

# The Predictable Influences of Culture Clash, Current Practice, and Colonialism on Punctuality, Attendance, and Achievement in Nunavut Schools

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*We explore concerns about punctuality, attendance, and student underperformance in Nunavut schools informed by a study (Berger, 2001) that surveyed predominantly Qallunaat (non-Inuit) educators about current and desired adaptations to schools meant to move school culture toward Inuit culture. We argue that the clash between contemporary Inuit culture and Qallunaat school culture, problems with current school practices, and the region's colonial past and present all contribute to making resistance and poor student performance predictable and inevitable. Recommendations include true Inuit control of education including meaningful consultation with communities, adoption of curriculum and pedagogy that honor Inuit culture, and extensive cross-cultural and ESL training for Qallunaat educators working in Nunavut.*

## *Context*

When Qallunaat schools<sup>1</sup> arrived in the Canadian Eastern Arctic less than 100 ago (Darnell & Hoem, 1996), they superimposed southern educational traditions on the existing Inuit practice of education (Douglas, 1994). Schooling had the colonial goal of assimilating northern Indigenous peoples into the “mainstream” (Brody, 1991; Lipka, Mohatt, & Ciulistet Group, 1998; Lipka & Stairs, 1994), and even when this was not the stated intent, it was often the result (Henze & Vanett, 1993). For the Inuit, pressure on culture exists partly because “formal education is not only alien to Inuit culture but, as initially transposed from the south, is in direct conflict with indigenous modes of transmitting knowledge across generations” (Stairs, 1988, p. 315). As La France (1994) put it, for Indigenous peoples “it is extremely difficult to be educated in a western way and, culturally, remain who we are” (p. 20).

Inuit “experience persistent, disproportionate academic failure” (Wright, Taylor, & Ruggiero, 1996, p. 734), which is one of the “dysfunctional effects of a EuroCanadian education system of service delivery for Aboriginal and Inuit people” (Binda, 1999, p. 87). Nunavut schools fail to

provide competence in either the Qallunaat or Inuit worlds (Williamson, 1987; Oakes, 1988). Cummins (1986) wrote that minority groups' underachievement in schools is the result of being schooled in a second language and culture, using inappropriate pedagogy, with no community participation. He noted, "minority groups characterized by widespread school failure tend overwhelmingly to be in a dominated relationship to the majority group" (p. 22).

The frustrations described by educators in Berger's (2001) study remind us that for many years Qallunaat teachers have been recruited to teach in Arctic schools without adequate training to teach in a cross-cultural setting (Arctic Institute of North America, 1973; Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Education [NWT LASCE], 1982), and with curriculum simply adopted from southern provinces (Van Meenen, 1994). These participants' voices can help us understand the root causes of lateness, poor attendance, and underachievement, phenomena especially prevalent in eastern Arctic schools (Jenness, 1964; Van Meenen). They help us see as predictable some Inuit students' "resistance to classroom life and routines" (Stairs, 1994, p. 68), and to frame it as "*resistance* to the dominant society's ideology," rather than "individual rule breaking or personal psychological dysfunction" (Faiman-Silva, 2002, pp. 193-194, emphasis in original; see also Field & Olafson, 1999).

In what follows we link participants' voices (largely Qallunaat) from Berger's (2001) study to Indigenous education literature on student underachievement and the themes of culture clash, current practice, and colonialism. We make recommendations cognizant that we address only a few of the many interconnected pieces of the puzzle, that there will be no simple or uncontested solutions, and that simply increasing student success in the current system is problematic as it speeds assimilation and loss of Inuit culture (Doige, 1999; Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000). True Inuit control is needed, and schools need to be engaged with the communities of which they are a part.

#### *Researchers' Background*

To help the reader identify how the first author's perspective may have influenced the findings and reporting (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1998), we include an account of Paul's experience teaching in Nunavut in his voice.

I was hired to teach grade 7 in a remote community in the Canadian Arctic in the fall of 1997. I was mailed copies of *The Inuit Way* (Boult, n.d.) and *Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective* (Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment [NWTECE], 1996). On arrival, I was startled to learn that my grade 7 students, all Inuit, had only formally started to learn English when immersed in it in grade 5. My only previous Arctic experience had been a brief trip to Tuktoyuktuk, where

English was the language spoken by children. Although I knew that Inuktitut was still strong in the Eastern Arctic, I had ethnocentrically assumed that schooling was in English and hadn't thought to ask when the Inuktitut/English transition took place. My southern expectations of student progress had to be modified to acknowledge my inability to speak Inuktitut and my students' weaknesses in English literacy skills.

In some areas no curriculum documents were available, while several that were available were from southern provinces. In some cases these guided my decisions and served as resources that had to be heavily modified, but usually I decided what, when, and how to teach. I often felt unqualified, poorly prepared, and limited in resources, a common circumstance in the history of formal education in the Canadian Arctic (Van Meenan, 1994).

My two years in the community were punctuated with events that made me question my role as a southern teacher in an Inuit community. In April 2000, I returned to Nunavut as Faculty Liaison for Lakehead University supervising student teachers and used the opportunity to interview educators for the larger study on which this article is based.

### *Methodology*

#### *Concerns and Cautions*

This is outsider research conducted by white Qallunaat researchers with predominantly Qallunaat participants. As a former Qallunaat teacher in Nunavut, Paul was frustrated by the geographical isolation that hampered collaboration and the sharing of successful practices. He believed that by surveying teachers in a number of Nunavut communities, documenting both what had already been done and what might be done to adapt the schools to Inuit students' needs, he could create a resource that would benefit teachers and could motivate recommendations that might inform policymakers.

Although Paul believed that the existence of Qallunaat schools in Inuit communities was problematic, as he planned the research he did not consider that a white researcher studying a matter primarily concerning Inuit might be equally so. His focus was largely on practical considerations. As he imagined flying in and out of five communities in a two-week period, he became concerned that he might not find enough participants and that Inuit might not volunteer to be interviewed. Flying to the communities in his role as Faculty Liaison, billeted with various Qallunaat residents, and with no budget, the task seemed daunting.

In hindsight and informed by relatively recent scholarship on Indigenous (Lipka et al., 1998; Menzies, 2001; Steinhauer, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 1999) and decolonizing methodologies (Pihama, Cram, & Walker, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), some things seem clear. Outsiders conducting research in Indigenous settings without co-creating the agenda with insiders, or at least inviting significant input, risk doing more harm than

good. Rasmussen (2001) even suggested that Qallunaat researchers stop research in Indigenous settings altogether, and Tuhiwai Smith (1999) cautioned that Indigenous people are all too familiar with researchers taking Indigenous knowledge, earning their degrees and careers through its (mis)interpretation and publication, and leaving nothing of value for the participants.

It is not surprising that although Paul hoped that Inuit would take part, almost all the participants in the study were Qallunaat. Boulton (n.d.) and Lipka (1989) cautioned that Inuit may perceive direct questioning as invasive. More critically, for respectful research with Indigenous peoples, relationship and trust are vitally important (Lipka et al., 1998). Because Paul was an outsider who spent only days in each community, as interested as many Inuit teachers may have been in the research, it was not reasonable to assume that they would have unqualified confidence in, or be comfortable with, the methodology, the researcher, or the interview process.

This research, then, was informed predominantly by Qallunaat teachers' beliefs. It cannot be taken as a complete picture or as one that represents the views of Inuit educators. The question is then: As an outsider analysis of outsiders' views, does it have any value? We hope so. Paul's original study was meant to be useful to educators in increasing student success and well-being while problematizing the role of Qallunaat schools in Inuit communities. The current work seeks to use his findings to examine weaknesses in the current colonial model of schooling. One of our intents is to put "the interests of the people studied ahead of the accumulation of knowledge" (Menzies, 2001, p. 20).

We hope that by being aware of our positions as outsiders, we are able to avoid damaging assumptions. Our analysis is based in the belief that decolonizing schools in Nunavut is important, and we believe that our recommendations reflect this stance. For example, the recommendation that an orientation be required for new Qallunaat teachers would help to decolonize their practices. As Joanne Tompkins (personal communication, October, 2004) pointed out, with "no understanding of the sociopolitical, sociohistorical context in which they teach ... they are hugely ignorant and therefore almost doomed to fail." Still, we consistently recommend that it should be Inuit who ultimately decide, so we suggest directions tentatively and as starting points, always aware that with true Inuit control of education, we cannot predict what choices will be made (Harris, 1990).

### *Data Collection*

This research began as a survey study using semistructured interviews to investigate current and desired adaptations of schools to Inuit culture (Berger, 2001). Nine schools in five communities in one region of Nunavut were visited; each had between 800 and 2,200 residents, 90% of whom were Inuit. Any educator who consented to a voluntary, taped interview

or who agreed to speak informally was included in the study. We assumed that all participants who volunteered would have something to contribute.

Fifteen taped interviews recorded 20 educators (1 Inuit and 19 Qallunaat). Four were student-teachers near the end of a four-week placement, and the other 16 included teachers and administrators with a wide range of subject and grade experience. In addition, Paul had unrecorded conversations with one Inuit and seven Qallunaat and recorded field notes after the conversations. As described above, the small number of Inuit participants should be seen as a consequence of the research design.

Paul transcribed the tape-recorded interviews and coded them along with the field notes. For this article issues broadly related to punctuality, attendance, and student underachievement were extracted from themes that appeared in the original study (Berger, 2001). Participants' voices are italicized.

### *Confidence*

Small samples have legitimacy in exploratory studies in areas lacking extensive research (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1998; Mueller, Schuessler, & Costner, 1977). Although this sample was small and nonrandom, it constituted over 10% of the region's Qallunaat educators. Participants expressed many ideas from various communities, increasing confidence that the findings represent the views of many Qallunaat educators in this region. Because participants volunteered, it is possible that those Qallunaat educators who were most critical of the current model of schooling were most likely to be participants. This may have led them to describe problems not considered serious by other Qallunaat educators.

Despite differences in history, geography, and culture of the various communities, their similarities lead us to believe it likely that our analysis here provides a starting point for discussion in all regions of Nunavut.

### *Culture Clash, Current Practice, and Colonialism*

*In terms of attendance in the lower grades ... it seems like every morning I walk in ... there's maybe 8 or 10 kids there—there's supposed to be 22 in my class. Within the first 5 to 10 minutes after the bell you get a couple more dribble in. By quarter to 10 or so you have maybe 12 to 15 in my class—by noon hour you have close to 18. Then people even come at afternoon recess for the last hour or so, so you're pushing 20 by the end.*

Punctuality and attendance were frequently mentioned by many Qallunaat participants in Berger's (2001) study as difficult problems linked to the failure and underperformance of Inuit students. We hesitate to use the word *problems*, because to do so frames the issues primarily from the perspective of the Qallunaat school. Although many Inuit parents may also see them this way, some at least may not. We look at the overlapping influences of culture clash, poor current practices, and colonialism, which help to explain lateness, poor attendance, and underachievement.

To address these issues fairly, we would need to know what Inuit want from the schools. Some may desire "a system that is not simply adopted from other societies" (Simon, 1996, p. 71), a system with significant local control, the use of Inuktitut as the language of instruction, and the predominance of Inuit educators at all levels. Some may want a system adapted from a southern model or a two-way system like that proposed by Harris (1990) in Australia. Currently we do not know. Because of this we highlight participants' ideas and suggest directions for change meant to help increase cultural compatibility, improve current practice, and move toward decolonizing the schools.

### *Culture Clash*

Inuit culture is not static; traditional ways change over time. To deny this would be to deny authenticity (Kuokkanen, 2000). In writing about cultural characteristics, we do not presume that all Inuit are the same or that Inuit culture does not evolve. Indeed Henze and Vanett (1993) cautioned that refusing to acknowledge and value the present-day forms of culture while idealizing traditional culture can be dangerous. We also acknowledge that all Inuit may not share the goal of changing schools to reflect Inuit culture (Crago, 1992; Stairs, 1994) and present here only a few of the most obvious areas of culture clash.

There are immediate reasons to suspect that lateness and absence would be areas of contention between Qallunaat schools and some Inuit students. The most salient reason may be that historically, Qallunaat and Inuit had different motivations for deciding how to structure their lives, as the former prepared for work in factories and the latter for life on the land (Stern, 2003). Qallunaat educators expect students to abide by school norms where "punctuality is a frequently articulated topic at assemblies, in teachers' classrooms, and in staff room discourse, and it is an explicit, expected institutional social convention" (Maguire & McAlpine, 1996, p. 231). Most Inuit, however, live in continual daylight for parts of the year, and people, especially teenagers, sometimes stay up all "night" and sleep in the "day" (Brody, 2000; Stern, 2003). This is also true of some Qallunaat who have trouble keeping a clock schedule when exposed to continual daylight (Joanne Tompkins, personal communication, October, 2004). It is not unusual to find street hockey games being played at 2:00 a.m. in Nunavut communities or hunters heading onto the land at 8:00 p.m. Historically, when an activity took place was determined by factors such as season, light, and weather, not the arbitrary numbers on a clock (Briggs, 1970; Freuchen, 1961).

Following natural rhythms must make the artificial schedule of the Qallunaat school especially difficult for some Inuit. In order to accommodate the Qallunaat schools' demand for consistent and punctual attendance, the goals of schooling would need to be highly valued and causally linked to these behaviors. Although many students do attend consistently

and punctually, some Inuit children and parents may simply not share teachers' value orientations about time, which makes it less likely that students will arrive and arrive "on time."

Many families still value spending time on the land away from their communities (Reimer, 1996). Douglas (1994) reported that in Arctic Bay this issue was contentious, and the school switched from recording land absences as *truant* to marking them *excused*, in order to value the educational nature of being on the land. This adaptation was noted by a participant in this study as well, and the proposed Nunavut Education Act (Government of Nunavut, 2002) explicitly states that a student should be excused with parental permission to take part in traditional activities on the land. This kind of shift in attitude is necessary, but will be difficult to embrace authentically in schools where learning is often sequential and absence disadvantages the student and inconveniences the teacher.

Other cultural factors may also create conflict with the schools. Inuit children traditionally helped with tasks and looked after younger siblings. These practices, still common today, may not be viewed by southern educators as legitimate reasons for students' absence (Douglas, 1994), although Inuit parents might logically view them that way.

Before the arrival of formal education, Inuit children learned when they chose and for as long as their interest held (Boult, n.d.). Inuit valued independence greatly and as a consequence believed in not interfering with others' choices. People were not asked to explain their behavior (Boult, n.d.; Fogel Chance, 1993; Minor, 1992). Brody (2000) provides another rationale for child autonomy, an Inuit belief that a baby receives a recently departed relative's spirit. A baby was often given a deceased relative's name, another reason why parents rarely told children what to do "as this would be equivalent to ordering an elder about" (Boult, n.d., p. 10).

Teachers may not understand that parents who are supportive of the schools might not act to ensure their child's punctuality and attendance. The teachers thus may respond ineffectively or disrespectfully if they misinterpret parents' culturally appropriate unwillingness to intervene, for example, by setting bedtimes, as a lack of concern for the child's well-being (Brody, 2000). A similar misunderstanding may occur when parents' traditional noninterference with teachers is misinterpreted as lack of interest in their child's education (Okakok, 1989).

If schools are rigidly structured to demand punctuality and consistent attendance on the teachers' terms alone, some friction is predictable and unavoidable.

### *Adapting School Culture*

Several approaches to punctuality and attendance were described by participants that diverged from Qallunaat school norms. These were attempts to work around lateness and absence rather than trying to change them.

They included scheduling most of the academic work in the first two semesters and trying to be outside doing seasonal activities in the later spring when many children are absent with their families on the land. One participant also noted that she started the day “relaxed academically” and made sure that students felt welcome despite arriving late. Lipka (1991) described a successful Yup’ik teacher in Alaska who respected the autonomy of her students by not reprimanding late students, continuing the lesson and including them seamlessly.

Ryan (1989) noted that the structure of curriculum in Qallunaat schools was hierarchical and therefore problematic. Once students have missed learning skills, they are more likely to be frequently absent, as lost and behind they feel inadequate and their self-concept suffers. One educator in this study said that teachers always had something for occasional students to do when they came to school so as to encourage them and keep them from being totally lost. Another worked student-led reviews into the day to help orient students who had missed work while reinforcing concepts for those who had not. Flexible scheduling was also reported where high school students’ work on modules could span the summer break without failure, thus reducing the effect of lateness and absence.

Each of these approaches honored students’ right to decide rather than trying to change their behavior. True direction about the school’s stance on punctuality and attendance should come from Inuit themselves and should not be imposed by the Qallunaat school. Meanwhile, Qallunaat educators in Nunavut must learn about Inuit culture so that conflicts that arise due to differing values can be understood. This will help all stakeholders find respectful ways to approach “problems” such as lateness and poor attendance.

#### *Problems With Current Practice*

In 1982 the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Education found attendance to be a common concern, but looked upon it as a “symptom of the problem, not the problem itself” (p. 77). Current practices may provide strong disincentives for students when deciding whether or not to go to school. In Nunavut there is no viable mechanism for compelling students to attend school; chronic nonattendance and dropping out of school occur even in the primary grades. If parental pressure to attend school is absent, a student’s choice of whether to attend may depend heavily on her or his experience at school. Participants focused on two problem areas that in the end create negative experiences for students: inappropriate and inadequate curriculum and resources and the teachers’ own inability to teach in culturally compatible ways in an ESL environment. We examine these separately.

*Inappropriate Curriculum and Resources.*

*Here I am reading a story about little squirrels jumping from tree to tree and ... a lot of these kids don't ever see trees ... first of all you have to explain what a tree is, then you have to explain what a squirrel is, and by then they've kind of lost the flow of the whole story.*

Lack of curricular relevance has long been a problem. Van Meenen (1994) cited a 1971 study that found that students could not relate to the teaching materials. In 1973 the Arctic Institute of North America wrote that new curriculum was being developed taking culture into account. In 1982 the NWT LASCE report recognized the gap between curriculum conception, production, and implementation; stated that inadequate resources had historically been dedicated to curriculum development; and noted the lack of curricula in Inuktitut.

Many respondents expressed frustration with existing curriculum and resources, stating that they were culturally inappropriate, did not recognize that most students' first language was not English, and did not match students' abilities: *"If it's totally the wrong curriculum and it doesn't fit this culture, then maybe we do need to develop our own stuff!"* Much of the curriculum used in Nunavut, especially at the secondary level, is from Canada's western provinces. More northern and more Nunavut content was needed, as well as English-language arts curricula that includes Inuit legends and authors.

Some participants noted the existence of *Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum From the Inuit Perspective* (NWTECE, 1996), although one cautioned that teaching from it *"takes a lot of work outside the classroom to organize those things"* and another said, *"now that we have the Department of Education ... they should realize that Inuuqatigiit is just the beginning; you know, we need a lot more."*

Many teachers expressed a desire for more and better curricula in Inuktitut. They believed that this would help attract more Inuit teachers and support them better. One participant said that in addition to translating resources into Inuktitut, materials should be transformed to make them relevant to a northern setting. This has been noted as important in other locations (Watahomigie & McCarty, 1994) and by the NWT LASCE (1982) report, which declared that *"Native-language teaching material cannot be prepared by merely translating existing English material"* (p. 93).

Complaints about the unsuitability of curricula in terms of unrealistic expectations in an ESL environment were also voiced:

*I was not prepared for what I found when I came up here, and that was basically that these students are being treated as if they don't speak Inuktitut as a first language. Right now I'm being paid to teach English Language Arts—what I'm doing is creating my own path as I go through this curriculum.... they've introduced the new curriculum this year, the WELA [Western English Language Arts] program, and there's no recognition whatsoever that these kids speak Inuktitut.... I cannot follow the curriculum.*

The NWT LASCE (1982) report recommended that funding be made available for the development of ESL programs and resources and to increase the number of professional development days to provide in-service ESL training. The report warned that few teachers had any training teaching ESL, that resources had primarily been intended for EFL speakers, and that “teaching English, and only English, as if it were a Native child’s first language is detrimental to learning” (p. 97).

One participant, who acknowledged that forcing children to learn in their second language was the problem, described the consequences of unrealistic expectations of unprepared teachers.

*They call their Skidoos “machines” or “Skidoos.” I used the word “snowmobile” one day and one of my brightest students said, “What’s a snowmobile?” ... You have to modify things and you have to meet your class where they are and try to get them along from there. If you’re coming in expecting to meet them at a regular grade 2 level or grade 5 level or grade 7 level, then you’re just going to be butting your head against the wall all year, and wasting their time and wasting your time, and making them develop into all kinds of behavior problems that happen in junior high.*

Tompkins (1998), principal for four years of a K-10 school in Nunavut, wrote that misjudging students’ language and cognitive abilities, aiming work “too high” or “too low,” and consequently facing severe discipline problems are common problems of Qallunaat teachers in Nunavut schools. The NWT LASCE (1982) report cautioned that if teachers were untrained in ESL, they “may mistakenly regard some children as retarded and in need of remedial work” (p. 98), and Sharp (1994) echoed the concern that Indigenous people are labeled as *handicapped* by dominant culture teachers who do not realize that the problem is of an ESL nature.

It is not difficult to see how programming that seems irrelevant to students’ lives or work that is too easy or too difficult would be a disincentive for students to go to school, would contribute to frustration and boredom, and would lead to disruptive behavior. In Tompkins’ (1998) words, “the more relevant the program, the more individualized and varied the programming, the less reason students had to misbehave” (p. 56). She felt that making schools responsive and welcoming would increase attendance and punctuality and that this connection might be the basis for setting criteria for judging a school’s success (Joanne Tompkins, personal communication, October, 2004).

### *Inadequate Pedagogy*

*You walk into the classroom the first day—what do you do? You’re not prepared for this kind of stuff, and there’s no book and there’s no guide. Most of the kids haven’t got a clue what you’re talking about.... We need something to train the teachers to get to these kids. The kids say, “we don’t read,” “we don’t talk,” “we don’t sing,” so how do we get to them? There’s got to be a way to get to them.*

It takes an enormous amount of energy for ESL learners to tackle language and content at the same time (Joanne Tompkins, personal communication, October, 2004), and many participants expressed frustration at their inability to teach Inuit effectively in their second language. Falconer and Byrnes (2003) noted that for multicultural educators, "without the necessary professional development and mentoring, good intentions will not translate into action" (p. 198). The literature is replete with calls for an adequate orientation and ongoing inservice education to ensure that southern teachers in the North have some understanding of both Inuit culture and sound teaching approaches for use with ESL Inuit students. In 1973 the Arctic Institute of North America reported that teachers in the North were not properly prepared to do their jobs and called for an extension of the two- to three-week orientation period. In 1982 the NWT LASCE report recommended that "a teacher orientation program shall be established immediately" (p. 109), the previous "inadequately long" program having been entirely abandoned in the interim. It cautioned:

Disciplinary problems may also occur in conflicts of will between persons of different cultures, as might happen when a new teacher arrives without proper preparation in a small community.... Southern teachers come to northern schools with little or no knowledge of the Native cultures, little or no training in cross-cultural education, little or no understanding of instruction in a second language, and unable to make proper use of a classroom assistant. (pp. 29, 31)

Stairs (1991) believed that without a teacher orientation, it was the students who suffered the consequences of the rift between their prior learning experiences and how they must learn in school. She wrote that in culture-based Native education programs, teachers' "ways of teaching are as important as the knowledge itself" (p. 287), and Leavitt (1991) maintained that native culture should be "the basis of pedagogy itself" (p. 266), and Kawagely (1993) suggested that in Alaskan schools, "teachers must be willing to learn at least the rudiments of the Native language and culture in order to do an effective job of teaching" (p. 162).

Cultural differences can be fundamental such as a collective, cooperative orientation versus an individualistic, competitive orientation (Stairs, 1991). Major differences in how Inuit teachers interact with their classes were noted by Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1994), with modeling, demonstration, repetition, and imitation as key teaching-learning strategies and the almost total absence of typical Qallunaat questioning techniques. Cultural differences "become boundaries between the teachers and the students with ensuing resistance to schooling on the part of the learners" (p. 44). When Qallunaat teachers mistake helping for cheating, for example, they may reprimand Inuit students (Crago, Eriks-Brophy, Pesco, & McAlpine, 1997), causing self-esteem to suffer and students to rebel.

Cultural miscues and the misinterpretation of language difficulties may result in teachers underestimating students' abilities: "*We really have to stress to teachers who come up to our community, these are ESL students, they*

*don't speak in English as their first language and they're not dumb.*" In Crago's (1992) study in northern Quebec, one southern teacher admitted, "one day I just couldn't stand their silence any longer, I ended up shaking this Inuk boy and screaming, "Talk to me for heaven's sake"" (p. 497). Loss of self-esteem may result from lower teacher expectations, poorer treatment of Inuit students, and an overreliance on the teaching of basic skills (Bernhard, 1995; Clifton & Roberts, 1988; Cummins, 1986; Falconer & Byrnes, 2003).

Although an orientation and continuing support for non-Inuit teachers would not ensure appropriate responses to Inuit students or effective teaching across language and culture, their lack virtually guarantees that misunderstandings and frustrations will occur. For students these must make the prospect of attending school less inviting.

### *Improving Current Practice*

#### *Better Curriculum and Resources*

Along with expressions of frustration and calls for the creation of new northern curriculum, participants described adapting and modifying, and in some cases disregarding, curriculum to better meet the needs of students: "*we need to throw away the curriculum.... We have to teach to the students, not the curriculum.*" Incorporating activities that Inuit excel at and enjoy was also suggested:

*They come to the gym and then there's a place where they can excel, and it's almost all of them excel there. So I think it's good to have phys ed, and a lot of it, so it actually creates some sort of balance where they're not struggling all the time at school.... Some students might be doing academically poorly and they come into the gym and they're brilliant, so it's a real boost for them; it's something that they really need.*

Inuit games and activities like igloo-building (led by Elders) were also included in this teacher's physical education classes. These curriculum choices honored that for Inuit "early physical competence of children is more highly valued than the display of spoken language" (Crago, 1992, p. 500).

Several participants described extracurricular programs as important to students, as well as a special program to ease the transition from home to school by starting Monday mornings with integrated, nonacademic activities:

*Some kids square-danced, some did butterflies, some did beadmaking, all different things. Some did drama. They just loved that time, and it gave them a time when they could come in and just feel safe and not have to think about anything academic, just do something fun ... we never, ever had any discipline problems during that time.*

Programming and student resistance are related; work done to make schools more engaging will reduce friction.

That most participants problematized curriculum is incongruent with Goddard's (2002) finding that in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan some

educators were uncritical of curriculum, but supports his assertion that “anecdotal data suggest that northern educators are at the forefront of curriculum development that is culturally and linguistically appropriate” (p. 131). Results from this study indicate that much of the adaptation and creation that took place did so without official recognition or support. This type of action carries the risk of censure (Cummins, 1988; Tompkins, 1998). A major effort should be undertaken to develop northern curricula and resources locally, and policy should make explicit that teachers should use their professional judgment in prioritizing the needs of students rather than adhering to a set curriculum.

### *More Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

*Do not discipline someone with the whole class or group of people being aware of it. You would just approach the student or ask the student to come to you and then you would tell them to correct their behavior or tell them that you are upset with them. You do it one-on-one. You wouldn't do it with the whole class hearing you say a negative thing about that student.*

This attending to cultural modes of interaction has more positive potential to help students succeed than just making changes to what is being taught (Stairs, 1994). Several examples of a conscious effort to honor Inuit cultural norms in the classroom were reported. Two culture programs, both reported as highly successful, were structured with small groups and seasonally appropriate activities taught by Inuit elders. In one case,

*We used to have a program where ... the man would work with all the boys and the woman would work with all the girls and they were large groups and we found it wasn't working very well. The kids were disrespectful to them and they weren't producing anything interesting, so we said, "what's wrong with this?" and we said, "how do Elder Inuit really teach?" They don't teach large groups of kids in classrooms, they would be teaching one-on-one or small groups, and they'd be demonstrating.... [so] they work in a small group of four or five kids and we have five staff doing cultural inclusion.... It's been highly successful.*

Other participants described the successful use of hands-on activities and said that increased possibilities for responsibility and freedom of movement worked well with Inuit students. Inuuqatigiit (NWTECE, 1996) provided support for the idea that learners should be free to move around more than in traditional Qallunaat settings: “participation and being actively involved will hold a child(s) interests longer than sitting at a desk doing sheetwork” (p. 24).

Additional practices reported as successful included pacing work appropriately, teaching through relevant themes, and creating relationships with students through sharing food.

Stairs (1991) wrote that in traditional Inuit education, personal relationships between teachers and learners were important and the teacher should be seen as part of the team. Lipka (1991) described a successful

Yup'ik teacher who had created a "familiar and comfortable environment" (p. 230), and Clifton and Roberts (1988) found that "effective teachers of Inuit students create emotionally warm and personable classroom environments" (p. 332). Sharing food is also a traditional Inuit practice that created community and symbolized interdependence (Minor, 1992; Tompkins, 1998).

Many steps may be taken by teachers and administrators that will immediately improve the quality of school experience for Inuit students, even in the absence of a significant shift toward community control, major curricular reform, or a change in the language of instruction (Henze & Vanett, 1993). An effective orientation and ongoing inservicing was desired and would benefit non-Inuit educators immensely in discovering culturally relevant, ESL-sensitive best practices. The attractiveness of school would increase, with the likelihood of improved attendance and punctuality and increased student success and well-being.

#### *Colonialism Past and Present*

"Nunavut schools are essentially a foreign institution ... delivering a foreign curriculum ... in a foreign language" (McAuley, 1991, p. 45). Colonialism and colonialist attitudes characterized early contact between Europeans and Inuit (Brody, 1991; Grygier, 1994; Tester & Kulchyski, 1994), and today "colonization goes on within the interactions between Qallunaat and Inuit on a daily basis" (Tompkins, 2002, p. 419). Early residential schools in the Canadian Arctic caused dislocation of families and loss of culture (Tompkins, 1998). The early day schools played an important role in forcing Inuit to move from dispersed camps to larger communities, a strategy that the federal government used to strengthen Canada's claim to sovereignty in the north (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994).

Movement of Inuit into communities structured on southern norms occurred mainly during the 1950s and 1960s, precipitating rapid cultural change and concomitant confusion and alienation (Minor, 1992; Reimer, 1996). Inuit "did not immigrate to a different cultural context thinking that they might have to change their ways in order to fit into ... a foreign country.... They had to deal with forced assimilation into the new and alien society" (Witt, 1998, p. 269). They became what Ogbu (1989) termed an "involuntary minority." With permanent housing replacing seasonal dwellings; wage labor competing with subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering; snowmobiles replacing dog teams; and cable television bringing images of the south, Inuit culture had to adapt rapidly. This may have resulted in "an incongruity of cultural values" (Sampath, 1992, p. 146). Minor wrote that the changes particularly affect the young.

Today young Inuit are surrounded by conveniences of white society.... The youth are not only lost in the confusing aspects of a foreign culture but also find themselves in a cultural vacuum where the elderly are powerless to help them.... The youth so wish to be true Inuit, but their Levi jeans and Hudson's Bay jackets are just not strong enough to allow them this

freedom. So much of what the youth depend on takes away their Inuit culture and channels them in a direction of uncertainty. (pp. 80-81)

Poverty, gambling, child abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse in Indigenous communities are connected to colonialism, with dysfunctional aspects of contemporary Indigenous culture traceable in part to the influence of the schools themselves<sup>2</sup> (Chisholm, 1994; Darnell & Hoem, 1996; Henze & Vanett, 1993; Hookimaw-Witt, 1998; Witt, 1998).

The events that precipitated great changes in Inuit society are recent enough to be the lived histories of parents and grandparents of school-aged children. The same schools that were used to force Inuit from the land into the communities were attended by people living today. Kaujak Katsak (Wachowich, 1999) described her early experiences in a school in Igloodik as follows.

When I went to school, when I came off the land, everything changed for me all at once... As soon as I stepped into the school system, these rules were all forced upon me, and it was a very difficult period. They taught us a new culture, a different culture from our own. They taught us that we had to live like the white people, we had to become like the white people. (pp. 194-195)

Schools were not and are not neutral institutions; they remain instruments of assimilation to Western culture (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998). Today garnering wide parental support for consistent attendance and punctuality may be especially difficult, as an imposed and foreign standard of punctuality and attendance (whether at work or at school) typified the types of changes forced on Indigenous peoples in adapting from a subsistence to a wage economy (Ryan, 1989). For some they must remain highly visible symbols of culture loss, reminders of the dominance of others and the ongoing pressure to complete the process of assimilation into Qallunaat culture. If universal benefit was gained with this new structure, support might be more consistent, but there is high unemployment in many Nunavut communities, and many families' schedules still do not revolve around wage labor (Joanne Tompkins, personal communication, 2001). It is, therefore, likely that resistance to the "dominant Euro-Canadian standards" (Ryan, p. 390) will persist, and it will not be surprising if some parents are ambivalent or unsupportive of the schools, leading to poorer student performance (Cummins, 1988; Ogbu, 1992). Neither will it be surprising if Inuit students "resist the oppression ... and drop out of school ... to maintain a sense of dignity and choice" (Goulet, 2001, pp. 68-69).

In the context of Aboriginal education in Australia, Harris (1990) wrote that attendance is important for achievement in Western schools. If part of the function of schooling is to prepare students to function in Western culture, then the Western valuing of punctuality and attendance must be taught. In his model of two-way schooling, the Western domain would not be given precedence, and the values would be taught as necessary for

survival in that domain, not as being intrinsically valuable or superior. Although the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (1992) expressed a mandate for schools to strengthen Inuit cultural identity as well as to include Western knowledge and values in schooling, most Qallunaat educators see being on time and attending school consistently as intrinsically good, rather than as values associated primarily with Qallunaat culture. Treating them as such, their unexamined imposition on students and communities may be experienced as maintaining a colonial attitude and may be resisted on those grounds.

The expectation that Inuit will conform to the norms of the schools, what Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1994) called a “pressure for assimilation” (p. 44), is colonial in effect if not in intent. In the study educators expressed understanding of why Inuit parents might not appear to support the schools while they say they wish to increase their support. Unfortunately, as Crago, Annahatak, and Ningiuruvik (1993) wrote, Inuit parents are often willing to try to accommodate school culture, even going as far as changing the way they speak with their children, whereas the schools are not often willing to move toward the values and ways of Inuit. However well intentioned, trying to move Inuit toward Qallunaat school values assimilates them into the dominant culture. Rasmussen (2001) decried this unconsciousness: “We must give up the blind belief of our cultural superiority and cease to force our Euro-American values, institutions, technologies, and lifestyles on other civilizations in the name of progress” (p. 114). If Western skills are to be learned, Hookimaw-Witt (1998) wrote that it should be done “on the basis of the Native perspective” (p. 162). Inculcating Qallunaat values from a base in Qallunaat pedagogy without a clear Inuit mandate to do so continues the colonial enterprise.

Beyond practices that assimilate Inuit to Qallunaat culture, many practices in Nunavut schools disadvantage Inuit children and forecast failure and discipline problems. Their continued existence raises serious questions about whether Nunavut schools are in fact designed to foster the success of Inuit students. Problems include a lack of Inuit role models as teachers in the prestigious upper grades, the use of English as the main medium of instruction, and the inability of Qallunaat teachers to communicate with their students in culturally compatible ways (Crago, 1992; Stairs, 1991). An example of a specific practice that disadvantages Inuit students is the departmental exam created in Alberta, which must be passed by students for high school graduation. Participants reported that the exams are culturally biased and unsuitable for ESL students. This type of assessment is completely incongruous with traditional Inuit assessment (Corson, 1992; Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1994; Kawagely, 1995; Stairs, 1994). Here, as in other jurisdictions, minorities are disadvantaged by standardized tests that do not take into account their context, learning style (Perrone, 2000), or ESL status (Goddard, 2002). Stairs and Bernhard (2002)

called testing “a western cultural artifact” that at its worst “epitomizes the colonial mindset that continues to plague us all and particularly alienate and disrespect Aboriginal peoples” (p. 314). Corson wrote, “minority peoples often see this preoccupation with assessment and evaluation as a strange interest at best, and as a culturally offensive obsession at worst” (p. 491). Where access to goods and status is limited by credentials, structuring access to these credentials through high-stakes tests that disadvantage Inuit students is indefensible.

Schools in Nunavut are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education, part of the government of Nunavut, elected by the people of Nunavut who are mostly Inuit. For many years locally elected district education authorities have had considerable power in determining policy such as discipline codes and in hiring principals and teachers. It might, therefore, be argued that vestiges of colonialism have been, or are in the process of being, removed: that the schools under Inuit control will become Inuit schools. Although this possibility may exist, it is certainly not inevitable. Orr, Paul, and Paul (2002) argued that in Aboriginal education, “the problem of how to define control has been muddled and elusive” and pointed out that “despite the fact that Aboriginal peoples may have governance over their own schools, taking control of their schools has not been easy” (p. 332).

Tompkins (2002) suggested that “the legacy of colonialism had left tremendous power imbalances between Inuit and Qallunaat” (p. 407), which may be of central importance when issues of control are considered. Coupled with the recent adoption of Western values (Crago, 1992; Maguire & McAlpine, 1996), the Inuit tendency to accept authority (Anahatak, 1994; Briggs, 1970; Brody, 2000; Napartuk, 2002; Tester & Kulchyski, 1994), individuals’ own “proclivity to conformity” (Kawagely, 1995, p. 100), institutional demands for traditional indicators of “effective” schooling “perhaps meant to hinder the real transfer of control” (Kirkness, 1998; Maguire & McAlpine, 1996), and cultural differences in decision-making processes (Douglas, 1994), it is apparent that much work will need to be done before schools in Nunavut are truly controlled by Inuit. They remain foreign institutions.

The colonial history of the Eastern Arctic and the current state of Nunavut schools give grounds to expect that resistance will persist and contribute to punctuality and attendance concerns as well as other classroom management issues and poor student performance.

#### *Decolonizing the Schools*

Although none of the participants spoke directly of colonialism, several described lack of parental support as an understandable consequence of poor personal experiences in the school system, recent rapid changes in culture, and the feeling that schools are foreign entities. Participants described attempts to generate support from parents such as holding a

curriculum night, an ice cream social, an activity night, or eat-lunch-with-your-child days. These cannot be viewed as decolonizing, although they were reported to be effective in increasing support and success for individual students, classes, or schools.

Two reported approaches did seem to be more decolonizing. In one a participant said that the school now employs 10 Inuit teachers. Benefits described included teachers and students speaking the same language, *"which is a huge bonus,"* as well as easier contact with the community and an increase in the presence of Elders in classrooms. Most important, *"it also means that the community is not viewing the school as some external force being used against them; it's their school, their people are running the school. I think that helps a lot."* These benefits resonate with the literature (Barnhardt, 1999; Kirkness, 1999; Stairs, 1991; Tompkins, 1998). Increasing the number of Inuit teachers is decolonizing when it shifts schools toward community control, allows Inuit values to be more easily brought into classrooms, and offers the possibility of teaching taking place in culturally compatible ways (Stairs, 1994). Orr et al. (2002) wrote that a necessary part of decolonizing Mi'kmaw education included bringing "Aboriginal cultural practical knowledge onto the school landscape" (p. 333). When hiring Inuit teachers is made a priority, Inuit cultural practical knowledge is gained. Although many authors have commented on the ability of minority teachers to interact with students in culturally compatible ways, increasing student well-being and learning (Corson, 1992; Lipka, 1991; NWT LASCE, 1982; Stairs, 1991), this is not always supported by Qallunaat schools and cannot be taken for granted (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1994; Lipka et al., 1998).

The other decolonizing practice reported was soliciting community input.

*We totally changed our cultural inclusion program, and we actually got community people in to say what they wanted the kids to learn in cultural inclusion. Some men saying what should a boy know by the time he's 10, by the time he's 11 in different fields such as meat preparation, hunting, trapping, carving, all these different things.... it's been highly successful.*

In this case, the community's voice was heard, which according to the educator who described it, helped lead to a successful program. Involving the community meaningfully in decisions is decolonizing and has the potential to alter community perception of the schools and student behavior in them.

That so little community consultation was described by participants is worrisome. It is believed that local control of education is necessary, not just for student success (Harris, 1990; Ogbu, 1992; Watahomigie & McCarty, 1994), but for the cultural survival of minority groups (Harris; Hornberger, 1997; Lipka, 1989; Lopez, 1996). Short of communities assuming complete control of schooling, many authors have discussed a negotia-

tion of schooling that would encourage meaningful community input and agency (Armstrong, Bennet, & Grenier, 1997; Barnhardt, 1999; Corson, 1992; Douglas, 1994; Goulet, 2001; Lipka, 1989, 1994; Stairs, 1991, 1994; Williamson, 1987). Although there are many barriers to community agency, and Lipka (1989) warned that communities must lead in changing curriculum, we suggest moving toward consultation at multiple levels, with individual teachers, schools, regions, and the Department of Education all initiating discourse to determine what roles parents and community members see for the schools and to explore how to move in these directions. Actively pursuing meaningful community consultation will help adapt schools to community culture and help gain community support. As well as being fair, this should increase student success (Ogbu, 1992).

With true community control, what happens in certain aspects of schooling might surprise educators, especially in the area of time, as the structure of schooling might be altered so radically that punctuality and attendance would become non-issues (Harris, 1990). First Nations author Nicholas (1996) wrote that many Western and First Nations values are diametrically opposed and that "to promote the idea that the two value systems are perfectly compatible serves no one but those in power who stand to benefit from colonialism and the values which support it" (p. 63). Hookimaw-Witt (1998) also felt that "Native control of education is only valuable for Native people when the whole education system changes and is based on Native culture" (p. 165). A whole new system may be needed, although Ryan (1989) cautioned that the framework of Canadian society in which the schools function is so powerful that the possibility of developing real alternatives may be limited. Inherent in the true transfer of control would be relinquishing Qallunaat criteria for measuring the effectiveness of schools in favor of locally defined standards (Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). Significant local control under the umbrella of strong central leadership that is committed to being inclusive may ultimately be needed to decolonize Nunavut schools (Joanne Tompkins, personal communication, October, 2004). True Inuit control may be possible only in the context of a broader society that is decolonized and truly multicultural.

### *Conclusion*

Many factors are involved in the issues of punctuality, attendance, and underachievement in Nunavut schools. They are predictable and problematic consequences of the history, values, and current practices of Qallunaat schools in Nunavut. Given the colonial nature of early contact and the roles schools have played and still play in assimilating Inuit, it is not surprising that some parents do not support the schools and that this is reflected in their children's performance and behavior. Given teachers who feel unprepared, who lack ESL training, and who are required to teach from inappropriate curriculum, classroom management problems

and underachievement should be expected, including lateness, frequent absences, and dropping out. Given the cultural differences related to time and structure, attendance and punctuality are logical points of conflict, and inasmuch as they remain unexamined will continue to cause tension.

Although the schools in anything like their present structures are probably unable to teach the Western domain while strengthening Inuit identity and culture (Henze & Vanett, 1993), some directions for action will work toward decolonizing education in Nunavut, making it more effective and culturally compatible. Educators in the study communicated tremendous frustration, dedication, and innovation in their attempts to make the schools work for their students, reporting many current and desired practices that resonated with the literature on successful practices in bicultural educational settings. They need ongoing support from their schools, centers of school operations, and the Department of Education to maximize their contributions to the transformation of the schools into places where students thrive and succeed.

It must become a common project. Most important, community consultation and control should be actively pursued; once schooling is negotiated and broad goals are defined, questions of curriculum and pedagogy can be determined that will further these goals. When punctuality, attendance, and achievement concerns are no longer so predictable, it may be because Qallunaat schools have made real strides toward becoming Inuit schools.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>By Qallunaat schools we mean schools structured like schools in southern Canada as opposed to schools with large numbers of non-Inuit students or teachers. Some elementary schools in Nunavut are in fact staffed mostly by Inuit, but still function on a southern model.

<sup>2</sup>Although this may help us understand its origins, Sorensen (1998) cautioned against using the "master narrative" of culture change to remove human agency and excuse harmful individual behavior.

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