoring model discussed by Joanne Tompkins in *Teaching in a Cold and Windy Place*²⁵.

Financial barriers. A concern about finances was prominent and was also salient for NTEP student co-researchers. One noted that counsellors suggest the food bank and soup kitchen to help make ends meet; the stress endured can negatively affect academic performance once in the program. We recommend that the financial support for Nunavut students be increased to facilitate recruitment and increase retention, echoing a recommendation in *Qalattuq: 10 Year Educator Training Strategy 2006-2016*²⁶. These monies will ultimately be recovered in reduced costs of recruiting non-Inuit teachers and since more of Inuit teachers' salaries remains in Nunavut²⁷.

Family and housing related barriers. Many participants expressed concern about having to leave their home community to attend NTEP, both because being away from family would cause stress and because finding housing, and losing current housing, would be problematic. These are not new concerns²⁸. Seventy-eight percent of participants in smaller communities said that they would be more likely to consider NTEP if they could attend in their own community. We recommend that community-based NTEP be expanded to include more communities and be provided with strong core funding. NTEP would become more accessible; recruitment and retention would improve.

Expanding NTEP

When asked what they would like to teach if they did become a teacher, almost half said grade 7 or above—grades that NTEP does not prepare people to teach. We asked what subject participants would most like to teach if they were teaching at a high school. Mathematics and Inuktitut were most popular, then English, Social Studies, Science and Physical Education.

These are not currently options at NTEP. NTEP needs to be expanded. *Qalattuq* called for expansion into the intermediate grades²⁹ and a mechanism to qualify teachers for those grades in fact exists, but has never been used³⁰. The goal of having an Inuit education system is possible to achieve, but not without a majority of Inuit teachers at all levels.

Recruiting to NTEP

Though many participants had thought of becoming a teacher and many of those said they had thought about applying to NTEP, some participants had never heard of it and only 21% said they had enough information to apply. Though 40% said someone in their family was a teacher, most said the family member never talked to them about teaching, and 59% said no one had *ever* talked to them about teaching. Almost half were unaware that the government wanted more Inuit teachers, and only 18% had seen NTEP newspaper advertisements, common at the time of the interviews. The need for more communication about NTEP echoes a 2005 recommendation from an evaluation of NTEP³¹.

We recommend that NTEP students be hired to talk to high school students across Nunavut. In this research, Inuit NTEP student co-researchers found it inspiring and affirming to talk to students about teaching. Their motivation to complete the program was strengthened. Participants had the opportunity to ask real people about their experiences and they asked many questions that a brochure, poster, or NTEP instructor could never answer. Three-quarters reported having an increased interest in teaching by the end of the interview. We recommend that Inuit teacher education students become the main way that NTEP is promoted.

NTEP could build community visits into the third year course where students learn presentation skills. They could present to high school and elementary school classes. They could ask the Inuit teachers to promote the idea of teaching with their students and in their families, and provide information on NTEP application procedures to the high school teachers. They could describe basic things, like the existence of financial support that may be unknown to high school students³². An open presentation and a spot on the local radio could give people who have graduated a chance to be inspired, and parents and community members a chance to learn more too. They could speak with Educational Assistants about NTEP. Most importantly, potential students would get a chance to ask questions one-on-one. As one participant said, it would be better to talk to “*someone we can relate to, not some older people.*”

NTEP students may be very happy to travel to communities where they have connections. Using the model from this research, they gain confidence and experience. Staying with friends and relatives, the model is cost-effective.

Recommendations

Our findings confirm that many Inuit youth are interested in teaching. To address the barriers named by participants and thereby increase NTEP recruitment and retention, we make the following recommendations.

1. Expand and core-fund community-based NTEP.
2. Expand NTEP to prepare teachers for the intermediate and senior grades.
3. Increase financial support for Nunavut students, particularly those interested in teaching.
4. Develop a shorter provisional teacher education program to apprentice teachers and get them teaching while completing degree requirements over time.
5. Hire NTEP students to conduct information campaigns in communities where they have connections. Personal contact is much more powerful than paper.
6. Prioritize building an Inuit language and culture education system, requiring Inuit-focused curriculum and major investments to support Inuktitut.

A window of opportunity exists that will slowly close. Recruiting more Inuit to teaching is entirely possible and should become an urgent priority.

¹ Tompkins, J. (1998). *Teaching in a cold and windy place: Change in an Inuit school*. Toronto: University of

² Government of Nunavut. (1999). *The Bathurst mandate: Pinasuaqtavut: That which we've set out to do: Our hopes and plans for Nunavut*. Iqaluit: Author.

³ Noordhoff, K. & Kleinfeld, J. (1993). Preparing teachers for multicultural classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(1), 27-39.

⁴ Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, B. M. J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 941-993.

Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, *op. cit.*

⁵ Wright, S. C. & Taylor, D. M. (1995). Identity and the language of the classroom: Investigating the impact of heritage versus second language instruction on personal and collective self-esteem. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 87(2), 241-252.

Wright, S. C., Taylor, D. M. & Ruggiero, K. M. (1996). Examining the potential for academic achievement among Inuit children: Comparisons on the Raven coloured progressive matrices. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(6). 733-753.

⁶ Berger, T. R. (2006). *"The Nunavut project": Conciliator's final report*. Report on the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement implementation contract negotiations for the second planning period 2003-2013. Retrieved from http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/agr/nu/lca/nlc_e.pdf.

⁷ Arctic Institute of North America. (1973). *Man in the north technical paper: Education in the Canadian north - three reports: 1971-1972*. Montreal: Author.

⁸ Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Education. (1982). *Learning, tradition and change in the Northwest Territories*. Yellowknife, NWT: Northwest Territories Information.

⁹ Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut. (1987). *Language rights position paper*. Ottawa: TFN.

¹⁰ GNWT. (1996). Departmental Inuit Employment Plans: Department of Education

¹¹ Aylward, M. L. (2004). *Summary report of the Sivuniksamut Ilinniarniq Consultations*. Iqaluit: Nunavut Department of Education.

¹² Nunavut Department of Education. (2006, May 26). Made-in Nunavut education act: What we've heard from Nunavummiut so far. (Newsletter in *Nunatsiaq News*). Iqaluit: Author.

¹³ Department of Education & Nunavut Arctic College. (2006). *Qalattuq: 10 year educator training strategy 2006-2016*. Author. Retrieved from <http://www.tunngavik.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/qalattuq-educator-training-strategy-july-06.pdf>

¹⁴ Government of Nunavut. (2007). *Inuit Language Protection Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.assembly.nu.ca/english/bills/index.html>

Government of Nunavut. (2008). *Government Bill 21: Education Act*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/pubdoc/Bill%2021%20Education%20Act%20_E-F_%20-%20introduction.pdf

-
- ¹⁵ Government of Nunavut. (2012). Uqausivut: The comprehensive plan pursuant to the *Official Languages Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act 2012-2016*. Department of Culture and Heritage. Retrieved from <http://www.ch.gov.nu.ca/en/Uqausivut.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(1), 18-36.
- ¹⁷ Martin, I. (2000). *Aajiqatigiingniq: Language of instruction research paper*. Iqaluit, NU: Nunavut Department of Education and CLEY. Retrieved from <http://assembly.nu.ca/library/GNedocs/2000/000076-e.pdf>
- ¹⁸ Møller, H. (2011). *"You need to be double cultured to function here": Toward an anthropology of Inuit nursing in Greenland and Nunavut*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
- ¹⁹ Dorais, L. & Sammons, S. (2002). *Language in Inuit society: Discourse and identity in the Baffin Region*. Iqaluit, Nunavut. Nunavut Arctic College.
- ²⁰ Berger, T. R. *op. cit.*
- ²¹ Berger, T. R. *op. cit.*
- ²² Crago, M. B., Eriks-Brophy, A., Pesco, D. & McAlpine, L. (1997). Culturally based miscommunication in classroom interaction. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 28(3), 245-254.
- Douglas, A. S. (1994). Recontextualizing schooling within an Inuit community. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 19(2), 154-164.
- ²³ Berger, P., Epp, J., & Moeller, H. (2006). The predictable influences of colonialism, culture clash, and current practice on punctuality, attendance, and achievement in Nunavut schools. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 29(2), 182-205.
- ²⁴ Berger, P. (2009). Eurocentric roadblocks to school change in Nunavut. *Inuit Studies*, 33(1-2), 55-76.
- ²⁵ Tompkins, *op. cit.*
- ²⁶ Qalattuq, *op. cit.*
- ²⁷ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2003). *The cost of not successfully implementing Article 23: Representative Employment for Inuit within the Government*. Author. Retrieved from www.tunngavik.com/English.pub.html
- ²⁸ Qalattuq, *op. cit.*
- ²⁹ Qalattuq, *op. cit.*
- ³⁰ Aarluk Consulting. (2005). *Final report: Evaluation of the Nunavut Teacher Education Program*. Author. Retrieved from <http://assembly.nu.ca/library/GNedocs/2005/000550-e.pdf>
- ³¹ *ibid.*
- ³² Berger, P. (2008). Inuit visions for schooling in one Nunavut community. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada.