LITERACY & DEMOCRACY

Is improving literacy the key to Northern Canada’s political & economic future?

THOMAS R. BERGER reflects on the 40th anniversary of the Calder decision & the power of modern treaties

The NUNAVUT LITERACY COUNCIL on stitching together literacy, culture & well-being through non-formal learning

MARCUS JACKSON on the Great Northern Arts Festival & the future of art in the Northwest Territories

Qikiqtani Truth Commission
BETHANY SCOTT, JULIE HARRIS & DAVID JOANASIE

China & the Arctic Council
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Reflections on 40 years representing Inuit
TAGAK CURLEY

Recognition, reconciliation & resentment
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Expanding possibilities for Inuktitut language literacy
MARY CAROLINE ROWAN

The decline of federal literacy programs
BRIGID HAYES

The Northern Alliance for Literacy & Essential Skills
KIM CROCKATT, HELEN BALANOFF & BETH MULLOY

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“When we come here, I don’t think it’s just all about ourselves. When I come here, my gosh, well I’ve been here 18 years, but if you can come here and even be here for one year and not take on a territorial perspective on issues, then you probably shouldn’t be here. If you’re here only about your people that you represent and not everybody else, and I’ve seen that, everybody comes here with a territorial view, and there are days where we fight about this and that and we feel like sometimes we’re getting overpowered by rural and remote communities, or [the] Yellowknife Caucus, there’s days that we feel that. But overall, and by and large, I believe that people come here with a perspective of the good of the territory. So in that sense, I don’t think we can count, oh well, they’ve got three times the amount of voice or three times the amount of representation in this House as somebody else.”

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On October 28, 2013, Nunavummiut went to the polls and elected twenty-two independent members to Nunavut’s fourth Assembly. Since 1999, Nunavut has operated under a form of consensus government derived, in part, from the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. Under that system, the speaker, premier, and cabinet are chosen by the newly elected members in a leadership forum in the weeks following the territorial election.

Nunavut’s fourth leadership forum was held on November 15, 2013. Nominees for premier, Paul Okalik (Iqaluit-Sinaa), Paul Quassa (Aggu), and Peter Taptuna (Kugluktuk), laid out their visions for Nunavut under their leadership. After a long day of questions and discussion, Peter Taptuna was elected premier in a secret ballot. George Qulaut (Amittuq) was acclaimed as Speaker, while nine cabinet ministers were selected – an increase from the previous eight.

In some ways, the 2013 Nunavut election could be characterized as one of change. Taptuna is Nunavut’s first premier fluent in Inuinnaqtun and to represent a riding outside of Iqaluit. There was a 68% turnover from the previous Assembly. The number of women in the Assembly has not changed, and because of the increase in total members, the proportion of female MLAs has, in fact, decreased.

In other ways, this Assembly is already showing signs of continuity. Taptuna was the only nominee who served in the previous assembly, and his top priorities in his responses at the leadership forum — education, economic development, and housing — are not markedly different than those of his predecessor, Eva Aariak. The new cabinet has a mixture of new and experienced MLAs, including both Quassa and Okalik, the latter serving as Nunavut’s first premier from 1999 to 2008.

Consensus government was, at one time, defended as an important innovation in Northern governance, reflecting both the flexibility of the Westminster parliamentary system and traditional Indigenous values. Today, in both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, consensus government is facing increasing criticism for its political and legislative outcomes.

The absence of political parties, for example, means there is no formal mechanism for developing a coherent, broadly-shared vision for the future of the territory going into an election. Instead, voters elect regular MLAs who in turn elect the premier and cabinet. These MLAs may or may not share similar views, let alone priorities, and so it is up to the premier to marshal the necessary coherence in cabinet while voters are left on the sidelines to watch the process unfold.

Of course, a formal party system is not necessarily the solution to this problem. A slate of candidates running on a common platform could emerge to challenge the status quo. But such a group would face the difficulties of long distance organizing if it wished to field candidates across the territory, not to mention the work of implementing its vision in a legislature built for consensus rather than partisan decision-making.

The selection of Nunavut’s premier by secret ballot has also become increasingly problematic. Members of the public and media are unable to vet nominees for premier during the election period, nor during the leadership forum. And while MLAs do ask questions of the nominees, candidates’ comprehensive visions for Nunavut remain obscure and, usually, unarticulated. In addition, during the election, most candidates for MLA remain mum about their leadership plans, further obstructing the public’s ability to evaluate potential premiers, ministers, and, ultimately, to take the measure of a future government. The informational burden on the electorate is significant.

This brings us to our special section on literacy in this issue, curated by the Nunavut Literacy Council, the NWT Literacy Council, and the Yukon Literacy Coalition. A healthy democratic politics requires an educated and literate population. Consensus government demands an engaged electorate, one that can analyze the political positions of candidates in twenty-two ridings. Without the benefit of political parties, or the direct election of the premier, the informational burden on Nunavummiut is high.

Education was a central issue for Inuit in the struggle for Nunavut, and it remained central in the 2013 Nunavut territorial election. Candidates took positions on social promotion in schools, standard-setting, and legislative reform, while training and adult education also registered on candidates’ platforms. In one of the election’s great upsets, former premier and education minister Eva Aariak was defeated by George Hickes Jr. who ran to make education a top priority. And, as noted above, the newly elected MLAs in turn brought their concerns about education to the leadership forum in November.

Across Northern Canada, literacy programming is helping to address the basic needs of many Northerners with already low literacy and essential skills. Literacy is the bedrock of any informed citizenry, denoting not only the ability to read and write, but also the ability to function in and critically analyze the world.

Unfortunately, while Northern literacy organizations are leading the way in developing innovative and culturally relevant programs, the federal government appears to be downgrading literacy among its policy priorities. As Brigid Hayes argues in this issue, the federal government’s narrow focus on training for the labour market through the Canada Jobs Grant, coupled with budget cuts and under spending, is likely to reduce access to programming for the most vulnerable.

Consensus politics — or any democratic politics, for that matter — cannot function properly without an educated and literate population. For this reason, those candidates who were elected on a platform to improve education deserve the support of the entire legislature. Let us hope they will be successful in spite of the challenges of consensus government. ☑
Election signs in Iqaluit, Nunavut, October, 2013.
Enhancing literacy innovation in the North: The Northern Alliance for Literacy and Essential Skills

Kim Crockatt with Helen Balanoff & Beth Mulloy

In today’s world we think about literacy differently than we did in the past. Literacy used to mean only reading and writing (usually in English). Today it means much more. It includes all the basic skills that people need for life, and it reflects the cultures and society that we live in. This makes literacy, and the work of literacy organizations, complex; yet this work is essential to alleviating the challenges of poverty, productivity, and social and economic development in the North. Literacy impacts the well-being of individuals, families and communities. It is integral to the workforce and to the effectiveness of education and training programs.

Evidence that Ilitaqsiniq—the Nunavut Literacy Council, the NWT Literacy Council, and the Yukon Literacy Coalition have collected demonstrates that changes in policy and practice to reflect this newer understanding of literacy, such as contextualizing literacy programs, can substantially improve the literacy levels of Northerners and increase economic growth. Learners of all ages need a variety of formal and non-formal, long-term, stable, and predictable programs in order to reach their potential. Despite considerable evidence that these programs are effective, they lack scale. Most operate on short-term, project-based funding, or operate as pilot projects with no real means of sustainability. Organizations that deliver such programs often have limited capacity. All three Northern literacy coalitions have a strong focus on empowering community members to design and deliver programs, and they spend much of their time seeking funding to create more sustainable programming.

This is an exciting time in the North. There is a renewed sense of growth and optimism. Made in the North confirmed for all of us the need to create a network to share our ideas, expertise and energy. It also confirmed that changes in policy and practice can substantially improve the well-being of Northerners. As a result, the three literacy coalitions have formed the Northern Alliance for Literacy and Essential Skills, or NALES. The goal is to build on our existing network to share knowledge, resources and research, and foster innovation in the field of literacy and essential skills.

Complex Northern issues require made in the North, community-driven approaches. Through NALES we are building a network to connect all the key stakeholders who have important roles to play in the work of building strong resilient communities.

Kim Crockatt is the Executive Director of Ilitaqsiniq - Nunavut Literacy Council. Helen Balanoff is the Executive Director of the Northwest Territories Literacy Council. Beth Mulloy is the Executive Director of the Yukon Literacy Coalition.
Views of the Mary Hakongak Community Library and Cultural Centre, October 2013.
Mr. Curley (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, this historic journey was not just about strengthening our culture; it was also about a public government, a public government which would be closer to home, which would involve more Inuit in the decision-making process, and elect leaders directly from Nunavut communities, hopefully.

About 40 years ago, most would be more understanding about our challenges locally. I can also recall maybe if we were to be put in a position that we would be able to help our people. I remember being a lone advocate seeking support for dividing the NWT and working towards this goal for years.

No one lined up to take the honour of being on the front lines to receive and reflect the first negative, discouraging shots of many experts. For instance, in English, they would say that that’s a noble idea. That means it’s not likely going to happen. However, I wasn’t going to let this slip from my mind and hands. The snowball, once rolled, never stays the same size. The rest is history.

The moment has arrived for me. Even though we had hard times, I could say that the moment has arrived for me to speak to my constituents, elders, and youth of Rankin Inlet North that my wife, Sally, and I have been honoured to represent and serve you for many years. You have been most supportive and understanding, not only to me as well as my wife. When I didn’t want to come back to politics in 2004, I was encouraged by the elders. For two years, I didn’t agree, but my wife and I can say “thank you” and I’m very grateful.

While I have some energy, strength to think, work, and stand, I ask my constituents of Rankin Inlet to allow me to stay closer to my family, our grandchildren, our daughters, and our sons. We want to be able to have some time for ourselves. For that reason, I would like to say that I have discussed this with my wife, Sally, and close personal friends.
We prayed together to get some guidance on that. I could say today that they will be electing a candidate for Rankin Inlet North. I will not be running.

I would like to also say “thank you” to all the people that I have worked with when there were a lot of challenges. I would like to say “thank you” to the ministers. Privately, we make sure that things we want are done.

I would like to say “thank you” to Lorne Kussugak, as well as James Arreak, not just here, but also from the NWT days.

I thank our Premier for assisting us and to want to assist the people of Nunavut.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say that Sally and I were here for about five years and before that, in 1999, and we were welcomed by the people. The elders from Iqaluit looked after us. We have made friends. I was told in a store by an elder, “I missed you very much.” We appreciate their support, including Sammie and Oolootie.

I would like to thank, Mr. Speaker, your staff and Mr. Quirke, as well as research staff and all the staff of the Legislative Assembly and the administration people on the third floor. In particular, I would like to thank the interpreters. They do a very hard job and have made our work easier.

Lastly, I would like to thank my constituency assistants in Rankin Inlet. I would instruct them to welcome anyone who walks into their offices. Bernadette Dean, who is always receptive there whenever we meet there and whenever I’m in town and whenever anyone walks in. That makes all of us happy and that is why I thank Bernadette for always welcoming with open arms.

The day has arrived, Mr. Speaker, when being elected in Nunavut is not the only job that has to be done, so I’ll take the opportunity to be more relaxed. I want to say to the people of Rankin Inlet that they will be voting for a slate with more than one candidate and that Sally and I will also vote there. We both wish to say thank you to all of you. This legislature in Nunavut is unique in Canada and very young. It is still a work in progress and I thank all of you.

>>Applause

Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Curley.
The Hon. Tagak Curley represented Rankin Inlet North from 2004 to 2013.
Tagak Curley was the first president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (now Inuit Tapirisit Kanatami). He was MLA for Keewatin South (later Aivilik) from 1979 to 1987, holding numerous cabinet posts including minister of economic development and tourism, minister of mines and resources secretariat, minister of public utilities, and minister of government services. He held leadership positions with the Inuit Cultural Institute, Nunasi Corporation, and the Nunavut Construction Corporation. Between 2004 and 2013 he served as MLA for Rankin Inlet North, holding cabinet positions as minister of health and social services, minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, and government house leader. Curley was awarded the Order of Canada in 2003 for his devotion to the economic and political development of the North.
I am now concluding my visit to Canada in my capacity as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Over the last nine days I have met with federal and provincial government authorities, and with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis leaders, organizations and individuals in several parts of the country. In addition to being in Ottawa, my meetings have taken me to various places, including Indigenous territories, in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Québec.

I am grateful to the Government of Canada for its cooperation and for the information it has provided, and for allowing me to carry out my visit freely and in an independent manner. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to representatives of Indigenous peoples who invited me to visit their territories and communities across Canada, and to those Indigenous organizations and individuals who assisted me in organizing parts of my agenda. Finally, I especially want to thank the Indigenous peoples with whom I met for sharing with me their stories, concerns and aspirations. I am honored to have been welcomed into their communities and territories, and am truly humbled by their hospitality and warmth.

Over the past several days, I have collected a significant amount of information from Indigenous peoples and government representatives across the country. In the following weeks, I will be reviewing the extensive information I have received during the visit in order to develop a report to evaluate the situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to make a series of recommendations. This report will be made public, and will be presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council. I hope that this report will be of use to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, as well as to the Government of Canada, to help find solutions to ongoing challenges that Indigenous, or Aboriginal, peoples in the country face. In advance of this report, I would like to now provide some preliminary observations and recommendations on the basis of what I have observed during my visit. These do not reflect the full range of issues that were brought to my attention, nor do they reflect all of the initiatives on the part of federal and provincial governments related to Indigenous issues.

Canada, with its diverse and multicultural society, has been a leader on the world stage in the promotion of human rights since the creation of the United Nations in 1945. And it was one of the first countries in the modern era to extend constitutional protection to Indigenous peoples’ rights. This constitutional protection has provided a strong foundation for advancing Indigenous peoples’ rights over the last 30 years, especially through the courts. Federal and provincial governments have made notable efforts to address treaty and Aboriginal claims, and to improve the social and economic well-being of Indigenous peoples. Canada has also addressed some of the concerns that were raised by my predecessor following his visit in 2003. These include actions to remedy gender disparities in the Indian Act and to providing access to the Canadian Human Rights Commission for claims based on the Indian Act. Additionally, Canada has adopted the goal of reconciliation, to repair the legacy of past injustices, and has taken steps toward that goal.

But despite positive steps, daunting challenges remain. From all I have learned, I can only conclude that Canada faces a crisis when it comes to the situation of Indigenous peoples of the country. The well-being gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada has not narrowed over the last several years, treaty and Aboriginal claims remain persistently unresolved, and overall there appear to be high levels of distrust among Aboriginal peoples toward government at both the federal and provincial levels.

Canada consistently ranks near the top among countries with respect to human development standards, and yet amidst this wealth and prosperity,
Aboriginal people live in conditions akin to those in countries that rank much lower and in which poverty abounds. At least one in five Aboriginal Canadians live in homes in need of serious repair, which are often also overcrowded and contaminated with mould. The suicide rate among Inuit and First Nations youth on reserve, at more than five times greater than other Canadians, is alarming. One community I visited has suffered a suicide every six weeks since the start of this year. Aboriginal women are eight times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women, and Indigenous peoples face disproportionately high incarceration rates. For over a decade, the Auditor General has repeatedly highlighted significant funding disparities between on-reserve services and those available to other Canadians. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has consistently said that the conditions of Aboriginal peoples make for the most serious human rights problem in Canada.

It is clear to me that Canada is aware of and concerned about these issues, and that it is taking steps to address them. I have learned about numerous programs, policies and efforts that have been rolled out at the federal and provincial levels, and many of these have achieved notable successes. However, it is equally clear that these steps are insufficient, and have yet to fully respond to Aboriginal peoples’ urgent needs, fully protect their Aboriginal and treaty rights, or to secure relationships based on mutual trust and common purpose. Aboriginal peoples’ concerns and well-being merit higher priority at all levels and within all branches of government, and across all departments. Concerted measures, based on mutual understanding and real partnership with Aboriginal peoples, through their own representative institutions, are vital to the long-term resolution of these issues.

Importantly, Canada has taken action toward the goal of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians with the 2008 government apology for the residential schools and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been documenting the horrifying stories of abuse and cultural dislocation of Indigenous students who were forced from their homes into schools whose explicit purpose was to destroy their family and community bonds, their language, their culture, and their dignity, and from which thousands never returned. Generations of Aboriginal children grew up in residential schools estranged from their cultures and languages, with devastating effects on maintaining Indigenous identity. It is clear that the residential school period continues to cast a long shadow of despair on Indigenous communities, and that many of the dire social and economic problems faced by Aboriginal peoples are directly linked to that experience. I urge the Government to ensure that the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission be extended for as long as may be necessary for it to complete its work, and to consider establishing means of reconciliation and redress for survivors of all types of residential schools. In addition, I would like to emphasize that the mark on Canada’s history left by the residential schools is a matter of concern to all of Canada, not just Aboriginal peoples, and that lasting healing can only truly occur through building better relationships and understanding between Aboriginal peoples and the broader society.

Another aspect of the long shadow of residential schools, combined with other historical acts of oppression, is the disturbing phenomenon of Aboriginal women missing and murdered at the hands of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal assailants, whose cases have a much higher tendency to remain unresolved than those involving non-Aboriginal victims. Certainly, both federal and provincial governments have taken steps targeted at addressing various aspects of this issue. Yet over the past several days, in all of the places I have visited, I have heard from Aboriginal peoples a widespread lack of confidence in the effectiveness of those measures. I have heard a consistent call for a national level inquiry into the extent of the problem and appropriate solu-
tions moving forward with the participation of victims’ families and others deeply affected. I concur that a comprehensive and nation-wide inquiry into the issue could help ensure a coordinated response and the opportunity for the loved ones of victims to be heard, and would demonstrate a responsiveness to the concerns raised by the families and communities affected by this epidemic.

These and further steps are required to realize the promise of healing and a new relationship that was made in the 2008 apology. Among all the government and Aboriginal people with whom I have met, there is agreement that improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal people is a key to addressing many of the other problems facing them. I commend the governments at both levels for placing a high priority on education. However, I have heard remarkably consistent and profound distrust toward the First Nations Education Act being developed by the federal government, and in particular deep concerns that the process for developing the Act has not appropriately included nor responded to Aboriginal views. In light of this, I urge the Government not to rush forward with this legislation, but to re-initiate discussions with Aboriginal leaders to develop a process, and ultimately a bill, that addresses Aboriginal concerns and incorporates Aboriginal viewpoints on this fundamental issue. An equally important measure for improving educational outcomes, and one that could be implemented relatively quickly, is to ensure that funding delivered to Aboriginal authorities for education per student is at least equivalent to that available in the provincial educational systems.

As was stressed to me throughout my visit, it will be difficult to improve educational outcomes without addressing the substandard housing conditions in which many Aboriginal people live. Young people described to me the difficulty they have studying in small homes overcrowded by generations of family members. Other social problems have also been linked to these overcrowded conditions, including high rates of tuberculosis and other health problems, family violence, unemployment, and unwanted displacement to urban centres. Overcrowding of homes leads to increased wear and tear and the premature deterioration of existing housing stock, resulting in dilapidated and often unsafe housing conditions.

It is abundantly clear that funding for Aboriginal housing is woefully inadequate. The housing problem has a significant economic and social impact; the Chief of one community I visited indicated that if adequate housing were available, the vast majority of his community’s members with university degrees — nurses, teachers, engineers — would choose to return home. A woman from the same community who more typically had not had the opportunity to attend university, told me that as she became an adult she had no chance of having a house of her own, but rather was forced to remain in her parents home for years to come, with few prospects for developing a life on her own. “It is as if I’m not a person,” she said. I urge the Government to treat the housing situation on First Nations reserves and Inuit communities with the urgency it deserves. It simply cannot be acceptable that these conditions persist in the midst of a country with such great wealth.

By all accounts, increased investment in building self-governing capacity is essential to creating socially and economically healthy and self-sufficient Aboriginal communities. One hundred and thirty years of Indian Act policies persistently undermined — and in some cases continue to undermine — many First Nations’ and Inuit peoples’ historic self-governance capacity. Enhancing economic development opportunities is also crucial to restoring and building healthy and vibrant Aboriginal nations and communities. I acknowledge the many initiatives by Canada to strengthen Aboriginal governance and catalyze economic development. And I applaud the many successes a number of Aboriginal communities have had in building governance capacity and pursuing economic development opportunities.

But at the same time I note the frustration expressed to me uniformly by Aboriginal leaders that their self-governance capacity and economic development, and improved conditions more generally, remain impeded by the multiple legacies of the history of colonization, treaty infringements, assault on their cultures, and land dispossession suffered by their peoples. To address these legacies Canada has developed specific and comprehensive claims processes that in many respects are models for the world to emulate. There are noteworthy success stories arising out of these procedures. But in their implementation overall, the claims processes have been extremely slow and mired in challenges — challenges that appear in most cases to stem from the adversarial structure of negotiations, in which entrenched opposing positions often develop on key issues and agreement simply cannot be reached. To make this worse, resource development often proceeds at a rapid pace within lands that are the subject of protracted negotiations between Aboriginal peoples and the Government, undermining the very purpose of the negotiations.

The Government has rightly acknowledged problems with the claims processes. In 2008, it took action to reform the claims processes, including
by imposing a time limit for settlement of specific claims. I commend the Government’s recent efforts to establish high-level oversight committees on treaty and comprehensive claims, which I hope will help to address in a timely fashion many of the concerns shared by both Government and Indigenous peoples related to these processes. In this context, in re-thinking the available claims processes, I encourage the Government to take a less adversarial, position-based approach in which it typically seeks the most restrictive interpretation of Aboriginal and treaty rights possible. In this regard, the Government should instead acknowledge that the public interest is not opposed to, but rather includes, Aboriginal concerns. The goal of reconciliation that has been cited by the Government and Indigenous peoples alike requires a more generous and flexible approach that seeks to identify and create common ground. Further, as a general rule, resource extraction should not occur on lands subject to Aboriginal claims without adequate consultations with and the free, prior and informed consent of the Aboriginal peoples concerned.

More generally, greater efforts are needed to improve avenues of communication between Canada and Aboriginal peoples to build consensus on the path forward. In all my meetings with Aboriginal leaders and community members it was evident that there is a significant level of discontent with the state of relations with federal and provincial authorities, as well as a widely held perception that legislative and other decisions over multiple matters of concern to them are being taken without adequate consultation or consideration of their inherent and treaty rights. I urge the federal government especially to work with Aboriginal peoples, through their representative institutions and authorities, to overcome this condition of mistrust. As with the Education Act initiative mentioned earlier, unless legislative and other government actions that directly affect Indigenous peoples’ rights and interests are made with their meaningful participation, those actions will lack legitimacy and are likely to be ineffective.

In order for the Government to move forward to address the concerns of Indigenous peoples in partnership with them, it is necessary to arrive at a common understanding of objectives and goals that are based on full respect for Indigenous peoples’ constitutional, treaty, and internationally-recognized rights. Indigenous leaders from First Nations with historical treaties repeatedly expressed to me their yearning for the friendship, respect and sharing of resources that they understand the treaties to embody, and Aboriginal leaders look to future arrangements based on similar premises. Such aspirations provide a much stronger grounding for a Canada respectful of human rights than a premise of Indigenous subjugation and extinguishment of rights.

In addition to historical treaties and constitutional principles, the international standards endorsed by Canada and Aboriginal peoples, in particular the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, should inform the definition of common objectives and goals. Canada’s 2010 endorsement of the Declaration marked an important step on the path towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and Canada should be commended for joining most all of the rest of the countries of the world in support of this instrument. I was pleased to hear, throughout my visit, references by First Nations, Inuit and Métis people to the Declaration, and about the incorporation of its standards into their work. It is my hope that the provincial and federal governments in Canada, as well as the country’s courts, will aspire to implement the standards articulated by the Declaration. The Declaration can help to provide a common framework within which the problems that I have outlined here in a preliminary fashion can be addressed.

I look forward to developing more detailed observations and recommendations beyond these initial comments in my report to the Human Rights Council. My observations and recommendations will be aimed at identifying good practices and needed reforms in line with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international instruments that mark Canada’s international human rights obligations. I hope that this process will contribute to ensuring that the Indigenous peoples of Canada can continue to thrive and maintain their distinct ways of life as they have done for generations despite the long shadow of a history of misdealing, enriching Canadian society for the benefit of all.

James Anaya is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He is a Regents Professor and the James J. Lenoir Professor of Human Rights Law and Policy at the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law in Tucson, Arizona.
This past summer marked Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s eighth annual Northern tour and his first ever stop in Nunavik. In all, the PM stopped in four Northern communities between August 19th and 23rd, joined by federal Environment Minister, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, Leona Aglukkaq, federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Bernard Valcourt, federal Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver, Yukon Member of Parliament Ryan Leef, and Nunavut Senator Dennis Patterson. Abridged versions of the Prime Minister’s speeches from Whitehorse, Yukon, Hay River, Northwest Territories, Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, and Nunavik, Quebec are reproduced here.

Whitehorse, Yukon – August 19, 2013

Thank you for that warm Whitehorse welcome, and I also want to thank Leona for her kind introduction today...

Of course, we have many representatives of local and territorial government as well: Grand Chief Massie, and of course, your own Premier, Darrell Pasloski, so please welcome everybody who’s joined us here today.

I gather, by the way, that this is Yukon College’s 50th anniversary this year. I’m told Karen Barnes, president, is here...Karen, please convey to the board, to all of your colleagues and to the students my congratulations on the achievement of your first half-century.

Thanks also to Quantum Machine Works for graciously hosting us today...I’m going to come back to Quantum in just a moment. But before I do, let me just say how wonderful it is to be back once again in Canada’s true North.

It is my eighth Northern summer tour, ladies and gentlemen, actually my ninth time here in Yukon as Prime Minister, and of course, Whitehorse is my first stop.

Let me begin by wishing everyone a very hap-
Above: Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his wife, Laureen, are greeted by local children upon their arrival in Whitehorse, Yukon, August 18, 2013. Below: Prime Minister Stephen Harper pauses for a photo with local children on the Hercules upon his arrival in Hay River, Northwest Territories, August 19, 2013.
py Discovery Day. As was mentioned, each year on this day, Yukoners celebrate the discovery of gold in Bonanza Creek, the discovery that sparked the Klondike gold rush. That seminal moment in Canadian history gave birth to this city and would of course forever transform this territory and our country. Robert Service writes at that time, and let me quote, “Remember the year when the eyes of the world were turned to the North, and the hearts of men were elate.”

Now, friends, although Service drafted those lines more than 100 years ago… The eyes of the world are today once again fixed on Canada’s North. That is in part because of the enormous mineral wealth of Canada’s North and of Yukon, especially.

Yukon, especially, continues to be a magnet for the mining and exploration industry.

In fact, the Fraser Institute ranked Yukon as the eighth most favourable jurisdiction for mining, not just in Canada, by the way, or even the Americas.

Yukon is rated the eighth best place for miners in the entire world. No wonder Canada has been the world’s top destination for exploration spending over the last ten years.

It is no wonder, therefore, that by 2020 Northern metal and mineral output is expected to nearly double, just as it was in the late 1800s: gold, copper, silver, lead, zinc. The demand for Yukon’s resources, for all Canadians’ resources is today very strong, and notwithstanding ups and downs, likely to remain so over the long haul.

And yet, as robust as our resource sector is, we are all aware that it faces the same challenges as its competitors around the world: fluctuating metal prices, unpredictable project financing, labour recruitment, and skills shortages.

Having riches below the ground does not in and of itself guarantee prosperity above.

So here’s the thing. To realize the promise of the North, we must act. Sustained prosperity in the mining industry requires the following things: efficient and effective regulatory regimes, the best technology, the most innovative methods, and a highly skilled workforce.

Indeed, Yukon’s mining firms will need nearly 1,700 new employees, we project conservatively, by 2022. That doesn’t include the multiple spin-off jobs that all of this new activity will generate.

So the need is real, and the need is now.

Therefore to help create the conditions for success in Northern mining, our government has taken action. We’re streamlining duplicative, inefficient and unpredictable regulations. We’re investing in vital infrastructure. We are producing new geological maps of the North. And of course, we have lowered taxes for business, and are keeping them down. And we are addressing the massive demand for labour.

I’m delighted, therefore, to announce that in partnership with the Yukon government, our government will make a substantial investment in Yukon College’s Centre for Northern Innovation and Mining right here. Here, Northerners will take the advanced training they need to fully benefit from the growth that is expected in Yukon’s mining industry.

Funds allocated under Economic Action Plan 2013 will be used to build a state of the art school, to be built at Yukon College’s Ayamdigut campus; the centre will be a one-stop shop. There men and women will learn a range of trades to qualify them for high quality, high paying jobs in the mining industry. As part of this investment, the centre will also develop a mobile trade school, what you might call a training lab on wheels.

Soon this mobile school will be visiting communities in mine sites from Watson Lake to Dawson City and many places in between. It will bring, quite literally, hands-on training to Yukoners everywhere. And that means those living in small remote communities will no longer have the same barriers to sharing in new opportunities.

I should tell you that I already like the way things are going. As part of the new centre’s work, Yukon College wasted no time in launching a mining operations program. Its first class has already graduated, and many of those graduates walked out of the college and right into jobs. That is how it’s supposed to work.

Our government’s investment will allow the Centre for Northern Innovation and Mining to expand quickly to help meet the growing need for labour. But that’s not all. We’re also expecting the centre to do beyond education. It must become a world leader in Northern mine training, in industry-specific research, and innovation.

Upon foundations such as these will be built the strong, sustainable future that we envisage for Northern mining and Northern prosperity.

All of this is actually, friends, part of a virtuous circle: advanced knowledge and a well-trained, highly skilled workforce will attract investment. That means the centre may well attract more of the very businesses that it is now trying to accommodate. And in that way, it will stimulate the jobs and growth that the territory and of course Canada needs.

Now, I did say at the outset I would speak a little bit more about our hosts, Quantum Machine Works. They do very interesting work. They design and manufacture diamond drilling equipment for businesses all over the world, and they have a very good
skills development story. Twenty years ago, Quantum’s owner, Martin Loos – there’s Martin over there – 20 years ago, shortly after purchasing Quantum, Martin hired his first apprentice, a young man, eager to work, keen to learn about machine manufacturing. That young man’s name is Lee Johnson, who’s sitting right at the end there.

Lee started apprenticing here at Quantum when he was 14 years old… Lee worked with Martin until he was old enough to attend trade school. There was one problem. At the time, the program that Lee needed wasn’t offered in Yukon, so he had to leave the territory to learn. But Lee was keen and he knew how to work. He finished his program and was back in Yukon in no time, back at Quantum to once more work beside Martin, his friend, his mentor, and as of 2005, his business partner. So my friends, Lee’s story illustrates just how important the right training is to future success…

All of this shows why we need places like Yukon College’s Centre for Northern Innovation and Mining. With our government’s investment, this centre will train hundreds, maybe even someday thousands of Lee Johnsons right here in Yukon.

That is a truly exciting prospect. It is what Northerners want and deserve.

Everybody, you’ve been very generous with your time and attention, so let me just wrap up with this final thought.

Canada’s North has always attracted the brave, the industrious, and the dreamers.

Even today, adventurous Canadians still come here to seek their fortune, and I am more convinced than ever that the call of the Yukon, the call of the entire North is truly Canada’s call to greatness.

So go forth, young man, young woman, to a place that inspires, a place of infinite promise, the North, where there is no limit to what can be achieved today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Thank you.

Hay River, Northwest Territories – August 20, 2013

I want to thank all of you for that very warm Northern welcome… Great to have members of the Territorial Legislature, of course you, Premier McLeod. Wonderful to have you here. Greetings as well to Mayor Cassidy, to chiefs Martellos, Fabien, to Elder Sunrise, and everybody who’s been able to join us today. We really appreciate your presence.

Also greetings to our hosts today, our partners, President Jane Archuk of Aurora College, and of course, the chair of the Mine Training Society, Iris Catholique. Also, my greetings to all representatives of industry and academia who have joined us today…

Hay River is the second scheduled stop on my eighth annual summer tour of Canada’s North. Friends, as you know, Laureen and I have a deep affection for the North. This is...my 11th visit to the Northwest Territories since I became Prime Minister.

And we are delighted to be here, in spite of all those other 11 visits, [this is] the first time Laureen and I are here visiting Hay River, the hub of the North…

Ladies and gentlemen, after my eight summer Northern tours, I’m starting to understand what Pierre Burton meant when he wrote, when he said, quote, “There is a saying that after five years in the North, everyone is an expert. After ten years, a novice.”

I haven’t hit ten years yet, but I will admit that whenever I travel across the North and visit Northern communities, spend time with Northerners, I am reminded that there is so much to learn here, and that the North really is a place of infinite promise.

I’m also reminded that as a Northern country, it is the North that truly defines us as Canadians, and it is the North that truly is Canada’s call to greatness. As to answer that call, our government established our Northern Strategy.

Our strategy is based on four pillars. Exercising Canada’s sovereignty, promoting social and economic development, protecting our environmental heritage, and improving and devolving Northern governance.

And ladies and gentlemen, I’m pleased to report that we’re making good progress on all of these fronts, especially most notably, I should say here, on governance. As many of you know that very recently, and following my last trip to this territory, our government has now signed with the government of the Northwest Territories and Aboriginal governments... a final, historic devolution agreement with the Northwest Territories. Premier, this is a great achievement for both of our governments, but especially for your government. This is a great agreement also for the people of the Northwest Territories, and the beginning of a promising new era in regional governance.

But, my friends, we’re not here today because of devolution. We are here to talk about another pillar of our government’s Northern Strategy, and that is development, and specifically, our government’s plans to ensure that Northerners take full advantage of the new opportunities that responsible resource development will bring.
Prime Minister Stephen Harper meets with members of the Canadian Rangers in Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, August 21, 2013.
Let me put it this way, or put it in this context. Canada’s 15th Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir, wrote about his Northern travels more than 80 years ago. He called the North, and I quote, “a great treasure house.”

Our challenge, and our government’s commitment, is to make sure we open the doors of this great treasure house to Northerners, and that all Northerners benefit from this.

Now, as we know, much of the North’s treasure is underground. That’s why our government has already implemented sound practical measures to encourage the mining that creates jobs and that brings prosperity to Northerners, and indeed, to all Canadians.

We also want to specifically encourage Aboriginal peoples with their young, fast-growing populations, often living close to mining areas, to make the most of the great opportunities before them.

How great are these opportunities? The mining sector is already the largest private employer of Aboriginal people in Canada, and current estimates show that by 2017, the mining sector will create thousands of new direct and indirect jobs in this territory alone.

So Northern mining has the potential to permanently change many lives for the better.

That said, in order to benefit from Northern opportunities, Aboriginal peoples must have greater access to education and skills training.

That’s why our government is investing in Northern basic education programs.

It’s why we created the Skills and Partnership Fund. It’s why we’ve invested in post-secondary scholarships and bursaries for First Nations and Inuit students. And it’s why our government has supported a Northern success story called the Mine Training Society. The Mine Training Society is a partnership linking the federal government with all the people you see here today, with industry, Aboriginal governments, and the government of the Northwest Territories, and of course with academia.

In the last ten years, through training and recruitment, the society has helped more than 850 trainees find meaningful employment, and we want to see that number grow.

And so today I’m delighted to announce that our government will make a significant investment in the Mining Training Society’s new Mining the Future project.

This project will provide hundreds of Aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories and western Nunavut with the vital skills and experience they need to take advantage of new jobs in their own communities and across the North, and the really exciting thing I know here is this: the Mining the Future project will be delivered right here in Hay River. This September, in fact.

In a matter of weeks, people from across the territory will come to your community to take Introduction to Underground Mining. Delivered by Aurora College, this program prepares trainees for a successful career in the mining industry.

And, ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you why the Mine Training Society programs have achieved such outstanding results. First, before candidates are accepted to the program, they receive career guidance and counseling from their own Mine Training Society job coach. Second, these programs leverage the power of the strategic partnerships I talked about.

Industry’s role is especially critical. Beyond investing financially in this program, the private sector assists with program development, hosts trainees at their mine sites, and most importantly, they hire graduates.

Now, this brings me to my last point: the Mine Training Society takes a demand-driven approach. It connects candidates to real jobs as defined by the marketplace.

This ensures trainees succeed by landing and then keeping high-quality, well-paying jobs.

Mine Training Society graduates often walk out of the classroom and right into a job.

In fact, I’m told that at a recent graduation ceremony, one student was offered a job as he walked across the stage to accept his diploma. That’s market demand!

Indeed, it’s common for graduate testimonials to include the words, “immediately employed.” That was the case for Stacey McSwain… After graduating in 2007 from the Mineral Processing Operator Technician program, Stacey was immediately employed by De Beers. Larone Lafferty… had a similar experience. Larone was immediately employed after he graduated from the Industrial Security Training Program in 2008.

The evidence overwhelmingly shows that the Mine Training Society approach works and it works very well.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I’ve kept you long enough, so let me just close with this final thought. More than 60 years ago, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, as I’ve mentioned repeatedly, the first Prime Minister to travel to the North, said that equality of opportunity in this country was a sacred trust.

He said, quote, “It was handed down to us in the tradition of Macdonald to bring about one Canada for every citizen and equality for every province.”
And I would add, every territory.

Our government believes that education and skills training are the foundation of the equality of opportunity that Prime Minister Diefenbaker was referring to. And, friends, for making it happen, I want to congratulate the Northwest Territories Mine Training Society.

Our government’s investment in the Mining the Future program, I believe, will help more people, people like Stacey and Larone, to get the training they need to obtain meaningful jobs, to provide for their families, and to aspire to even better futures for themselves and their children.

This is the future of hope that our government wants for the North, and indeed for all of Canada, and I want to thank all of you for having me, and all of you who are involved in this for making it happen.

Merci.

Masi cho.

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Rankin Inlet, Nunavut – August 22, 2013

You know, the North is a massive part of this country, over 40 percent of our territory; over 20 percent of that is in Nunavut alone, and I think it has never had a stronger presence in Ottawa, and I know that as the new Environment Minister, Leona will continue to work hard not just for Northerners, but all Canadians…

Greetings also to Premier A[a]riak, to Deputy Commissioner Kusugak, and to all representatives of the territorial government who are here today. Also to Deputy Mayor Harry Towtongie, and to Ross Gallinger from the Prospectors and Developers Association. We appreciate everybody’s presence with us today, and also as well, of course, we appreciate the generosity of our hosts, Leo Usaak Elementary School…

As you know, every year I try to visit a few new places, as I travel through, and this is my first trip, as I mentioned last night, to Rankin Inlet, and I certainly hope it won’t be my last.

You all know, ladies and gentlemen, that the pioneering spirit that built our great country very much lives on today in Canada’s North. Our vast Northern frontier has always attracted adventure seekers. Many have had to face tremendous challenges, and yet, even in the presence of the most daunting obstacles, generations of brave men and women have expanded our knowledge of our country from, really from the South to the North, all the way up to the Arctic.

And in doing so, they have over the generations laid the bases, the foundations for our prosperity. Your town is in fact named after such an individual, Lieutenant John Rankin.

Royal Navy Lieutenant John Rankin was one of many who searched for the Northwest Passage. It’s fitting, then, that I’m here in Rankin Inlet to make an important announcement about the future of Arctic exploration and development.

It is, of course, very well known that the North is rich in energy and minerals. It has been estimated that a quarter of the world’s undiscovered oil and natural gas lies in the Arctic. Nunavut is now home to the Meadowbank gold mine, which I had the privilege of visiting a few years back, and new projects are step by step moving forward: the Mary River iron ore project, the Chidliak diamond project, and the Meliadine gold project just 22 kilometres north of here.

All this potential development reminds us that, as I said before, the North is Canada’s call to greatness. These developments will bring growth, jobs, and prosperity to this territory across the North, and indeed across the entire country.

In fact, during 2012, due just to mining activity, Nunavut experienced greater economic growth than any other province or territory. Our government believes in reinforcing that success.

That’s why in 2008, as I announced, we began using the latest technology to produce a new generation of geological maps for Canada’s North. More formally known as the geomapping for energy and minerals, this project encourages development by giving prospectors new tools for exploration…

So far, the program has produced more than 700 maps and reports. As a direct consequence, private investors are now looking for nickel on the Melville peninsula, searching for diamonds on Baffin Island, and copper, silver and gold deposits have been found in Yukon. Geomapping also informs land use decisions that help balance responsible resource development with environmental protection.

And it draws on the expertise of an advisory group of Northerners, for, to be clear, Northern expertise is essential. While we expect all Canadians from coast to coast to benefit from the North’s coming mining boom…Northern development must mean jobs and prosperity for Northerners themselves. Prosperity here, jobs now; that is essential.

Now, the first phase of this program is scheduled to end this year, but it has been so successful and so much of the North remains to be mapped that in our judgement, it would be foolish to stop now.

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, I’m delighted to announce today that our government will re-
Above: Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister Leona Aglukkaq visit the Wilfred Laurier coast guard ship to be briefed on the search for Franklin’s lost expedition in Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, August 21, 2013. Below: Prime Minister Stephen Harper participates in a round of target practice with members of the Canadian Rangers in Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, August 21, 2013.
new funding for Canada’s geomapping program, an investment sufficient to completely finish the job. In other words, an investment sufficient to create modern regional scale geological maps and data sets for Canada’s entire North. I’m also pleased to tell you that on this very day, geomapping for energy and minerals is releasing 32 new sets of data that reveal Nunavut’s geological wealth. Some of these maps show where gold, silver, cobalt, and diamond and other things may be found…

We’re also publishing new findings on the energy potential of Hudson Bay to our east, and we’re uploading geological data for 11,000 square kilometres of the Duggan Lake area in the west of the Kitikmeot region. Industry and the public can access all of this information from their own computers with the click of a mouse.

Now, friends, as I’ve said earlier this week, just having riches in the ground will not on its own secure Northern prosperity. Only the mining jurisdictions with the most efficient regulatory regimes, the most skilled workforces and the most complete geoscience information will succeed and thrive. The extension of the geomapping program is one part of ensuring that Nunavut and the entire Canadian North compete successfully in a very tough international marketplace.

Let me conclude with this: we are committed to the sovereignty of this country as a great Northern nation. We will continue to protect our Northern inheritance, to protect the interests of our Northern peoples, and to build prosperity for the Northern generations yet to come.

And that’s why I’m here, and it is why I will keep coming back.

Thank you.

Qujannamiik.

Nunavik, Quebec – August 23, 2013

Welcome to all of you who are here with us today...

As the Director has mentioned, this mine is celebrating now 15 years in operation and I understand there are folks here today who have been with this operation from the very start doing a great job. So congratulations to everyone for 15 great years here at Raglan.

As my family and my staff will tell you, my annual trip to Canada’s Far North is one of my favourite activities as Prime Minister. Indeed, this is my second visit to Quebec’s Far North, in Nunavik, and I certainly plan to come back.
thanks to innovative thinking, and with the support of our Government, there may be a better way.

It’s no secret that it can get awfully windy around here…

But the wind power is also…a potentially clean and renewable source of energy. And friends, we hope it’s part of the solution. And that ladies and gentlemen is why our government is pleased to support Tuglik Energy Company and Xstrata Nickel in testing the feasibility of harnessing the wind to power, right here, this highly productive mine. A feasibility study was recently completed and I’ve been told that the results are very promising.

Now ladies and gentlemen, if the technology works here in the way that we hope it will, the implications for power generation across the North are enormous… The proposed new system would generate electricity from a turbine when the wind blows. Any surplus is stored as hydrogen, hydrogen that would then run fuel cells to generate electricity when the wind is not blowing…

That new energy source would lower the cost of living in the Far North and improve the environment. If the project pans out, that new energy source produced by the wind could become an option for many other communities in the Far North.

Since taking office in 2006 our government has taken some significant actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and invest in sustainable energy sources. Processes such as this that could reduce or eliminate the need for diesel generation in so many Northern communities are absolutely consistent with what we hope to achieve. And as you go forward we wish you all the best of luck in what is a very exciting project.

Friends, our government will move forward on responsible economic development for all regions of Canada. Isolated communities in the Far North can count on our government to stimulate their economy through major job-creating projects. And we will do so by consulting with Aboriginal people and seriously and completely assessing the environmental impacts, as set out in our responsible resource development plan.

Thank you everyone.

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper is Canada’s 22nd Prime Minister. He toured the Northern Canadian communities of Whitehorse, Hay River, Gjoa Haven, and Rankin Inlet between August 18 and 22, 2013. He visited the Raglan Mine in Nanavik, Quebec on August 23, 2013.
LITERACY
Introduction

Tara graduated from Grade 12 in Rankin Inlet with the goal of becoming a teacher; however, she needed to improve her oral and written Inuktitut before taking the Nunavut Teacher’s Education Program (NTEP) in Rankin Inlet. Gwyn left high school early, then described herself as “not doing anything” prior to taking the Miqqut program. Nina was a stay-at-home mom. She wasn’t particularly looking for work or to enroll in a learning program, but when she saw Miqqut advertised, she saw it would help fill her family’s immediate needs for warm winter clothing. Tara, Gwyn and Nina had different educational backgrounds and learning goals, but a common need. None of them could move forward in the ways they wanted to within the formal learning opportunities in their home community. When Ilitaqsiniq – the Nunavut Literacy Council – offered an innovative traditional skills and literacy program in Rankin Inlet in January 2012, they, along with 12 other young women, signed up.

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The Miqqut Program

‘Miqqut 2’ was a non-formal traditional skills program with embedded literacy. It was modeled on promising practices developed in other ‘made-in-Nunavut’ programs, including Somebody’s Daughter, Reclaiming our Sinew, and Traditional Skills Workshop.2 Cultural experts taught traditional skills alongside literacy instructors who led language-related activities directly linked to the cultural focus. Daily activities were identified and evolved as the program progressed, as participants selected their own items to create and literacy instructors developed activities (pre-planned or spontaneous) directly linked to participants’ interests. The program ran full-time (9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday to Friday) for four months in Rankin Inlet’s middle school library.

Elders taught in Inuktitut, literacy instructors used Inuktitut and English, and participants, whose language backgrounds varied, were free to use and develop skills in either Inuktitut or English, or both. On a typical day, participants would read silently, look through photographs for ideas, create and adjust patterns, sew by hand or by machine, document their progress in their learners’ portfolios, and participate in literacy activities as a group. Teaching took place through direct instruction, modeling/observation, and one-on-one mentoring. The group would come together for brief periods, then go back to self-directed work. The high teacher-participant ratio (five Elders and two literacy instructors for fifteen participants) facilitated this one-on-one interaction and participant-directed progress, which were both key to the program’s success. A focus on cooperative learning encouraged participants to look to and provide each other with support. For example, in the earlier days of the program, more fluent Inuktitut-speaking participants could be seen helping less fluent speakers follow the Elders’ directions.

The Miqqut program offered a holistic learning environment. Instructors were carefully chosen for their personal attributes of compassion and caring as well as for their recognized expertise in sewing and teaching. Instructors created a safe learning environment through an orientation in which participants and instructors alike set parameters for the course, through ongoing encouragement of participants, and through respect for participants’ different starting points. Instructors supported participants to set, and then move toward, their own goals. These non-formal components of the program’s process all contributed to developing a promising model for re-engaging young Inuit learners.

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Community-Based Research

Ilitaqsiniq documented Miqqut’s process and
outcomes using a Community-based Research methodology. Staff members Quluaq Pilakapsi, an Inuit Elder, along with Adriana Kusugak and Gloria Uluqsi, accredited bilingual teachers from the community, joined the Miqqut instructional team as cultural and literacy instructors respectively. Serving also as community researchers, they conducted a series of entrance, exit, and six-month post-program interviews with each participant. They also recorded observations of activities and progress through fieldnotes. Ongoing dialogue with the full research team, which included other Ilitaqsiniq staff and an academic research guide, guided analysis of program outcomes. From all accounts, participants blossomed in the course, surpassing their own expectations, and developing competence and confidence in unexpected areas.

### Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit

Miqqut’s focus on Inuit traditional skills – in this case, sewing and clothing production – motivated most participants to join. So-called ‘traditional’ skills, part of Inuit qaujimajatuqangit,\(^3\) are still very much linked to identity and survival in the North (Tagalik 2010). Participants were attracted by the opportunity to gain warmer clothing for their children, spouses, and themselves. Nina said, “I needed to learn how to make my own stuff. And no one would be able to do that for me if my kids need warm stuff.” They were also motivated by the opportunity to learn the traditional practices that have been developed and passed on over centuries by their ancestors. For different reasons, young women like Tara had not had the opportunity to learn fully from their own mothers and grandmothers. They wanted to provide for their families, and be able to teach their own daughters when the time came.

The loss of Inuktut among younger Inuit and other cultural changes have broken down contexts in which younger women used to learn from the Elders. Inuit Elders, as cultural experts, are the natural teachers for traditional skills. They are also the most respected teachers in Inuit communities, and those from whom many Inuit are most motivated to learn. As they taught sewing, they also shared their own life journeys — stories of resilience, seasoned with humour and grace — that inspired the younger seamstresses to become stronger as women in their community. Tara reflected, “The days I remember the most was when we were interviewing the Elder instructors and they were telling us about how they learned to sew and just giving us advice on life and I really enjoyed those days.” For many participants, the best part of Miqqut was the opportunity to spend so much time with the Elders, benefiting from their diverse wisdom from sewing to being a healthy woman, an engaged community member, and a loving parent. The connections the young women made with the Elders continued long after the program ended.

As the women created beautiful, functional clothing, these tangible products ‘documented’ each woman’s success. As women wore their sewing, other community members commented on their skills, which enhanced the women’s confidence and pride, and encouraged them in other new endeavours. As they spent time engaged in traditional practices, women also re-embraced Inuit values such as generosity, patience, resourcefulness, respect, and working together. In all these ways, Miqqut 2’s focus on traditional skills created a motivating environment for young Inuit, conducive to holistic learning.

### Literacy and Essential Skills

Ilitaqsiniq, the Nunavut Literacy Council Literacy, defines literacy as “a skill that enables people to interpret and effectively respond to the world around them. Based upon language development from birth, it includes the ability to learn, communicate, read and write, pass on knowledge and participate actively in society.” In line with this holistic vision of Indigenous literacies, instructors invited Miqqut participants to practice various forms of communication — oral and written, verbal and non-verbal, in English and in Inuktitut, with varying audiences and through multiple media, including sewing and art. Literacy was directly relevant to the participants’ goals: learning specialized Inuktitut vocabulary for body and pattern parts; discussing and then writing down, in Inuktitut and English, the steps for making a parka; creation of sewing portfolios; speaking on the radio about the program, and so on. Through embedded literacy, the Miqqut program motivated participants to see how literacy is relevant to their lives and thus engage with new and expanding ways of expressing themselves and receiving information. Following the program, Nina said, laughing, “I write more and here I didn’t used to like to write.”

Literacy and culture are inherently linked. Research in other contexts has shown how programs

3 *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is roughly translated as “Inuit traditional knowledge.” It encompasses the knowledge, values, attitudes, practices and skills that have favoured Inuit survival over centuries, and which are still relevant to living well today.
focusing on cultural and artistic production enhance literacy even when literacy is not deliberately target-
ed as a goal (e.g. Bhola 1990, Heath 2004). Meade (1990), Balanoff and Chambers (2005), and Lipka et al. (2007) have shown how Inuit traditional knowl-
edge and practices are imbued with literacies and numeracies that go beyond reading and writing. For example, the lines and shape of a woman’s coat tell the story of where she is from. Traditional sewing by observing size and mentally transferring shape and proportion onto materials, knowing how to fit pat-
terns together, where to gather and how much, and so on, are other examples of numeracies inherent in traditional clothing preparation. The National Ab-
original Design Committee (2002: 6) recommended that Indigenous literacy programs “place literacy into culture, rather than fitting culture into literacy” – in other words, draw out and teach literacy and essential skills through cultural programming. The Miqqut program did just that.

Within the literacy work, as with the sewing, instructors encouraged participants to set their own goals, but to gradually expand self-expectations. For example, participants who started out drawing in their journals were encouraged to add labels, then sentences, slowly building up to writing full thoughts. Gwyn was very shy at the outset, but she challenged herself to share a single word in group times. Encouraged by the non-judgmental environment, she gradually worked up to sharing complete thoughts. Others who started out as more confident speakers and writers were encouraged to expand into public communication. Tara, for example, spoke as Master of Ceremony for the community fashion show at the end of Miqqut 2. She would never have imagined speaking publically prior to Miqqut “because I would freeze and not be able to say anything and words wouldn’t come out of my mouth but after [Miqqut], I feel fine with speaking in front of people. I don’t feel like I’m being judged. That really helped me.” Observation of participants and their work showed how participants’ self-expression, con-
fidence and willingness to communicate and use documents grew over the course of the program. As Campbell (2003: 142) stated, “Literacy is not an end in itself, but rather a means for participants to shape reality; accomplishing their own goals.” The practice of embedding literacy into the Miqqut program was one part of supporting participants to gain self-assurance to set and achieve personal goals.

The literacies participants developed helped them beyond the program, with their families, and in their communities. For Nina, being a better com-
municator helped her engage with her family: “I’ve noticed lots of things change with my family. We are a lot closer now. My girls love going to school and talk about school… I’ve learned how to be a better mother.” Through the program, participants developed life and work skills such as organization, self-discipline, timeliness, reliability, attendance, hard work, finishing what one starts, willingness to take risks helped participants to gain confidence to enroll in further education or apply for jobs. While almost all of the participants had described themselves as “doing nothing” prior to Miqqut, six months after the program two thirds of them had started new jobs or enrolled in further education. Miqqut drew in participants who might not otherwise have enrolled in or received what they wanted out of other types of adult education available in the community. This non-formal program served as a bridge to re-engage sometimes-marginalized young Inuit women in for-
mal learning and the wage economy.

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**Well-being Through Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Literacy**

Learning from Elders, learning what was really mean-
ingful for them, and approaching literacy as a tool for empowerment all contributed to Miqqut becoming a place of personal growth for participants. For Nina, taking part in Miqqut helped her to see herself (for the first time) as a capable learner: “I’ve always thought I was always ajuq (no good) but after I took the Miqutt program I [know] I can do it now.” Miqutt 2’s focus on process – being welcoming, encouraging, and responding to participants as whole people – led to holistic outcomes. Gwen explained that she was only able to take risks, now, in communicating because Miqutt offered her the chance, finally, to practice speaking without being judged or assessed. Participants became more confident, happier, prouder of who they are, and motivated to live up to their own expectations of themselves. Participants said they are better people following the course. Some moved away from unhealthy life choices to more positive life choic-
es. Such non-academic outcomes are seen across the country in literacy programs (Battel 2001), but seem enhanced in this traditional skills program.

Mental health research documents the healing power of reconnecting with traditional practices (Kirmayer, Simpson and Cargo 2003), and this pow-
er was seen among all the participants in the Miqqut program. Tara, for example, shared, “I feel more
whole as a person, as an Inuk woman, just knowing how to sew.” Antone et al. (2002: 8) wrote, “factors such as healing, reclamation of identity, language, cultures and self-determination, play a major role in the complex issue of Aboriginal literacy and learning.” Non-formal programming such as Miqqut provides a venue for holistic learning. As the program incorporated healing, identity, culture and literacy, improvements were seen in each of these intertwined areas of the learners’ lives.

### Conclusion

Non-formal traditional skills programs offer a promising model for addressing the whole person in Nunavut youth and adult learners. They invite learners to work on skills and practices that they see as highly relevant and to produce tangible products of which they (and their families) are proud. The creative activity, cultural connection and relationships among instructors and participants contribute to increased confidence, which in turn supports engagement in the community, education and the workforce. Success factors in these “made in Nunavut” programs such as learning that addresses participants’ perceived needs; hands-on learning; relationship, respect and safety; and addressing the whole person, echo those documented in successful adult education programs around the world (Vella 2002). They also resonate with documented strengths of Indigenous approaches to education, including linking learning and community (Canadian Council on Learning n.d.).

Limited research into traditional skills programs with embedded literacy in other Indigenous contexts identifies these as “invisible learning spaces” (Kral 2010b: 5). In the absence of the documentation of the process and outcomes of non-formal, cultural programming in Nunavut, programmers sometimes found it difficult to access adult education or literacy and essential skills funding for what were seen as ‘only’ cultural programming (Greer 2001). Moreover, those offering cultural programs such as traditional clothing production do not necessarily have the knowledge and tools to deliberately embed literacy, nor the awareness of the impact a literacy component could add. This research sheds light on the potential for engaging learners and maximising impact through embedding literacy in non-formal traditional skills programs.

Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement sets out parameters for enhancing Inuit employment. However, the Conciliator’s report on achievement of the land claims’ goals found employment targets far from being met, and blamed inadequate, inappropriate educational opportunities (Berger 2006). The Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy advocates for more “non-formal, community-based literacy programs…to re-engage adult learners in life-long learning” (Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. 2006: 41). Our research shows that non-formal culture and literacy programs are a promising venue to open doors to more equitable educational and employment opportunities in Nunavut.

While on the one hand, statistics show difficulties in recruitment and retention in adult learning in Nunavut, non-formal cultural programs are multiplying across the territory. This research suggests that cultural programs with relatively modest goals may actually be achieving much broader outcomes than they are targeting, or recording. It is hoped that this research might support programmers, instructors, and participants to articulate and possibly more actively pursue the breadth of literacy and well-being outcomes these programs offer. Perhaps understanding the impact of such programs may help policy makers and funders to make informed decisions supporting the Government of Nunavut’s goal of *silippallianginnarniq*, lifelong learning, as well as supporting the desires of many Nunavummiut to find a safe, stimulating, and relevant context in which to pursue their learning goals. Tara, Gwyn, and Nina, along with their diverse co-learners in Miqqut 2, certainly reached and surpassed their goals. In September 2012, Tara began the Nunavut Teachers Education Program’s (NTEP) foundation year. Through Miqqut, she reached her goal of improving her Inuktitut language and literacy skills for admission to NTEP while also following an unexpected journey into greater wholeness and happiness. She said, “I feel a lot more confident in myself in trying new things like not to be afraid to fail.” Gwyn, who said at the beginning of program, “I didn’t have confidence in myself,” found the confidence after Miqqut to (temporarily) relocate to Ontario and enrol in a heavy equipment operator course. Nina, like all the Miqqut women, filled an immediate need by creating warm winter outerwear for her family. But she also developed skills and confidence, which motivated her to think differently about her own future: “My life got easier after taking Miqqut Project. It got me doing something…It made me want to do more not just stay home doing nothing…Miqqut Project was the best! I’ve learned to write, to sew, be a better person, and it was always good.” This research shows the wisdom of investing...
in high quality non-formal programs with embedded literacy to ensure the best outcomes for diverse Inuit learners.

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Northern Public Affairs: Thank you for taking the time to speak with us. Literacy forms the basis of healthy communities and strong democratic politics. Can you tell us about the state of literacy in Yukon and the Northwest?

Helen Balanoff: Formal assessments like the recent Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) or the Alberta Achievement Tests (AAT) don’t paint a pretty picture of English literacy and math skills in the NWT. However, these are snapshots in time and are only one way of measuring skill development. We have to be a little bit cautious when we use them, because they tell only a part of the story.

What we do know is that we have children and youth who don’t work at grade level in English and we still have high numbers of young people who drop out of school before they reach Grade 12. This means we have a significant number of young people who don’t have the skills they need to be able to get and keep jobs. People with lower levels of literacy are more likely to be unemployed and on income support, or have low paying jobs. They are more likely to have poor health, and parents’ levels of education impact children’s levels of literacy. We know that this is particularly an issue among the Aboriginal population. Having said that, we can’t lose sight of the skills that people have: their relationship with the land, their culture and language, their stories. The health of Aboriginal languages is declining, however, so there’s some urgency to dealing with language revitalization and retention.

Beth Mulloy: In Yukon, the recent results show that we hold the highest level of literacy and skills in Canada. What that means is still being analyzed. The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (2003) results showed much the same. We concluded...
that the highly educated Whitehorse population influenced these results. Rural and First Nations populations had lower scores, which were much more in line with the other territories. We anticipate that the PIAAC results will translate much the same way.

The three territories have the highest percentage of First Nations people per capita in Canada. This population also appears to have the highest need for support in literacy and other essential skills. We also know that there is a relatively high percentage of children who are not ready for kindergarten. This is an area of great concern to the Yukon Literacy Coalition (YLC), and we are supported by the Yukon government to provide programs for families and children to support literacy.

**How does literacy skill development work in dual or multi-language communities?**

_Balanoff:_ I think one of the issues in literacy development in the NWT is that we don’t pay enough attention to the fact that we do work in a multi-lingual, multicultural, multiple literacies context. And by ‘we’ I mean most people who work in the field of literacy. Literacy is a social, cultural construct. It’s grounded in the culture and society where it takes place. In a multicultural context, that makes it very complex. People need English literacy skills today, but they still also need to be able to make meaning in their own culture — and for a lot of people in the NWT, that’s an Indigenous culture.

English literacy is based on an alphabetic, written model, but Indigenous forms of literacy are not. They’re often more symbolic and based on oral language and non-alphabetic literacy. Elders, for example, have amazing memories and are able to recall the most minute details about events, such as who was there, where it was, what time of year it was, and so on. They can ‘read’ the weather; they can tell where they are by ‘reading’ the land; they understand their kinship relationships and explain them in a way that someone grounded in English literacy finds hard to understand. For example, in Inuit culture you might find an older girl addressing a young girl as ‘big brother’ because of her kinship relationship to the older girl through her namesake. That doesn’t make sense in English literacy. So the types of literacy that people use at home are not necessarily the types of literacy that schools teach. I don’t think we really know how to bridge the gap between family and community literacy and the forms of literacy involved in formal education, yet it’s critical to be able to do that.

_Mulloy:_ In Yukon, there are two official languages: French and English. There are also eight First Nations languages in the Yukon. However, the dominant language in the First Nations communities is English as there are fewer and fewer fluent
speakers of traditional languages. There are also many other communities of people from around the world living in the Yukon.

We work primarily in English while working closely with our French partners who are working on a project together to have more of our signage and resources in both English and French. We also work together on Family Literacy initiatives and we have a board member from the French community.

We don’t get funding to work directly with Aboriginal languages and our experience in the Yukon is that most Aboriginal people speak English. The Yukon Native Language Centre works in Aboriginal language literacy. We have not yet been able to partner with them on a project or activity but hope to in the future. We work with communities with English literacy activities in traditional settings such as culture camps. When we are able, we incorporate Aboriginal languages into our work, but so far this work has been limited to translating the occasional resource. We offer some French and Spanish in the Family Literacy Centre. We hope to increase our work to include more of the languages in the Yukon and have developed a multi-language library project that we hope attracts the resources needed to make it happen.

What are the best resources to use to address literacy challenges in Yukon and the NWT? How should these resources be allocated?

Balanoff: I think if we knew the answer to that, we might have solved the problem a long time ago! I think there are several areas that need more focus. One of the areas that needs more attention is early childhood and family resources. We’ve talked about that for a long time here in the NWT, but we haven’t made much progress. The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is now putting some focus on this area, but it’s been a long time coming. The research shows that putting supports for early childhood and parents in place particularly for children pre-natal to 3 years old has a positive impact on children’s success. So I think that’s an area where resources need to be focused.

A second area is youth literacy. Given our dropout rate, we need to pay attention to people who have left school early and often are hanging around the community. We have a large labour shortage (or ‘skills mismatch’) in this country, but we have a significant number of people who, with the right training, could be part of the labour force. We are beginning to see more resources put into this area and that’s positive. Both the federal government and the GNWT are funding youth literacy projects.

The third area is adult basic education. The federal government has put $27 million into adult basic education through the three territorial colleges, but many people who need to upgrade their skills are not ready to go back into a formal learning environment. They need some transition programming that lets them experience success quickly, and then they’re more likely to return to formal learning. So we need a greater focus on community-based and community-driven non-formal learning for those with the lowest levels of skills to re-engage them in learning.

Mulloy: There are a number of resources and best practices that are addressing literacy challenges in Yukon. At the YLC, we feel that community-based and Northern developed resources have the greatest success. We have had great success with embedded literacy in culture camps and working one-on-one with families in casual learning environments. We have piloted innovative projects such as the Learning Circle held for several months at the Whitehorse Correctional Institute. I understand that one-on-one tutoring offered by Yukon Learn is also very successful and Yukon College provides many work preparation skills development courses that include a literacy component.

What considerations do local and territorial governments, policy makers, and practitioners need to be aware of when developing policy and programs for the Northern context?

Balanoff: They need to really pay attention to the needs of our NWT population. Governments, in particular, have a tendency to create programs that take a one-size fits all approach. The needs of our Northern population are different from the needs of people in the South. We need to look at what these needs are and try to figure out the best ways to address these needs.

For example, currently the Government of Canada is proposing a new Canada Job Grant that would replace the Labour Market Agreements (LMA) that Canada has with the provinces and territories. I’m not convinced that the Canada Job Grant necessarily suits small businesses, which is largely what we have here. I’m also not sure that employers will want to hire people with lower level skills and want to train them.

Second, the LMA has allowed the NWT to tailor training to people with lower levels of skills. Eliminating that funding will leave a significant portion of our population with fewer training opportuni-
ties. The IALSS in 2003 showed that in Canada we have a tendency to provide training to people with higher levels of skills. The LMA not only broadened the scope of training opportunities, but allowed the NWT to make decisions around the training that was needed to meet the needs of a specific segment of the population. As someone from Alaska said at the Centre for the North Summit in Whitehorse this past October, “Outside solutions don’t work for the North.”

Formal schooling in the NWT is still relatively new compared to other areas of Canada. We also have the legacy of residential schooling that still has an intergenerational impact. All of that needs to be considered, along with language and culture. The situation is particularly complex in the NWT with 11 official languages. I think we need to put much more emphasis on supporting Aboriginal languages.

Are there any innovative programs or approaches to literacy education in Yukon and the NWT that you would like to share with readers? If so, what are they and why are they innovative?

Balanoff: I think the NWT Literacy Council’s family literacy programming has been innovative. We started it slowly just over 10 years ago with training. There are four components to the program: training for community facilitators, development of resources to support their programs, promoting the importance and benefits of family literacy, and providing outreach and support to the programs. Family literacy fits really well in the North in Indigenous communities where family is so important. We’ve trained people from every community in the NWT, and while they don’t all run family literacy programs, they may, for example, have incorporated family literacy into their everyday family routines.

I think a great example of family literacy programming is in Deline, where Mary Ann Vital offers a broad range of programs in North Slavey, as well as in English. We also had a research project in Ulukhaktok on Indigenous literacy. We’re still finishing that but I think it has shown us some of the things that we need to do to support that bridge from home and community-based literacy into more formal English literacy for school and work, and to help people retain their Indigenous literacies. The NWT Literacy council is also recognized as a leader in literacy resource development. Last year (2012-2013), there were more than seven million downloads of our resource materials from the Copian website (the former National Adult Literacy Database). For a small organization like ours, that’s phenomenal, and we’re very proud of that!

I also think we see some really transformative programs when they are culturally and community-based. The Dechinta Bush University has taken a unique and important step in culture-based programming. While it’s a formal program connected to the University of Alberta, it uses community-based, non-formal approaches to learning, and it works. It contextualizes skill development, which makes learning more meaningful and ultimately leads to greater success for learners.

So I think we’re seeing innovation. However, there’s no magic bullet for literacy and skill development; it’s a long-term initiative that needs resources and support on a long-term basis.

Mulloy: We developed a Learning Circle Pilot Project that was held in the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. It was designed to meet the needs of inmates, to help them develop essential skills necessary for life and work. Each participant designed their own program by picking the essential skill they wanted to develop and choosing a project that needed that skill. For instance, one participant chose to make a button blanket to work on his math skills.

Another very successful initiative has been the development of our Family Literacy Programming. Working in partnership with the City of Whitehorse and the Government of Yukon we run a Family Literacy Center in the Canada Games Center. We run literacy programs and also enable user groups to run learning programs. In the summer we run a literacy program in a heritage house in a park by the river, doing heritage literacy programming. We also have a very successful Yukon wide outreach program, a literacy wall tent and a book bike.

In closing, what should we remember about literacy in the North?

Mulloy: It is really important that our programs be Northern based. Although we can use best practices from all over the world we need to ground our work in good Northern research and Northern providers should be supported. Years ago if something was from “outside” it was generally thought to be better. That is no longer the case. We have tremendous capacity in the North to research, develop and provide excellent programming.

Helen Balanoff is the Executive Director of the Northwest Territories Literacy Council in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Beth Mulloy is the Executive Director of the Yukon Literacy Coalition in Whitehorse, Yukon.
Cairn construction at the site of the Maud, Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, October 2013.
The year 2005 marked a high point in recent federal literacy policy. That year the federal Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills (also known as the Bradshaw Committee) brought together Canadian literacy organizations and the federal government to map out a broad vision for a national literacy strategy that recognized the right of all Canadians to have the literacy skills they need “to participate fully in our social, cultural, economic, and political life.” The federal government backed up its commitment by promising to increase its dedicated $28 million in annual spending on literacy by $30 million over three years.

Only one year later, a significant shift in the federal approach to literacy policy would begin under the newly elected Conservative government. In short order there would be budget cuts for literacy organizations and programming, and a further narrowing of policy goals to the needs of the labour market. Eventually, the central role of the provinces and territories in the planning and delivery of training programs would also come under threat.

This article provides an overview of these trends by exploring three elements that demonstrate the current government’s policy stance on literacy. First, it examines federal budgeting and administration, and the enforced alignment of literacy organization activities with federal policy. Secondly, it explores how the federal government is using labour market agreements (LMAs) to shape literacy policy at the provincial and territorial levels, particularly in the area of training and essential skills. Finally, the article looks at the effect of a singular measure of literacy on policy and practice. It concludes that literacy policy is at a critical juncture with significant shifts expected in all three areas over the next year.

In important ways, recent changes to literacy policy and programming reflect a pattern that began in the early 1990s. In advance of International Literacy Year in 1990, the federal government created the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) with a mandate to work with provinces, the private sector, and voluntary organizations to develop resources to ensure that Canadians had access to the required literacy skills (see Box 1). The NLS was originally housed in the Department of the Secretary of State, which was also responsible for citizenship. This association reflected the perspective that literacy was essential to a citizen’s full participation in Canadian society.

In 1993, the NLS was transferred to Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), signaling a shift in literacy policy toward improved labour market outcomes (see Box 2). Even after this move, however, many of the original social development features of literacy policy remained intact. Literacy remained an issue tied to broad socio-economic participation and lifelong learning. NLS projects supported community-based literacy, family literacy as well as workplace literacy and plain language.

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**Box 1: The National Literacy Secretariat**

Until it was replaced by the Office for Literacy and Essential Skills in 2007, the National Literacy Secretariat had two functions. One half of its budget supported national literacy organizations and national projects undertaken by voluntary organizations, business associations, and labour groups. The other half of the budget supported projects at the provincial-territorial and local levels using matching funds from the provinces and territories. Since the NLS was not permitted to fund the direct delivery of literacy training, these funds supported research, practitioner training, curriculum development, awareness raising and outreach, and information sharing in the provinces and territories.

**Box 2: Essential Skills Framework**

In the early 1990s, the federal government looked for a way to describe the basic or essential skills tasks of various occupations to support its national occupational standards. Nine essential skills were identified and their use within various occupations documented. The nine essential skills are: Reading, writing, document use, numeracy, computer use, thinking, oral communication, working with others, and continuous learning. Practitioners in workplace
literacy and sector councils adopted the framework as a way to understand job requirements in terms of literacy and other essential skills. The NLS supported the development of curriculum, training of practitioners, and research based on the essential skills framework. The development and application of the essential skills framework signalled a growing emphasis on the economic dimension of literacy.

Beginning in 2006, federal literacy policy moved decisively away from providing support for community-based literacy and family literacy. In 2007, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada abolished the NLS to create OLES, the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (italics added). HRSDC's successor department, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) funds national projects dealing with literacy and essential skills for work-related purposes. OLES is described as "a Centre of Expertise with a workplace focus - building awareness and capacity in 'what works' to improve the literacy and essential skills of adult Canadians" with labour market attachment as the policy objective.  

### Funding and Administration of Federal Literacy Programming

The current federal policy stance towards literacy is reflected in the way literacy programs are funded and administered. Since 2006, federal funding cuts have been significant. The 2006 budget abolished the federal-provincial-territorial cost shared arrangement (see Box 1), representing $17.7 million or approximately 42 percent of the NLS annual budget. Since few provinces or territories were able to finance these activities on their own, the result was a significant reduction to research budgets, practitioner training, curriculum development, and other activities that support literacy training. While the cuts to literacy programming were made within the context of an overall reduction in federal spending, the relatively small amount of savings belied a shift lowering the priority placed on literacy as a federal policy issue.

A small portion of these cuts affected provincial and territorial literacy coalitions (see Box 3). This funding was intended, in part, to coordinate efforts at the local level and to provide a direct link between the federal government and the local literacy community. A massive advocacy effort on the part of the literacy communities saw core funding reinstated for the literacy coalitions. However, funds were never restored to the federal-provincial-territorial cost shared budget.

In addition to a smaller budget and a greater focus on labour markets, the way OLES delivers its programming has changed. In 2007, OLES began issuing competitive calls for proposal for national projects rather than engaging, as the NLS had, in a collaborative proposal development process focusing on local or regional needs. Since then, the time lag between application and funding approval has grown to at least six months – and in one case, years – while the administrative burden of using contribution agreements rather than grants (as was the NLS practice) has favoured larger project budgets. These changes may have contributed to fewer projects being funded overall.  

While OLES has been funding fewer projects, it has also been lapsing money. From 2000-01 until 2005-06, most of the NLS annual budget was completely spent. However, between 2006-07 and 2011-12, despite receiving Parliamentary approval for almost $191 million, OLES has lapsed more than $60 million (see Figure 1). Rejection rates may provide some insight into why this might be happening. In 2009-10, for instance, 247 proposals were received, 41 approved, 199 rejected, and 7 withdrawn. An 80 percent rejection rate indicates either a poorly conceived and written call for proposals or an almost universal inability for organizations to develop successful proposals.

The significant under-spending by OLES is troubling. Yearly lapses leave OLES vulnerable to further budget reductions. Meanwhile, the lengthy periods between calls for proposal and the awarding of projects undermines stability in the literacy field, since needs, personnel, and partners can change quickly.

Notwithstanding budgetary lapses, at some point since 2006 OLES began to supplement its resources with funds from the Pan-Canadian Initiatives (PCI) under the Employment Insurance Act. The PCI is designed to promote an efficient and integrated

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2 Ironically, these cuts were announced on Raise-A-Reader Day, a day devoted to literacy awareness.

3 Since 2007-08, OLES has issued six calls for proposals. For the three fiscal years for which information is available, 195 projects were funded. By comparison, in 1997-98, when grants were the primary transfer method, over 500 projects were funded annually ranging in dollar amount from $10,000 to over $1 million. (Data from author's personal files and "Riding Report, National Literacy Program, 1997-98").

4 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Summative Evaluation of the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLES) Terms of Reference. Table 2.1, 2010.

5 PCI spending can only be deduced by examining the annual EI Monitoring and Assessment Report, as detailed information about PCI projects is not available. This lack of detail as well as the removal from the ESDC website of all but the last two years of the EI Monitoring and Assessment Reports makes it impossible to determine when OLES began to use EI funds.

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national labour market, address common labour market challenges, and promote equity of opportunity, including enhancing investments in workplace skills. In 2011-2012, the most recent EI Monitoring and Assessment Report shows that $11.9 million in EI funds supported 21 essential skills projects (including work on the Essential Skills Profiles).

Box 3: Literacy Organizations

National literacy organizations and provincial and territorial literacy coalitions provide advocacy, coordination, knowledge exchange, training, and research on behalf of their constituencies at the national and provincial/territorial levels. Following the re-instatement of funding to provincial and territorial-level literacy coalitions in 2006, and perhaps as a means of deterring further protests about the abolition of the federal-provincial-territorial funding, OLES began to provide core funding to organizations at the national and provincial-territorial levels. Core funding will end in June 2014.

It is not clear why OLES has accessed these funds while lapsing its own. However, we do know

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Note:
1. The funding allocations presented are for the National Literacy Program and its successor program, the Adult Literacy and Essential Skills Program. The former program was administered by the National Literacy Secretariat and the latter by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.
2. Spending under the National Literacy Program and the Adult Learning and Essential Skills Program based on the Main Estimates tabled in Parliament and annual reports prepared by HRSDC on actual spending. Spending data for 2012-2013 was not available at the time of writing.

that the core funding of several provincial and territorial literacy coalitions using EI resources puts pressure on these organizations to align their activities with federal labour market priorities. This creates challenges for many coalitions whose members do not support this shift and would prefer to focus on family or community literacy, or who lack the capacity to respond to workplace issues. In a few provinces, existing workplace literacy and essential skills organizations are already providing this focus.

Soon after establishing core funding for literacy organizations in 2006, OLES reversed its thinking and began seeking ways to reduce its ongoing commitments. In 2012, OLES informed the literacy organizations that core funding would end in June 2014 and held its own consultation to validate its perception that a pan-Canadian network could replace the current complement of national and provincial-territorial organizations. The pan-Canadian network would focus on improving the labour market outcomes of Canadians through strengthened literacy and essential skills (LES). A call for proposals to form the pan-Canadian network was held in May 2013, but at the time of writing no funding decisions have been announced.


Since 2006, the federal government has taken steps to limit its involvement in literacy. It has done this by cutting funding; allowing OLES to consistently underspend its budget; using its funding authority to direct activities towards a labour market focus; and working to replace the network of literacy coalitions and organizations that currently exist at the national and provincial-territorial levels.

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The Role of Provinces and Territories in Training

In order to fully understand how literacy priorities are shifting under the Conservative government we must also look to the changing involvement of the provinces and territories in training. Until 1996, the federal government delivered training and other employment services such as Targeted Wage Subsidies, Self-Employment Job Creation Partnerships, and Skills Development to unemployed Canadians eligible for EI. In 1996, the federal government began signing Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) with the provinces and territories. The LMDAs transferred responsibility and resources for these training and employment services to the provinces and territories. Over the next 10 years every province and territory began to deliver these services.

One limitation of the LMDAs is the narrow population they serve. Many unemployed people are not eligible for EI and so do not benefit from the LMDAs. In 2007, the federal government introduced Labour Market Agreements (LMAs), which transferred $500 million annually to provinces and territories to provide training for those people not eligible for LMDA services. The LMAs are significant because they place a special emphasis on literacy and essential skills, targeting people without a high school diploma and those with low literacy skills. The LMAs are set to expire on March 31, 2014.

LMAs have enabled the provinces and territories to create their own programs that respond to literacy and essential skills issues in the workplace, among the unemployed, and in some cases within the community. Yet despite these efforts, the March 2013 federal budget signalled a definitive change to the current arrangement. The federal government announced its intention to re-negotiate both the LMDAs and the LMAs “to ensure that skills training funds are being...
used to help Canadians obtain qualifications they need to get jobs in high-demand fields. The intention to re-negotiate the LMDAs was a surprise since these agreements did not have a fixed end date.

The centerpiece of the federal approach is the Canada Job Grant (CJG). The CJG would provide $300 million annually to directly connect skills training with employment. A maximum per person federal contribution of $5,000 will be made available to “eligible training institutions,” with matching dollars required from employers and the provinces. Literacy and essential skills are no longer a stated priority. In the future the federal government plans to finance its share of the CJG by redirecting 60 percent of the LMA funds from the provinces and territories. Provinces and territories will need to identify new resources to fund their matching contributions as well as to continue to offer existing LMA programming with 60 percent fewer dollars.

The CJG is based on the assumption that employers will contribute up to $5,000 per individual for existing employees. Canadian employers typically do not encourage or pay for workplace training, and there is no evidence available to suggest that employers would be prepared to pay to train unemployed people.

Perhaps the biggest design challenge the CJG will need to overcome is the problem of displacement; that is, using public funds for training that would have already been delivered by the private sector. In order to ensure the CJG will create additional training opportunities the CJG will need to find ways to encourage small businesses to provide and fund formal training, and it will need to provide incentives for employers to train the unemployed.

Provinces and territories have reacted negatively to the proposal. The Council of the Federation issued statements at its July 2013 meeting reiterating its share of the CJG by redirecting 60 percent of the LMA funds from the provinces and territories.

In early October 2013, the OECD released the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) is intended to provide a broad overview of a country’s literacy levels based on a narrow measure of how well adults use printed information to function in society. The trouble with this tool is that it fails to value the full range of literacy skills or the self-confidence, social capital, or long-term gains that come from improved literacy.

This has not stopped the federal government and some provinces and territories from declaring the need to raise the literacy levels of Canadians to level 3, as measured by the IALSS. The risk of relying on this goal is that it could result in preferential support for those individuals who have a chance of reaching it, leaving others without the necessary assistance.

Nevertheless, the release of the latest results from an OECD literacy survey may create even more pressure to conform to a narrow set of standards. In early October 2013, the OECD released the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the latest international literacy survey. The 2013 PIAAC results for Canada as compared to the 2003 results show an increase in the proportion of Canadians at the two lowest literacy levels and a decrease in the proportion of those at the two highest levels. Overall, Canada’s mean score dropped by 6 percentage points.

A third, and arguably problematic, element of the government’s approach to literacy is its reliance on metrics as a way of crafting literacy programing. The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) is intended to provide a broad overview of a country’s literacy levels based on a narrow measure of how well adults use printed information to function in society. The trouble with this tool is that it fails to value the full range of literacy skills or the self-confidence, social capital, or long-term gains that come from improved literacy.

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Criticisms include limiting eligibility to clients with an employer, the lack of evidence that the proposal will help workers or employers, and the destabilization of the existing training delivery system.

Under the Conservative government, federal efforts of the past six years to improve the literacy and essential skills of the most vulnerable are likely to be discontinued. Provincial and territorial programs for the workplace and for the unemployed may also end. With its emphasis on employer requirements and short-term training, the CJG will be hard pressed to address the challenges faced by people without grade 12 or those with low literacy and essential skills.

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“Measuring” Literacy

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13 See IALS and Essential Skills in Canadian Literacy Policy and Practice for an overview of how IALS methodology has influenced policy at the federal, provincial and territorial level.
14 Statistics Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada. Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Chart 4.1, page 55.
While it is early days and not all of the information from PIAAC has been digested, clearly governments will be taking stock of the numbers and deciding how to respond. A series of policy institutes, convened by the Centre for Literacy, have facilitated a dialogue that “traced the shift from ‘literacy’ to ‘skills’ to ‘competencies,’” and explored evolving methodology and the impacts of international literacy assessments over two decades on policy and practice.”\textsuperscript{15} The literacy community, governments, academics, and international speakers reviewed IALSS’ meaning and impact for policy and practice, prepared for PIAAC and, in late October 2013 will begin interpreting PIAAC results.

\section*{Conclusions and Commentary}

Federal literacy policy has shifted considerably since 2006, and more changes should be expected in the near future. Funding cuts and under-spending demonstrate a reduced commitment to literacy as a national issue. Moreover, the policy area itself has narrowed from a broad-based issue focusing on the social, economic, and political nature of literacy to an issue related primarily to the labour market.

The federal government is trying to wield more influence over employment training – an area for which the provinces and territories have held responsibility since 1996. After years of supporting literacy and essential skills through the LMAs, the federal government is seeking to transform those agreements and reduce support for those individuals with the lowest skills. Finally, measures of success continue to be narrowed to outcomes as determined by international surveys. These changes have occurred as public information about spending and policy intentions has become more difficult to access.

The future is uncertain. The federal government’s decision to re-negotiate the LMDAs and LMAs at the end of March 2014, including its plan to create the CJG, has the potential to radically change how training is funded and delivered. The federal government has indicated its willingness to implement the CJG without the participation of the provinces and territories. Whether that is possible remains to be seen. The public criticisms of the LMA renegotiation, which includes the CJG, by the Council of the Federation are unusual and federal-provincial-territorial tensions are running high.

The federal government’s decision about which organizations will be part of the pan-Canadian net-
In the winter of 2008, I was visiting at the Tasiurvik child care centre in Inukjuak, Nunavik and snapped a series of picture with my digital camera. The photos featured a five-year-old boy in the process of tying his shoelace. In the first couple of frames we see the boy pulling on the lace with one hand and holding his shoe in the other. In the following sequence of pictures a young girl appears. At first she watches the boy and the shoe and then she offers assistance. Subsequent images feature the girl as she tries to help the boy by knotting the lace and fixing a bow, unsuccessfully. In the last photo the boy, sitting across from his female friend, has pulled the bottoms of his pants over his untied shoelaces. Later in the afternoon, with the children’s educator and the centre’s pedagogical counselor, we examined the images and wondered together about the stories the pictures told and the implications they might hold for learning. We discussed possible activities to plan in response. Several weeks later I showed the same set of photos and others to my colleague at Kativik Regional Government (KRG). We discussed the power of photographs and the potential of narrative forms of assessment to inform classroom practice; as well as to demonstrate to federal and provincial funders innovative child care practices developing in Nunavik.

Eighteen months later, inspired by the potential of teacher taken photographs and stories, KRG obtained funding from Health Canada through the Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Communities program to investigate the possibilities of narrative assessment. At the same time, I enrolled at the University of Victoria to pursue a Master’s in Child and Youth Care. Learning stories became the topic for my thesis.

I was first introduced to learning stories as a means of narrative assessment through the work of Margaret Carr (2001; Carr and Lee, 2012) who has written extensively about learning stories, which are composed of pictures of children in the action of learning, accompanied by narrative text. In the mid 1990’s early childhood leaders in Aotearoa/New Zealand created a curriculum called Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), which was based on a bilingual/bicultural Māori and English framework and series of exemplars. Te Whāriki continues to be a model curriculum for early childhood globally. The content is arranged in five strands: well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration, and it positions early childhood experiences within a social context. This narrative methodology shifted early learning and child care away from a graduated developmental focus guided by pre-determined checklists to a more socially-oriented curriculum accompanied by narrative strategies for assessment. For example, in the opening paragraph I told the story about the boy trying to tie his shoelaces. After sharing the photos and accompanying story with the teacher and pedagogical counselor, we developed a plan for knot making and bow tying activities, to be shared with children in that playroom in the following day and weeks. Narrative strategies recognize children’s strengths and are holistic. They involve reciprocal relationships between people, places and things, and connect deeply and meaningfully with families and communities. The photos and accompanying stories feature children in the process of successfully negotiating daily life in the community and at the child care centre, and in response to reflection and discussion are used to inform classroom planning and curriculum.

Significantly, this Aotearoa/New Zealand work was being used with great success in Māori communities. Te whatu pōkeka, Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning: early childhood exemplars (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2009) is a curriculum support document, which sets out Māori specific considerations. Ritchie and Rau’s 2008 research demonstrates that the strength-based approach to assessment positions teachers to incorporate Maori values and beliefs in their daily practice. Rameka (2007) describes how the Kaupapa Māori approach, “privileges and empowers Māori children and insists that constructs of the powerful, rich Māori child be at the heart of understandings about learning and assessment” (135). Rameka’s work demonstrates how, because of the socio-cultural focus, the combination of the Te Whāriki curriculum and learning stories enabled Māori educators to be open to learning from local knowledge and understandings, and to connect families more meaningfully with the education process.
by making visible children’s daytime learning activities and dispositions.

In 2005, then President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) Jose Kusugak, addressed a group which included then Minister of Human Resources, Ken Dryden, on the subject of Inuit early childhood development, saying, “We believe that children have the right to child care that is culturally and linguistically appropriate, incorporating the values and traditions of their parents and communities” (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2005: 4). These words echoed direction provided at the Avataq Elders’ conference in 2000 (Rowan, 2010). Later in specifying activities to meet Inuit Quality, Universal, Accessible and Developmental Care (QUAD), the 2005 Inuit Early Learning and Child Care discussion paper called for activities, “To promote and support the creation of Inuit-specific teaching material…” (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2005: 34). I wondered what educators in Nunavik would think about the possibilities learning stories might hold for strengthening Inuit approaches to early childhood practices and informing curriculum in Nunavik and how these could meet policy direction from our Elder’s and leaders.

Research in Inukjuak, Nunavik took place over eight weeks during the winter and early spring of 2011. I set out to investigate what learning stories might contribute to supporting local knowledge generation and sharing; cultural identities; language identities; and relationships between educators, children and families (Rowan, 2011, 2013). I worked closely with educators and support staff at the two community child care centres called Tasiurvik and Pigiursaviapik, throughout the project. We held a weekly dinner and discussion group, during which we shared a meal, discussed theories and practices connected with early childhood education research and practice, and planned activities for the following week. It was during these sessions that the educators created their first learning stories and began to read these stories aloud in Inuktitut to their peers.

Another research activity involved in-class visits. During the first week community co-researchers Maaji Putulik, pedagogical counselor at Tasiurvik, and Aani Augiak, child care counselor from KRG, and I visited playrooms and took photos of children demonstrating “interest” in their daily learning activities. Specifically, we looked for photo opportunities that featured children wholly engaged in: meaningful activities, solving problems, demonstrating learning, interacting with people and things, and connecting with local knowledge(s) and Inuit culture (Forman & Pufall 2005; Rowan 2011).

Soon the educators began to take their own pictures. The research team visited playrooms during naptime and while the children slept, we quietly worked with the educators as they learned how to upload photos to their computers, store them in files and then select images for learning stories. Eventually most of the educators learned to type using the syllabic chart as a reference, and how to use publishing software. All of the stories were written, typed, and shared in Inuktitut using syllabic text. These interactive sessions offered an opportunity for the research team to informally interact with educators and to think together about how best to connect educators, computers, photos, and words to create learning stories.

Outside of the Monday night discussion groups, the co-researchers worked with individual educators in response to their inquiries, interests and requirements. As the project evolved educators began to support one another more and more, both with Inuktitut language word verifications and technical computer questions. At the conclusion of the research phase, a local learning stories support committee was established, in order to keep the stories growing. And, inspired by their new writing projects, many of the educators also asked for Inuktitut grammar lessons.

The main sources of data for the project were the 59 Inuktitut-language learning stories, created by the educators at the centre. In addition to these, I kept a daily journal, documenting my observations both in-class and in my interactions with the educators and co-researchers. I also recorded narrative conversations with five educators and the two co-researchers. These materials formed the basis of my Master’s thesis. (Rowan, 2011) In January 2012 Annie Augiak went to another community, Kangiqsujuaq, and with the participation of Maaji Puutulik and KRG support, prepared a second Nunavik community to adopt the methodology we had used in Inukjuak. In February of 2013, Health Canada funded a Regional Training Workshop, which was organized by KRG and held in Kuujjuaq. This event provided three days of training for Aboriginal Head Start educators from all of the AHS sites in the province, on the learning stories approach to culturally and linguistically specific assessment.

Learning from Learning Stories

Each child at the centre has his/her own binder. The front cover of the binder features a photo of the child’s face and name printed in syllabics along the
spine. Inside the binder there is a one-page biography of each of the child’s two educators and a one-page child information sheet, which is completed by the parents and includes details about the child’s sauniq (bones) namesake and sanajiq (dresser), identifies the child’s favorite country food and camping place, and includes the names of family members. The rest of the binder will be filled with Inuktitut stories, which feature the child alone or with friends and classmates. The intention is that the binders will travel between the home and school. In most playrooms the binders are situated on child-accessible shelves so that the children may pick them up and read them as they wish.

Learning stories almost always start as a series of photographs taken of children immersed in their daily activities at the centre, or in the community. These photos serve as the inspiration for the accompanying narrative, written by the educators. Once the stories are completed, they are always printed and inserted into these binders. Sometimes the educators also place the stories on the wall above the children’s cubbies for parents to see and discuss. In the babies’ room there is a wooden photo frame, in which four stories can be displayed at once. It is delightful to watch a one-year-old standing at eye level with the frame examining the stories, in which they are featured through a combination of photos and syllabic text! One educator hangs the stories with clothes pegs on a clothesline slung across her room. Occasionally, the stories are even shared among classrooms.

The learning story process, however, does not end when the story is printed and displayed. Guided by the Early Learning Framework (ELF) (Government of British Columbia 2008), we followed the seven-step cycle of pedagogical narration, which recommends educators: “record ordinary moments; interpret ordinary moments to make learning visible; share description with others; add to deepen interpretation; link your pedagogical narration [with] the framework; evaluate plan and start the process again.” (Government of British Columbia 2009: 14)

Together, the educators and researchers used our Monday night discussion groups to reflect on the potential implications for learning contained in the stories documented, and consider future activities. While doing so we directed our attention to the connections between the learning stories at the centre, and local Inuit practices and values.

Very often, such as was the case with the story of Simeonie (below), these discussions prompted a desire to seek further advice from local Elders, encouraging intergenerational dialogue and learning.

Simeonie

Simeonie is on top of the hill.
Simeonie slides- wee, wee, wee- it’s fun!
Simeonie was happy to slide down, his classmates went with him.

The pictures, which accompany this story feature a boy dressed in a beautifully sewn, handmade bright blue parka, with matching snow pants and mitts. In the first frame the boy is seen at the top of a snow bank, considering the steep edge. The second image shows the boy sliding down the bank on his bottom. From this perspective, viewers can clearly see the distinctive mukkuk (the peak of a parka’s hood) and thick black fur that encircles the boy’s face. Finally we see the boy’s back as he climbs back up the hill, where several children appear to be moving around. The story, originally written in Inuktitut, captures an ordinary experience of children playing outdoors but it also prompted educators to initiate conversations with local Elders about the boy’s mukkuk.

Simeonie’s story prompted extended discussion in one Monday night meeting about the mukkuk. We spoke about parkas’ peaks as being used to identify Inuit affiliation with specific places and about instances of Inuit being rescued from drowning after being pulled out of the broken ice by someone who grabbed onto the mukkuk. These conversations served as encouragement to seek further clarifications from community Elders, and to recognize and plan activities to find out more about mukkuk, thus serving as a meaningful way to access Inuit knowledge(s).

Another story depicts a group of very young children – about 14 to 15 months old - taking turns trying to help a classmate remove her shoe. The children are seated on a mat and one by one the children offer to help:

Stuck Shoe

Elisapee sits on a mat, holding her Educator’s shoes and thinks, “I am going to wear these.”

Emily wants to try them on – she can’t remove her own shoes. They’re stuck!

The educator suggests, “Maybe Maina can remove your shoes?” Maina tries to pull the shoe and she says, “Ee pa.” The educator then says, “Johnny, help her too.”

“Maybe Elisapee can help you take them off?” “Maybe
when you pull the Velcro – the shoe will come off?”

“Maybe, Sandra can help you”? Sandra said, “It’s stuck!”

Then Maina says, “Maybe I can try again to take it off – Ee Pa! Now it’s off.” Emily is happy.

As the Monday night discussion group participants studied this story, we marveled at the cooperation and collaboration of these very young children who, in the end, succeeded in removing the shoe and solving the problem. We wondered if this was a great example of ways in which many Inuit, even at a very young age, come together to solve a problem with patience, persistence, determination, and a good spirit.

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What are some outcomes of the project?

The learning stories project began as an effort to develop and consider a culturally and linguistically relevant means of child assessment. As the work proceeded the learning stories became active Inuktitut language materials, relationship builders and Inuit cultural knowledge recognizers and promoters.

1. Creating culturally-embedded literacy

In thinking specifically about the Inuktitut language: educators involved in the project reported that after introducing learning stories into their classrooms, children were speaking more Inuktitut, using new words, asking about word meaning, employing place names, recognizing their own names in syllabics, and reading Inuktitut language stories in their binders alone, with friends and with family members.

Educators were writing more in Inuktitut themselves, and they were reading out loud in Inuktitut to children and peers. Some began to reconsider the content of their classroom walls with the aim of increasing Inuktitut language content. One educator completely revised her wall calendar replacing the commercially prepared apples, leaves, and trees of the South, with seal skin boots, mittens, ulus, and other symbols connected with Inuit knowledge. As we saw in the story of Simeonie, educators also began to ask colleagues and Elders to confirm Inuktitut word meanings and for editorial advice. Some reported gaining consciousness about their own use of mixed Inuktitut and English at the child care centre.

2. Fostering connections between families and the centre

The stories also provided a helpful vehicle for connecting with families. Through the stories parents became more aware of their children’s activities and abilities while at the child care centre. This resulted in an increased appreciation for the educators and children’s work, and created a greater sense of cooperation between parents and educators in the care and education of the community’s children.

3. Strengthening children’s sense of identity and place

At the Tasiurvik and Pigiursaviapik child care centres in Inukjuak, children now have access to stories written in the Inuktitut dialect of the place where they live, featuring images of the human and physical environment that surrounds them. When we started this project, there were fewer than 20 Inuktitut language stories and books in the centre’s playrooms (Rowan, 2010). Now, all 110 children at the two centres have perhaps as many as four learning stories in their binders, totaling close to 450 Inuktitut stories in the centre – a significant increase!

During my most recent trip to Inukjuak in February 2013, several children approached me in the Tasiurvik corridor, eager to show me their binders. A few minutes later, I saw two little girls, aged two years, lying on their tummies on the floor, studying a story in a binder. Learning stories are providing a new and growing source of deeply meaningful and relevant, community based, Inuktitut language material, and are actively contributing to Inuktitut language literacy in Nunavik. This is exciting stuff!

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Policy Implications

In 2011 the National Committee on Inuit Education published its Inuit education strategy, which included a vision for Inuit education that would see the education system reflect these five goals:

- Be bilingual (in the Inuit language and at least one of Canada’s official languages) and founded on Inuit history, culture and worldview.
- Be community-based and empower parents and elders to support education.
- Restore the central role of the Inuit language.
- Embrace early childhood education, Kindergarten to Grade 12, post-secondary and adult learning.
• Be continually informed and improved upon by monitoring, evidence and research. (National Committee on Inuit Education, 2011:70).

I would like to suggest that each of the five goals listed above is addressed through the learning stories project. The learning stories provide access to Inuit culture, history, and worldview as evidenced in the discussion about the mukkkuk and deliberations around sharing in the story about the stuck shoe. The stories are providing a reason for educators to seek Elder advice and direction, and are giving parents easily accessible insights into the activities of both their children and their children’s educators. This is directly equipping parents, Elders, and families to participate in and support children’s educational lives beginning at a very early age. The stories provide a platform through which parents, educators and children can communicate, share ideas, and consider future plans using the Inuit language.

The stories are written in Inuktut. They are read quietly and aloud in Inuktut. Educators have asked for grammar classes in order to improve their writing skills. Children can take their binders home – to read and to be read to. The stories are working to position Inuktut as a viable workplace language (Taylor & Wright 2003), which is fundamental to restoring the central role of the Inuit language in Inuit communities. As Avataq (2012) explains, “Inuktut is one of Canada’s great national assets. It deserves to be treated as a distinctly Canadian treasure…. To Inuit their language is a precious heritage worth every effort to preserve” (109).

This work embraces early childhood by capturing ordinary moments in children’s lives and using these moments to reflect, using the Inuit language, on their cultural meaning and importance. Finally, the work of the learning stories embodies evidenced-based practice. It engages with educators as researchers investigating children’s interests and activities, and goes further by providing a mechanism through which we can recognize and develop Inuit understandings, knowledge and practices in early childhood education.

In closing, the National Committee on Inuit Education recommends that educators and government work together to “Develop quality, consistent programming based on Inuit language, values and ways of knowing…” (National Committee on Inuit Education 2011: 81). Based on the discussion above, I suggest that the learning stories provide a viable tool through which Inuit values, language and knowledge can be accessed and lived at child care centres in Inuit Nunangat. What do you think?

Mary Caroline Rowan is a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholar completing a PhD in education at the University of New Brunswick. She teaches comparative education at Concordia University.

References
Avataq Cultural Institute (2012). Illirijavut-That which we treasure-La langue que nous Chérissons. Inukjuak, Québec: Author.

Endnotes
1 Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand.
2 All names have been changed to respect confidentiality.
Our mission is to provide insightful and compelling commentary on the policy issues facing Northerners. We’ve featured contributions by the Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, Premier Darrell Pasloski, Premier Bob McLeod, Tony Penikett, Tom Axworthy, Peter Russell, Frances Abele, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Niki Ashton, Terry Fenge, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, Zacharias Kunuk, David Brock, and many more. Our first year reflects the passion our authors have for the North and its future. We hope that you’ll join them and consider subscribing to the magazine. Please visit us online at www.northernpublicaffairs.ca for ongoing commentary, archived articles, and more!

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Nunavut territorial election campaign poster for Jack Anawak, who ran in Iqaluit-Niaqunnguu, October 2013.
ARTICLES
Judge Thomas Berger at “Keeping the Promise” Land Claim Agreement Coalition Conference, Gatineau, Quebec, February 2013.
My relationship with the Nisga’a goes back... to the early 1960s which is a long time ago, but that relationship is one I treasure and indeed I proudly bear a Nisga’a name, Halaydim Xhlaawait, and I hope that relationship will continue for a long time to come.

I want to talk about the Calder case. That is the case the Nisga’a fought back in the 1960s when they sought to establish their Aboriginal title to the Nass Valley. I was a lot younger then than I am now; indeed I was just a young lawyer. Frank Calder and the four chiefs of the four Nisga’a villages on the Nass River came to see me in Vancouver. I had a very small law office, a secretary, and my widowed mother worked for me as well. My recollection is that when the four chiefs came in we didn’t have enough chairs for all of them!

You may be saying to yourselves, well why did the Nisga’a go to this young lawyer? I had no reputation, no background. Just let me tell you why.

I started out in the field of criminal law doing defence work. I often consulted an older lawyer named Tom Hurley who then was about the age I am now — let’s just say late 70s and not be too specific about it. He was a lovely old gentleman and he always wore a three-piece suit, he always smoked and always had ashes all over his vest. He had a little office, but though he argued some of the most important cases in criminal law in Canada’s history, he was quite unassuming and I do not think he ever made very much money in law. I would go down to his office and ask him about my cases and he was always very generous with his time, but he was a man that liked to take a drink and he would say, “Well, Tom, why don’t we go over to the Olympic Hotel and talk about this?” That’s when they had beer parlours in the old days and you could sit around and drink beer and that was always agreeable to me. We would step out of his office, but his wife worked in the office opposite and her name was Maisie and she was a great champion of the Indian people of British Columbia. She was a formidable lady; she was tall, wore a quilted black dress and horn-rimmed eye-glasses, her hair was back in a tight bun and she had a cane that she was willing to swing... Anyway, Mr. Hurley and I were leaving his office to go the beer parlour — she objected to his drinking. She came out of her office and said, “Tom Hurley, where are you going?” He said, “Oh, just stepping out with Mr. Berger for a conference, my love.” And she said, “I know where you’re going, you’re going the beer parlour.” His response was, “How can you say such a thing, my love?”

Well, Mr. Hurley and I kept scuttling toward the door as this conversation went on. Anyway, she said she knew where we were going and came after us. We hurried down to the elevator, and as we got into the elevator, Tom Hurley mopped his brow and turned to me and said, “Didn’t I tell her!”

Mr. Hurley died about a month later of a heart attack and Mrs. Hurley did not waste a moment. She came into my office a few days later, stood in front of my desk, smacked her cane down towards me and said, “Now Tommy, you will have to represent the Indians.” So, in that way life’s choices are made for you; it was a choice I am always happy that Mrs. Hurley forced me to make.

The first case she brought to me involved two Indian men, young men, who had been hunting allegedly out of season in breach of the B.C. Game Act. This was in Nanaimo, and after she brought the case1 to me we took it all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and won in 1965, establishing their right under an old and forgotten treaty to hunt in southern Vancouver Island. But, we also raised a question of Aboriginal rights; the Crown said they didn’t have a right to hunt, that their old treaty signed with Governor Douglas could not be upheld. All right then, we argued, if there was no treaty then they had never given up their Aboriginal right to hunt, and they had a right as Aboriginal people to hunt independently of any treaty right. The Supreme Court of Canada upheld the treaty.

1 Regina v. White and Bob
But we had kind of opened the door a little bit to the discussion of Aboriginal rights in the courts and that, of course, was the reason Frank Calder and the Nisga’a chiefs came to see me.

In the mid-1960s, we started the lawsuit that bears Frank Calder’s name. The case went to trial in 1969. I should tell you that we had meetings, Frank Calder and I, with other First Nations people in the province, all of whom objected to this lawsuit being brought. They said, “You are going to lose and then we will have lost forever”, but the Nisga’a, guided as they always have been by statesmen, said “No. We believe in our own history, we’re going ahead.” And just before we went to trial Prime Minister Trudeau was asked in Vancouver about claims to Aboriginal title and he said, “Well, our answer is no” — this is the Prime Minister of Canada speaking — “We can’t recognize Aboriginal title because no society can be built on historical might-have-beens.” He swept the whole question of Aboriginal title into the dust bin of history.

Well, the trial proceeded. The Crown admitted that the Nisga’a had used and occupied the Nass Valley for thousands of years — since time immemorial. Frank Calder and the four chiefs testified. An anthropologist named Wilson Duff testified; he was the first anthropologist to testify in these cases. Some of you familiar with Aboriginal rights litigation in recent years will be astounded to know that the trial took one week and all the issues were canvassed. We made our argument and we lost. The judge said, “I think you should appeal this. I accept all of this evidence, but nobody has ever claimed Aboriginal title in this century and you should take it to a higher court.”

Now, let me just say that the concept of Aboriginal title was not just something that smart lawyers had thought up. It is true that it had been sleeping for a century in the law books, but it had not been forgotten by the Nisga’a because in 1887, there was a Royal Commission in British Columbia that travelled to the Nass Valley. Reserves had been allotted in those days, but no treaties made. When a royal commission (the provincial government appointed a royal commission “to look into the condition of the Indians of the Northwest”) visited the Nass Valley, the Nisga’a raised the question of Aboriginal title. David McKay, one of the Nisga’a chiefs, spoke for the Nisga’a. Now, this is 126 years ago:

What we don’t like about the government is their saying this: ‘We will give you this much land.’ [that is the reserve] How can they give it when it is our own? We cannot understand it. They have never bought it from us or our forefathers. They have never fought and conquered our people and taken the land in that way, and yet they say now that they will give us so much land — our own land. [Our] chiefs do not talk foolishly, they know the land is their own. Our forefathers for generations and generations past had their land here all around us; chiefs have had their own hunting grounds, their salmon streams, and places where they got their berries; it has always been so…it has been ours for thousands of years.

You will recall that in the Haida case in 2004, Chief Justice McLachlin for the Supreme Court of Canada pointed out that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada had never been conquered…

The Nisga’a continued to assert their Aboriginal title and another royal commission went to Northern B.C., this time in 1915, and Gideon Minesque spoke for the Nisga’a. 1915, now I think that is 98 years ago, and at that time he said,

We haven’t got any ill feelings in our hearts, but we are just waiting for this thing to be settled… It is not only a short time that we have lived here; we have been living here from time immemorial - it has been handed down from legends from the old people and that is what hurts us very much because the White people have come along and taken this land away from us… We have heard that some White men… said that the [Nisga’a] must be dreaming when they say they own the land upon which they live. It is not a dream - we are certain that the land belongs to us. Right up to this day the government never made any treaty, not even to our grandfathers or our great grandfathers.

And, of course, that belief among the Nisga’a held firm for all of those years, and it led Frank Calder and the four chiefs to come and see me in the 1960s. Now, I said we lost at trial and an appeal to the B.C. Court of Appeal, and that is not really surprising. I went to law school in the mid-1950s and we never studied Aboriginal rights. It never occurred to our teachers or to us that the people who lived all around us, from whom we had taken the country, had rights – legal rights, constitutional rights. Judges in those days had never been trained in the field of Aboriginal rights so it was difficult to convince them that the Aboriginal peoples possessed rights based on the indisputable fact that they used and occupied vast areas, if not the whole of this continent, before the Europeans came. They had their own institutions, their own laws, but of this fact many lawyers and judges remained unaware. They

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2 This was the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, jointly appointed by Ottawa and the Province, commonly called the McKenna-McBride Commission.
could not accept that people without an extensive written language would have an elaborate legal system. And as for their Aboriginal title, how could the court acknowledge it? It was ill-defined, it was not recorded in the system of title deeds and land registration; most importantly, it was not usually a form of private property, but often was communal.

Well, we went to the Supreme Court of Canada and there were some outstanding judges there in those days. Of course, the Supreme Court of Canada is the last stop on the judicial railway and the judges there know that there is no appeal after they deal with a case; they are speaking to history. In our case, we went down to Ottawa to argue the case. Frank Calder and the Chiefs of the four villages together with the Elders travelled to Ottawa for the hearing and theirs was a grave, respectful and poignant presence. They represented there, in a sense, the Aboriginal peoples of Canada whose interests the judges, for the first time in the 20th century, would have to confront. And if there was a fighting chance of obtaining justice, we felt, it was here, where the judges know they will make or unmake history.

We argued the case before the Supreme Court in 1971. The judgement came down in 1973 and six of the seven judges decided that Aboriginal title was part of the common law, part of Canadian law. They divided three to three over the question of whether Aboriginal title had been extinguished in British Columbia. The view that was to prevail was that of Justice Emmett Hall who discussed in his judgement the importance for the judges to rise above their cultural biases. After considering the evidence in a very lengthy judgement he said, “What emerges from the...evidence is that the Nisga’a in fact are and were from time immemorial a distinctive people with concepts of ownership indigenous to their culture and capable of articulation under the common law.” He concluded, “[The Nisga’a] have the] right to possession of the lands delineated...and their right to enjoy the fruits of the soil, of the forest, and of the rivers and streams within the boundaries of these lands has not been extinguished by the [Crown].”

So, that was a turning point because, of course, it led the federal government to agree to negotiate with the Nisga’a. Within a few months, on the advice of their principal legal advisor in these matters, Gerard LaForest, who later became a judge at the Supreme Court of Canada, they decided that Justice Emmett Hall, in the passages I have just read you, represented the sound view of the law. The Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, who had dismissed the Nisga’a case just a few years before, said that Canada had to negotiate comprehensive claims with all of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada where their Aboriginal title had not been surrendered.

And, of course, it was not only the decision of the Supreme Court that brought about this immense change. Aboriginal people all over the country had begun to make the case in their own way for acceptance of the idea of Aboriginal title. In fact, Elijah Smith, a chief from the Yukon, led a delegation of Yukon First Nations people that met with Mr. Trudeau just a few days after the judgement in the Calder case came down.

Now, since that time, under the heading of comprehensive claims, we have the 24 land claims agreements represented by you folks sitting here today. It began with the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975 and we have seen claims settled in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavik and now three more from British Columbia: the Sliammon, the Tsawwassen and the Maanulth.

It was at that point that I was appointed a judge by the federal government to the Supreme Court of British Columbia so I vanished into the judicial woodwork for about twelve years; though some of you from the Mackenzie Valley and the western Arctic remember that during that time I was appointed the head of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, which took me to your neighbourhood for about three years.

While I was a judge, my wife, Beverley, was a counsellor to the Native Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of British Columbia. It was a program run by a very well-known Indian educator, Verna Kirkness, from Manitoba, whom some of you I am sure know. Anyway, we lived near the university and most of these Aboriginal students struggling to become teachers were women, and they used our livingroom as a kind of home away from home. They were often there. I was working upstairs one day and I heard a lot of laughter downstairs. When I came down I said, “Well, what was that all about?” and my wife said, “Well, the students are going to occupy the offices of Indian Affairs downtown tonight and they are going to stay there overnight, to protest the reduction in the money being made available for First Nations university students.” And she added, “Well, they have to cook breakfast and maybe lunch so I gave them our electric frying pan.”

The next day I went to work at the courthouse and I got a call from the Chief Justice who said, “Tom, the Department of Justice is coming over...
here and they are going to apply for an injunction against some Indian women who have occupied the department’s offices. Would you hear the case?”

I said, “Well, Chief Justice, I think I may have a conflict of interest. As we speak, I believe our frying pan is being held hostage!”

Anyway, in the meantime the Nisga’a negotiations proceeded with the federal government and in due course the province joined those negotiations. They took a long time because Canada agreed to negotiate in 1973 and the Nisga’a treaty was signed in 2000. It was my observation that the Nisga’a leaders had a deep concern for the future of their people. They were conscious of, but not pre-occupied with, the grievances of the past. They had no interest in representing themselves or being characterized as victims and they always maintained their sense of humour. They could not have made it through if they had not. They were not negotiating merely a land claim – and this I am sure is true of all the land claims that you folks here tonight have negotiated – but the future of their people. They were engaged in redefining the relationship between the Nisga’a and the dominant Canadian society. That was what was always at stake and what remained at stake through the negotiations.

Well, the Nisga’a negotiations were completed in the year 2000 and when the treaty went through there was a flurry of litigation as Gordon Campbell, then the leader of the opposition in British Columbia, sought an injunction to prevent the treaty coming into force. Various other groups sued and the last of those challenges was only disposed of on February 5th, three weeks ago, when Jim Aldridge the last of those challenges was only disposed of on coming into force. Various other groups sued and

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before. You can take it from me that I know what
I am talking about; although that was not always
the case. When I first became a judge, I was still in
my 30s and my father who had been in the RCMP
on the prairies in the old days spoke to me when I
became a judge and said, “Now Tom, I know you
went to law school and graduated and you have read
a lot of law books, but there are some things that
judges do not know. There is a lot of wisdom out
there on the farm and on the street and in the bush,
and judges should be aware of it.” And he told me
a story about a new judge on the prairies in the old
days who was hearing a case in a small town; it was
a case of a young man in the town who had been
charged with stealing a horse. The case came before
the judge, he tried it with 12 prairie farmers and the
evidence was pretty strong. It looked as if the young
man had stolen the horse. The judge summed up the
evidence and he sent the jury out. They realized the
evidence was pretty strong, but they thought this was
a young man whose record should not be blemished
by a conviction for a crime. So, they came back with
their verdict. The judge said, “Have you reached
a verdict Mr. Foreman and members of the jury?”
The foreman said, “Yes. Your Honour, we find the
defendant not guilty; but we think he should give the
horse back.”

Well, the judge, a new judge preening himself
on his knowledge of the law, said in a patronizing
way; “Well Mr. Foreman and members of the jury,
that is what in law we call an inconsistent verdict. I
will have to ask you to go back to the jury room and
reconsider your verdict.” So, away they went and
soon they came back. The judge said, “Have you
reached a verdict?” — “Yes, we have.” The foreman
said, “Well, we find the defendant not guilty and we
have decided that he can keep the horse!”

Well, I have learned a lot since those days, so
let me just mention one or two other things. These
land claims agreements are remarkable in that they
provide the whole basis — I do not pretend to know
all of them, but I am sure this is true of all of those
in the Northern regions, in the Arctic and Subarctic
— they provide the whole basis for land use planning
in that great land mass because, of course, these 24
land claims agreements that you folks have signed
cover one-half of the land mass of Canada and these
agreements provide the whole basis, legal and consti-
tutional, for land use planning in these areas. In fact,
the auditor general in her report in 2011 pointed out
that in the Northwest Territories, where you had land
claims agreements that had been signed, you had in-
stitutions established for land use planning involving
local control that were far ahead of any measures the
federal government or the government of the North-
west Territories had taken on its own to develop land
use planning in those areas where there were as of yet
no land claims agreements.

Let me give you another example of this. In
the Yukon, the Umbrella Final Agreement was signed in
1993, providing the basis for the 11 final agreements
that have been reached with First Nations in the Yu-
kon. The Umbrella Final Agreement provides for a series
of land use planning commissions jointly established
by First Nations and the Yukon government that will
over a period of years develop land use plans for the
whole territory. One of those commissions completed its work a few years ago covering the Northern part of the Yukon. The Yukon government, First Nations of the Yukon, and the people of the Yukon are now considering the report of the second of those planning commissions dealing with a vast area called the Peel Watershed. If the proposals of the regional land use planning commission jointly established by First Nations and the Yukon government are carried out, it will become the largest protected area in North America. It is not all protected — provision is made for industrial development — but, of course, this is where the lines are often drawn. If you are engaged in land use planning, what land is to be preserved for parks, for habitat, for the caribou and snow geese, the marine mammals and fishery and so on? Those are tough decisions and in the Yukon. In the first instance, they have set up these land use planning commissions to deal with each area as they go along. It will take many years, but isn’t that the rational way to deal with these vast territories; to sit down and work it out over a period of years?

Now, because I know your conference is dealing with promises that are not kept, it is only right to point out that in the Peel Watershed, the First Nations involved are engaged in a struggle to persuade the Yukon government to live up to the recommendations that the land use planning commission has advanced for the Peel.

But in the main these land claims agreements have made the Aboriginal people major land owners; significant players in the economy, local and regional.

I think I have demonstrated that these modern treaties have altered the political, social, environmental, and cultural landscape as well as the legal and constitutional landscape of Canada. As Aboriginal people over the last 40 years have sought to establish their Aboriginal title, they have also sought and obtained constitutional guarantees for their Aboriginal and treaty rights. Under section 35 of the Constitution adopted in 1982, the rights that Aboriginal people have established and that are written into these land claims agreements, these modern treaties, are protected by the Constitution. That means all of these land claims agreements are constitutional instruments. They are, in a sense, part of the Constitution of Canada. That is an important and far-reaching development that you should keep in mind because there are opportunities from time-to-time before the courts to take advantage of the constitutional status of those promises written in to these land claims agreements.

Now, I realize that some of the promises that have been made have not been kept and I am sure every-body in this room, if they cornered me after this event, could each of them tell me something that has not been implemented — a promise that has not been kept. Of course it is true that often the representatives of the Crown seem to have forgotten the idea at the heart of these land claims agreements — that they are intended to established a new relationship, to bring about reconciliation not just in the short term, but in the long term. I know, if I may say so, looking back forty years and more — because I look back to a landscape in the 1960s when Frank Calder knocked on my door, a day when there were no land claims agreements. There were occasional statements by Aboriginal leaders about Aboriginal title, but these were regarded, as the Prime Minister of the day said at the time, as historical might-have-beens. And, so, I know looking back, that you will come through; I know you can complete the work that you set out to do.

Those historical might-have-beens, as they were once described, have instead become important milestones in Canadian history. You know, if you take a poll of Canadians and ask what makes us distinctly Canadian, they’ll say Confederation and the union of English and French-speaking people, the building of the railway, the extension of Canada from sea to sea, and the courage of Canada’s soldiers in WW I and WW II (and it is to be remembered that an important contribution was made in both of those wars by soldiers from Aboriginal villages all over Canada). Then people say, well there is Medicare, the Charter of Rights and so on. All of that is true, but I think that this process of settling land claims, which is still unfolding, a process that you are leading, is just as important a milestone in Canadian history. Canadians should be made aware of it. It should be taught in the schools. It is a struggle by the Aboriginal peoples of Canada that we Canadians should always bear in mind because it is, in a sense, an achievement not only for Aboriginal people, but for all Canadians. I have described your work as a milestone in Canadian history; I just want to say I am proud to have played a small part in that history and I want to thank you very much for inviting me here today.

*This article was based on a speech to the Land Claims Agreement Coalition conference Keeping the promise: The path ahead to full modern treaty implementation held in Gatineau, Quebec, February 26- March 1, 2013. Thomas R. Berger lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.*
The story is set beside a lake north of Yellowknife, at a school called Dechinta that teaches Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on the land. Standing before Glen Coulthard, a member of the Yellowknives Dene as well as an assistant professor of political science at the University of British Columbia, are Kate Middleton and Prince William. The couple is about a week into their 2011 honeymoon through their family's former colony. The trip is like an echo of the one William's father, Prince Charles, and grandmother, Queen Elizabeth, made in 1970. Unsurprisingly, the media are dripping with superlatives to describe it all.

But out here by the lake, Coulthard has tougher emotions. As one of the leading critical thinkers on the politics of Indigenous reconciliation, he’s struggled with the invitation to teach the couple about his community’s history. “I had a lot of mixed feelings about it, which were mostly negative,” Coulthard says. “The Royal family, under the British empire at one point, was in acquisition of over 80 percent of the globe. So these people are representative of the heart of colonial policy on a global scale. I wasn’t convinced that it was a conversation that should be even had.”

A story has changed Coulthard’s mind and allowed him to meet the couple, though. Back in 1970, during the first Royal visit, his grandfather had loaned his boat to the Canadian government. When he got it back, it was ruined. “It was damaged to the point it was no longer operable,” Coulthard says. And yet Ottawa refused to compensate his grandfather for the loss. “Apparently, the story goes, [the community] wrote a letter to the Royal family. It was the Royal family that ultimately compensated him for the damaged boat.”

Glen Coulthard on Blatchford Lake with Dechinta Bush University, Yellowknives Dene territory, Northwest Territories.
At one level, the story of Coulthard moving from resentment to interaction with the Royal couple reads like the Canadian state’s ideal for reconciliation. An Aboriginal man is resentful for wrongs committed in the past but decides to forgive and accept his situation, reconciling with an apologetic power. But a different reading of the same is possible. Coulthard welcomed the Royal couple — who are potent symbols of contemporary colonialism — because he was swayed that they had actively reconciled with his family by compensating his grandfather for his damaged boat. Coulthard explained the effects of colonialism to the Royal couple while they were guests in his community and they listened to how colonialism continues to affect the Yellowknives today.

This second version of reconciliation — a two-way interaction — is largely silenced in mainstream political talk in Canada. Instead, aside from the apologies and expressions of regret from the state, Aboriginal people are seen to be solely responsible for reconciliation: they must overcome their past, manifested by their resentment. “Canada has a different understanding and goals for reconciliation than do most Indigenous peoples when they’re speaking about it amongst themselves,” Coulthard says. The differences and the conversation that results form the core of his academic work.

What has emerged through Coulthard’s work is a new way to see discussions about Aboriginal issues in Canada, whether it is land claims in the North, the recent Idle No More protests, or the broader notion of Aboriginal rights. What becomes clear with Coulthard’s perspective is that reconciliation is central to all of it. Canada’s desire, as Coulthard says, is to “solve the modern Indian problem,” and this pushes the country to seek its idea of reconciliation. But Aboriginal people have a desire for their grievances and nations to be reconciled, which can often lead to deep resentment because reconciliation politics do not satisfy this desire. In arguing that Canada needs to overcome reconciliation politics and that resentment might actually help it do that, Coulthard is perhaps the most important emerging Aboriginal politics scholar in Canada.

Coulthard’s first focus was in the realm of another ‘R’ word that dominates discussions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada: recognition. Back in 2007, about a year before Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s official apology for residential schools, Coulthard published the article “Subjects of Empire” in the journal Contemporary Political Theory. Coulthard argues against the belief — widely held in Canada both then and now — that recognition offers the potential to change the political structures that marginalize Aboriginal peoples. But as Coulthard argues, the politics of recognition can’t change a situation where a state is negotiating the rights of Indigenous nations that exist within it. Instead, he writes, the politics of recognition “promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.”

Why does it do this? “Recognition is often demanded by Indigenous people,” Coulthard says, in an interview. “The Dene Nation demanded recognition of our community as a nation, with the right to self-determination, in 1975. But what was countered or offered in the form of recognition from the state was not the right to land and freedom; it was a very narrow right to certain resources, in exchange for the Dene giving up, extinguishing all the rights and title to their traditional territories.” This style of recognition is mirrored by Canada’s version of reconciliation, and even forms the first step towards it.

To recognize Aboriginal rights or title, Canada seeks to reconcile them with its own claims to sovereignty. Because it doesn’t question its own power and rights, reconciliation with Canada is a project aimed at settling past wrongs but leaving the present and future comparatively unexamined. Reconciliation with Canada is about “moving on,” Coulthard says. “Reconciliation is willing to confront, to a certain degree, the past. So [the state says] ‘Residential schools were bad, and we recognize that they were unjust, they were immoral, but they are over now. We’re left with this legacy, and we need to move on,’” he says. “Reconciliation [with the state] is about getting over that which is inhibiting a healthier state.” What results is something like an ironic knot, where the concept Aboriginal people desire — reconciliation — is exactly the same word used by the state that seems to prevent it.

In the context of settler colonialism, to be resentful of something is actually a sign of our critical consciousness. It’s a sign that there’s something in the world that is nagging at us, that is unjust, and if targeted, those forceful emotions can challenge us as individuals to act.
Coulthard has worked to untie the knot. In his earlier work, such as the 2007 paper, he concentrates on the potential for Aboriginal peoples to decolonize their minds, focusing on ideas from thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, author of the groundbreaking *Black Skin, White Masks*, among other works.

But as Coulthard’s work untwisting the knot has matured, he has honed his critique and has arrived at yet another ‘R’ word: resentment. Because Aboriginal recognition and reconciliation, from a Canadian perspective, are focused only on the wrongs of the past, the situation as it exists today is ignored. “We can’t make a tidy distinction between past injustices we need to move on from and these ones that still inform the core of the relationship between native peoples and the state,” Coulthard says. And here lays the problem:

That there is the problem. Reconciliation doesn’t even properly identify the issue at hand, that we need to collectively put our heads together and work on as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on this land that we now share. Reconciliation is structurally ill-equipped to deal with that because it doesn’t recognize that as a problem. That’s why you can have Harper apologize in 2008 for the residential system, and one year later at the G20 meeting in Pennsylvania, say Canada has no history of colonialism. Because they’re entirely conceptually distinct, because reconciliation, as it’s framed by Canadian policy makers, is not about colonialism, it’s about what it would like to think is a misguided humanitarian project that was undertaken in the form of residential schools.

In his forthcoming book, *Seeing Red: On Recognition, Reconciliation and Resentment in Indigenous Politics*, Coulthard argues that in this situation, “to be resentful of something is actually a sign of our critical consciousness. It’s a sign that there’s something in the world that is nagging at us, that is unjust, and if targeted, those forceful emotions can challenge us as individuals to act.”

The politics of recognition and reconciliation may have ended in Canada sometime around December 2012, with the outpouring of resentment for ongoing marginalization of Aboriginal peoples called Idle No More. And though many commentators from outside the Aboriginal community saw its forceful, passionate expressions of resentment as yet more proof of that community’s need to get over the past and move on, Coulthard viewed it differently. “I saw an awakening among many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples,” Coulthard says in an interview. He continues:

I saw a truth revealed about the destructive and oppressive nature of our current situation, which I think will be hard to package up and ignore from this point on. So now, what I would like to think is that there was a turning point, that there was a break in peoples’ consciousness, in First Nations’ peoples willingness to go along with this, because we thought it would be made better eventually. On the side of non-native society, I think there was a real awakening as well that, yes, there is this relationship that non-native people are also a party to and the federal government, which claims to be representative of their interests and their rights, has historically and is in the present running roughshod over that relationship. And I think there were more Canadians than ever before who started to see that as a problem, which I think will be hard to go back from. It’s going to be much harder for all of us to just put our blinders on to that.

But perhaps a larger question remains: Is the state’s position inevitable? Can a country that sees its own ideas of sovereignty and nationhood as somehow threatened by Indigenous assertions actually change to accept, even embrace, calls for recognition and reconciliation? Coulthard is clear that he feels the leader of the day makes little difference to the logic that marginalizes Aboriginal people in Canada, noting that it’s a structural pattern rather than one created by individuals. But he refuses to see things as fixed or as hopeless.

“To say it’s inevitable and it will always be the same would be too dismissive or too pessimistic,” he says. “What it will require is some genuine will and motivation amongst Canadians, non-native Canadians, who see themselves as being represented by a state or government that is violating that relationship of sharing that they have, through Treaty, with Indigenous peoples.” Ultimately, what Coulthard is speaking about is a two-way reconciliation and about both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians engaging to address what’s really happening, right now, rather than just the past. “I think that’s where change has to really focus itself,” he says.

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This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Great Northern Arts Festival (GNAF), which takes place annually in Inuvik, Northwest Territories. I was fortunate enough to attend the festival this year while in Inuvik for a territorial meeting on the arts and I learned a great deal about what the festival is about and what it means for artists in the North. I am one of many artists living and working in the NWT. Unlike our peers in larger southern cities, we are isolated from one another. The North’s expansive geography, lack of infrastructure, and prohibitive travel costs, means that festivals and gatherings are often our only opportunity to get together and meet other artists. This was my first experience with the Great Northern Arts Festival — the largest festival of its kind in the Northwest Territories.

GNAF began in 1989 with just a few small tables cramped together in a small, borrowed space in Inuvik. Today, over 120 artists and performers gather to celebrate. During the opening ceremonies over 300 people crowded into the community hall to celebrate the longest running arts festival in the NWT. Elders sat in the front rows, smiling and watching the children playing and fidgeting on the floor at their feet. Many people were reunited with old friends or family members and there were all sorts of people laughing and reminiscing about the last time they had seen each other. The Inuvik Drummers and Dancers inspired everyone with their performance and the Fort Good Hope Drummers told jokes and sang, their drums beating excitement into the air.

The entire festival took place at the Midnight Sun Complex and Family Centre. The gallery was set up in the curling rink, the workshops and artist demonstration area was in the arena, and the performances and banquets were held in the community hall and gallery area. As we discussed the future of the arts in the NWT, it was difficult not to be optimistic with the energy and excitement of the festival going on all around us. Through the hard work and dedication of many volunteers, and the on-going support of corporate and government sponsors, the festival has grown into an incredible display of culture and Northern pride.

*Midnight Sun Complex, Inuvik, Northwest Territories, August 2013.*
Inside the gallery space, including a tepee from Fort McPherson.
I currently sit as the president of the Aurora Arts Society, which is based in the capital city of Yellowknife. Attending the territorial arts conference allowed me to meet people from other organizations, build new relationships, and learn about how other groups overcome issues like funding and professional development. In Yellowknife, we have access to government programs and funders in a way that the communities do not. We often take for granted our ability to walk into a government office and have a face-to-face meeting with someone on the NWT Arts Council or in the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Places like Tsiigehtchic, Trout Lake or Lutsel K’ee cannot easily access that type of government presence for support. GNAF offered us a chance to develop ideas and relationships for future collaborations with organizations outside of Yellowknife. This is extremely important as groups outside the capital often suffer from a lack of services or amenities like exhibition space or a large pool of volunteers.

It is essential to the future well-being of the arts in the territory to have government support. Most arts organizations are run entirely by volunteers and lack the surplus resources to send even a single person to a gathering. For example, it costs approximately $1,500 for a round trip airline ticket between Inuvik and Yellowknife. For a smaller communities like Ulukhaktok airfare can be over $3,000 for a trip to the capital city. Add to that the cost of a hotel room, food, and transportation to and from the airport and you could suddenly find your organization spending your entire NWT Arts Council grant to send a single person to just one event. Most groups cannot even afford a paid staff member for administrative purposes because there are just not enough resources.

Government support for these gatherings helps organizations and artists build lasting relationships that tie groups and regions together. Art is a multi-million dollar industry, but it is often overlooked in favour of primary industries such as mining or oil and gas. Supporting artists across the NWT is an investment in more than simply beading, carving, or painting; it is an investment in the people and health of communities, in the traditions and culture of the people of the NWT, and most importantly, an investment in an economically sustainable future.

Part of what is so admirable about the Great Northern Arts Festival is that it has survived 25 years in a territory whose primary industries are mining and government. Historically, gold, oil and gas, and more recently diamonds, have been the focus of government efforts to build a stable territorial economy. Yet when an economy is dependent on a single commodity for its survival, the impact of a downturn can be devastating. The GNAF survives with support from sponsors, volunteers and because the NWT has a strong policy that supports the Arts.

Networking is an important part of the festival particularly for artists. Meeting peers is an important opportunity to learn from Elders or to mentor young and emerging artists. These encounters help to keep feelings of isolation at bay. Knowing that there is a larger community of artists supporting each other, no matter how scattered they are across the territory, is essential. With such talented artists as sculptor Rueben Komangapik, printmaker Louis Nigiyok, mixed media artist Leslie Leongm, and beader Lena White in attendance, younger and emerging artists have a chance to sit and talk with them, to ask questions about techniques, to collaborate, and to get advice on building their own careers.

There are a number of departments and programs that support artists in every aspect of their career. Whether they are creating traditional crafts in Tsiigehtchic, taking photos in Hay River, making birch-bark baskets in Fort Liard or painting, performing, or writing in Yellowknife, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has a program to support them. Support for artists is critical because for many people in small communities it is their livelihood.

The NWT Arts Council has a budget of $500,000 to support the creation and exhibition of visual art, traditional arts, writing, music, and performance all across the Territory. They have requests from artists and groups all across the Territory that exceed that budget every single year. This leads to reduced grant allocations to organizations and individuals. More requests means the money has to go further and further and because many artists cannot access the next level of funding the pool of artists and requests keeps growing. One way to alleviate the pressures on the NWT Arts Council budget would be to have organizations and artists develop to a more professional level where they can access Canada Council funding. But without access to stable core funding for organizations or opportunities for professional development, artists will continue to have only a few funding options and the strain on the NWT Arts Council budget will continue to grow.

The Support to Entrepreneurs and Economic Development, or SEED Program, delivered through Industry, Tourism and Investment has a budget of
$658,000 for each of the five regions within the NWT. This program supports artists by providing funding for capital equipment, materials and supplies, travel expenses related to exhibition and professional development, and for marketing and promotion. But this money is shared with other small business entrepreneurs and not dedicated entirely to artists.

Other programs, offered by the department of Education Culture and Employment, support arts mentorships, literacy development, performance, and film and media arts.

There is money available to artists and arts organizations but how that money is distributed can become problematic. The application process, program eligibility, and competition for funds often prevent artists from pursuing contemporary practice particularly in the visual arts. Much of the funding from the NWT Arts Council for individual artists is awarded to projects that engage the community in the form of workshops that leaves little room for artists to experiment or create a body of work that develops their individual practice. There is little incentive to move beyond the borders of the territory and a lack of support for professional development means few artists move on to become successful outside the NWT.

With a lack of understanding of what it means to be a professional artist, it is much more difficult for contemporary artists from the NWT to break into the contemporary Canadian arts scene. The Northwest Territories does not offer a single post-secondary arts course. There is only one public art gallery in the NWT, Open Sky Gallery in Fort Simpson, to which artists can apply for a peer-reviewed exhibition and receive an artist fee. A lack of professional development, opportunity for public exhibition, and little or no access to fine arts education makes it far more difficult for NWT artists to compete with their southern peers when acquiring funding from Canada Council. The last Canada Council production or creation grant awarded to a visual artist in the NWT was in 2005.

Support for the festival from the community and the territory is overwhelming because it is a celebration that brings together artists from all across the territory to create, perform and meet with each other. In a territory of just over 43,500 people who reside in 33 communities across 1,346,106 km², a gathering like this is an opportunity to connect with others across the vast geography of the territory.

The sense of community was palpable during the opening ceremonies. It was standing room only in the community centre where a long list of dignitaries was on hand to welcome artists and visitors from across the country. Speakers included the Chair and CEO of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nellie Cournoyea; the mayor of Inuvik and former NWT Premier, Floyd Roland; the Commissioner of the NWT, George L. Tuccaro; and NDP MP for the Western Arctic, Denis Bevington. Many of the speakers rem-

Inuvik Drummers and Dancers during the opening ceremony.
inisced about how they participated in arts activities with their Elders as children. From gathering materials from the land to learning to carve or sew, the sense that the arts are prevalent in all aspects of Northern culture was unmistakeable.

For many Aboriginal families, the festival is an opportunity to meet after long periods apart. Both families and friends share stories and news, celebrate births, marriages, anniversaries and mourn the loss of those who have passed away or been taken back by the land. Throughout the ten days, families get to reconnect with each other, to feast and share their accomplishments, to pass on their skills and knowledge to the next generation. They also share with artists from the other Northern territories and from across Canada who travel thousands of miles to attend.

Many families are multi-generational craftspersons who capture and record stories, legends, and memories of their families and ancestors within their pieces. This is especially true of traditional arts, which are passed down from generation to generation. It is particularly interesting to see the stories and memories emerging in the work of a new group of talented young artists who bring their own perspective to traditional arts.

For the five days I was in Inuvik, the sun did not touch the horizon even once and the energy of the festival made it feel like one wonderfully long day. People smiled and hugged as they reconnect with family and friends. Artists shared their work and drew inspiration from each other and it is these connections made at festivals like GNAF that tie the communities of the North together. Many times while walking the gallery floor I would hear, “look how much that (beadwork) is like her grandmother’s” or “he is just as talented as his father.”

When attending an arts festival in the North, you should expect to see a variety of traditional arts: beaded moosehide slippers, caribou-skin dolls, seal-skin kamiks, carvings, birchbark baskets, and stencil prints. What I did not expect to see was the wide variety of other arts that often had surprising combinations of traditional and contemporary materials or themes. From photographs printed on aluminium to jewellery made from recycled computer parts the thrill of discovering something new and unexpected was exciting.

Some of my favourite pieces were the delicate paper-like vessels made of hog gut by artist Lyn Fabio. Her pieces remind me of old-fashioned globes with scrawling thread-like text and continents of silk organza burnt around the edges. Combined with the rust prints and patchy image transfers, the orbs appear to be diaphanous relics of another time.

The other piece that stood out for me was by artist Jesse Tungilik a young man from Iqaluit, whose sculpture Manhole Hunter cleverly juxtaposes contemporary urban landscape with traditional cultural practices: a hunter, carved out of caribou ant-

“Ancient Orb” by artist Lyn Fabio.
ler, harpoon in hand hunched over a manhole grate all set atop a broken slab of concrete cinderblock. It is brilliant in its simple presentation yet addresses many complex issues faced by young Inuit today.

Technology has already begun to influence the next generation of artists. There are plenty of traditionally carved sculptures to be seen carved from stone, bone, and horn — many traditional themes created from “natural” materials. There are also new and emerging trends in Northern art and beading is an excellent example of this. Where much of the traditional beadwork was done with glass or plastic seed beads, the invention of Japanese Delica beads has begun to transform the craft. Patterns usually as organic as those found in nature are beginning to change as the uniform shape of the cylindrical beads means patterns come out more accurate and even. Not only are the materials changing, so are the themes appearing in the work. One artist from Tsiigehtchic Margaret Nazon, uses all the “old” seed beads donated by her friends to make three-dimensional beadworks on black velvet depicting astronomical star-scapes and nebulas.

Looking to the future it is difficult to anticipate where Northern art is headed. Many communities rely on subsistence hunting to gather materials and food for their food, traditional clothing, and art. Everything in the North is tied to the land in one way or another. The impact of climate change will determine the future of many people in the North. Things such as migration patterns determine how far hunters have to travel to feed their families and how much food they may acquire for winter. Ice packs and temperatures can determine what access they may have to particular areas where they hunt, fish, or collect plants and medicine. It determines how long the ice road connects small communities like Tuktoyaktuk to urban centres and doctors, grocery stores, hardware stores, and dentists can be accessed. Traditional art materials come from the land: fur, hide, bone, antler, teeth, stone, and qiviut (muskox fibre), and the ability to collect and transport these materials will determine the nature of traditional Northern arts in the future.

With Aboriginal groups struggling to preserve their language, traditional knowledge, and collective histories, the arts may be the key to preserving the rich diversity of culture within the NWT. Passing down knowledge, stories, and language from one generation to another will enable cultures to persist. Encompassing the arts as part of our cultural heritage enables us to reflect and remember the past and carry with us the rich diversity of the North into the future for the next generation of Canadians.

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Saimaqatigiingniq means “when past opponents get back together, meet in the middle, and are at peace.” For almost a decade, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) and the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) have been working to facilitate healing for Inuit about the past relationship with government and its agencies. The QTC was created in response to a desire on the part of QIA’s members (its board of directors, Elders and beneficiaries) to understand and analyze their common experiences in their interactions with the federal government, beginning in the post-war period. Beneficiaries have asked, and QIA agreed, that the Government of Canada has a responsibility to acknowledge that its policies, laws, and actions contributed to the confusion, pain, and suffering of Inuit and that the consequences have been felt by subsequent generations. The most recent results of this important and on-going work by the QIA have been made available online as drafts for public education and use.¹

For many years Inuit Elders spoke of hurt and anger at the loss of their qimmiit (sled dogs) at the hands of authorities, as well as the immediate and lingering impacts of events related to families moving into permanent settlements during the post-war period and into the 1970s. While history shows that many government representatives, including RCMP, undertook their duties with deep regard for Inuit, evidence of the unlawful killing of qimmiit, the withholding of social benefits, and intimidation tactics used to bring Inuit into settlements, demonstrates that authorities acted without regard for the law or the impact that actions would have on Inuit. The lack of respect for Inuit knowledge, culture, and economic conditions reflected unwise demands and expectations of politicians, the general public, and bureaucrats about the extent to which Inuit should be forced to conform quickly to new economic, cultural, and social practices brought from the South. Some examples include: education programs, designed for children more likely to live and work in urban and industrial Canada; housing programs that were unaffordable for people without long-term employment; health services that ignored language differences and existing knowledge; and families threatened with losing family allowances if their children did not attend full-time schooling. As many Inuit and other researchers have shown, the federal government also experimented with and changed programs regularly. Language and cultural barriers made it very difficult for Inuit to understand and take advantage of some of the services that might have been of benefit to them before the programs were changed or taken away. Not surprisingly, families were skeptical about government promises and took steps to resist intrusions in their lives. The changes came so rapidly and with so little consultation that it should not be surprising that the benefits to Inuit, especially in the areas of health care and eventually education, were generally only appreciated after much time had passed.

The impacts of historic events, such as the killing of qimmiit, the socio-economic realities of settlement life, inadequate housing, and poor nutrition have been felt across generations. Levi Evic told QTC how his family was worse off after moving into Pangnirtung and having to hunt on foot because they lost their qimmiit:

Looking back today, that has affected me a lot, and also to my parents. When they moved us there were changes in us, even in myself, I changed… Our hunting practices were disrupted, looking for food by our fathers, they even lost some of that and experienced hunger when we were living in this community, whereas in the camps we never experienced hunger… The written and oral records, taken together, suggest that the police might have killed more qimmiit than necessary and might have overreacted when the brought almost everyone of the land. People who remained did not starve, and those who were evacuated were almost entirely cut off from country food and were hungrier, colder and more demoralized than those who stayed behind in their qarmat.

The decision to listen to and absorb these stories was made several years ago. Recognizing common themes in the stories told by Qikiqtalungmiut³ about this period, QIA began to conduct interviews with Elders in 2004. In 2005, with the help of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) and Makivik Corporation in Northern Quebec, QIA approached the Government of Canada to request an inquiry into
the effects of past government decisions and policies on, and affecting, Inuit in the Eastern Arctic. In particular, these organizations called for an independent inquiry into the loss of sled dogs in Canada’s Eastern Arctic.

The federal government chose not to act on this request, and instead instructed the RCMP to investigate the matter itself, culminating in a 2006 report entitled, *The RCMP and the Inuit Sled Dogs*. QIA was not satisfied with the methodology or analysis in the RCMP report. The RCMP had been dismissive of Inuit memory and experience. In addition, the report failed to gain the trust and cooperation of Inuit, thereby missing the opportunity to develop a broad understanding of the impacts of losing dogs. Finally, the report did not meet professional standards with respect to the collection and identification of sources. In short, the RCMP seemed to be focused on determining whether any laws had been broken, rather than on trying to understand the complex relationship between Inuit and sled dogs, or Inuit and government authorities, and the impact that changes to these relationships would have on Inuit families and communities.

As a result, QIA independently established and funded the Qikiqtani Truth Commission. The overarching goals of the Commission were to give Inuit the opportunity to speak of their experiences, to deliver a more balanced and inclusive history of the effects of government policies on Inuit during the QTC period, 1950 to 1975, and to determine what reconciliation between Inuit and government (both at the federal and territorial levels) might look like.

To achieve these goals, the QTC recorded the history of Inuit experiences during the important period of transition into permanent settlements in Qikiqtani region using a wide range of reliable sources, including existing archival records, scholarly works, and most importantly, testimonies from the people who lived through the period. In total, the Commission interviewed 300 witnesses in their own languages in the spirit of listening and gaining understanding of peoples’ experience at the same time as professional historians conducted extensive archival research using thousands of documents. QTC visited all 13 Qikiqtani communities and Ottawa at least twice: first to collect testimonies and second to reflect on what the Commissioner had learned and to draft recommendations. The findings and recommendations included in the final report of the Commission were not the result of detached research by outside ‘experts’, but reflect what was heard from witnesses who testified.

The QTC is a rare example of a comprehensive social justice inquiry designed and led by an Aboriginal organization in Canada. The approach of the Commission was one of deep respect; Qikiqtani Inuit who testified were given the space and time to speak in an open and respectful environment about the issues that mattered to them. The Commission was different from a forensic truth commission or an academic study in that it was established by Inuit and driven by their interests into understanding the past and its links to the present, rather than reflecting questions and issues of interest to outside researchers and/or government officials.

The Commission’s 2010 final report and the recently released historical studies emanating from QTC’s work help explain why government decisions were imposed on Inuit, and help to illustrate the contradictions inherent in many of the government policies at the time. The Commission’s work has also helped to shed more light on the impacts of these poorly conceived, designed, and implemented programs on individuals and families.

In October 2010, the QTC presented its final report and recommendations to QIA. In late 2011, QIA developed an implementation plan, which identified priorities among the recommendation. The implementation plan influences QIA’s current social policy work. At the same time, QIA began preparing a complete set of QTC reports to be made available to the public. These reports include: histories of the 13 Qikiqtani communities; historical reports about specific policy areas including housing, education, qimmiit, economic development, mobility, policing, and healthcare; and special reports about the “official mind” of the bureaucracy (the beliefs, values, goals, knowledge and fears shared by officials) and a response to the RCMP’s 2006 report on the killing of qimmiit in the territories and Northern Quebec.

With the help of professional historians, a team of community reviewers, and translators, a set of 22 different reports that weave together witness testimonies with thousands of archival and secondary source documents were officially made public during QIA’s Annual General Meeting in Iqaluit in October 2013. Soon these reports will be published, in English and Inuktitut, as a two-volume set both in print and online to anyone who wishes to read and learn from them. QIA has also produced a four-part DVD depicting the work of the Commission, summarizing its key findings, and outlining the recommendations of the final report. The DVD is also available in English and Inuktitut.

QIA is proud to share this great accomplishment with beneficiaries and the public and to continue the work of implementing the Commission’s
recommendations. Because many of the recommendations are directed toward different levels of government, QIA has met with organizations, departments, and agencies that have a part to play in the implementation of the QTC recommendations. These organizations have been invited to join a new inter-agency working group, which will be responsible for measuring progress on implementation of the two dozen recommendations put forth by the Commission in 2010.

QIA recognizes that although many of the programs and policies examined by the QTC originated in the federal government or were assigned by the federal government to the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Government of Nunavut now must play a vital role in the implementation of the Commission’s recommendations if they are to be successful.

Some progress has been made on several of the Commission’s recommendations as a result of the work of QIA and other stakeholders, including ITK, NTI and the Governments of Canada and Nunavut. For example, significant progress has been made by the AANDC-led Nanilavut [meaning ‘let’s find them’] working group on the recommendation regarding locating and visiting burial sites of family members who were sent south for medical treatment. However, some recommendations are in need of refinement. One of the first tasks of the working group will be to update the recommendations strategy, which will involve developing consensus within the above-mentioned working group on priority recommendations, and identifying benchmarks to measure progress and success of implementation.

The release of the complete set of QTC reports is a milestone to be celebrated. It is expected that this body of work will serve as a springboard for more research with Inuit and allies about Canada’s Eastern Arctic, relationships between Aboriginal peoples and government, and other fields of research. Most importantly, for Qikiqtani Inuit and the association that represents them, this work represents another necessary step in the long process of understanding and healing the relationship between Inuit and government, with the goal of eventually achieving saimaqatigiingniq.

Bethany Scott is the Policy Analyst at QIA and manages the ongoing QTC work. David Joanasie is the Media Advisor at QIA. Julie Harris (Contentworks Inc.) directed the research and writing for the QTC and the QIA historical reports.

Endnotes
1 The two QTC books, which include the complete set of reports and the 2010 final report, are available on the QIA website, www.qia.ca. Also note that the QTC’s research work was initially managed by the Commission’s Executive Director, Madeleine Redfern, on behalf of Commissioner James Igloliorte. The senior historians on the project were Julie Harris and Philip Goldring, who also led the writing of the reports for the QIA based on the research and testimonies collected for the QTC.
2 People who live in the Qikiqtaaluk region.
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People who live in the Qikiqtaaluk region.

Cover of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission Community Histories 1950–1975. Also available in English.
China & the Arctic Council

Tony Penikett

Does China’s economic clout outweigh the democratic voices of American and Canadian citizens, even on Arctic policy?

Despite its notorious reputation for human rights injustices, the economic superpower China is now an accredited Observer to the eight-nation Arctic Council. What does this mean for the human rights of Inuit, Athabaskans, Gwich’in and other Indigenous peoples? For the region’s vulnerable and fragile environment? For Canada’s democratic accountability? Or, for Arctic Council rules?

John English’s new book, Ice and Water: Politics, Peoples, and the Arctic Council, tells the marvelous story of the Arctic’s evolution, from Gorbachev’s celebrated “zone of peace” speech in 1987 to Brian Mulroney’s Leningrad proposal in 1989: “Why not a council of Arctic countries eventually coming into existence to co-ordinate and promote co-operation among them?”

The eight Arctic states — Canada, Russia, the United States, Greenland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland — spent years negotiating over the roles of Indigenous peoples, as well as the criteria for admitting non-Arctic Observers into such a council.

In 1996, Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy and Arctic Ambassador Mary Simon were able to officially launch the Arctic Council. They did so with one innovative addition: the inclusion of six international Indigenous organizations as Permanent Participants.

Permanent Participants, who represent the Arctic’s permanent residents, are given more seniority than Observers — a status which is open to non-Arctic states, inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The Council assesses Observer applications based on their potential contributions and only accepts applicants once a consensus is reached.

At the Nuuk ministerial meeting in 2011, the Council adopted two rules for Observer applicants: they had to respect the sovereignty of all Arctic states and they had to respect the rights of the Indigenous peoples of those states. This laid out the welcome mat for the long list of applicants vying for Observer status, such as the European Union. For states like China, however, a country known for its hostility towards both democracy and minority rights, the door appeared closed.

At the 2012 Munk-Gordon Arctic Security Conference on the future of the Arctic Council, former Iqaluit Mayor Madeleine Redfern questioned whether a powerful nation, once admitted, could ever be expelled for breaking the rules? The answer was unclear.

Of the six Indigenous organizations with Permanent Participant status, three have deep roots in Canada. Inuit, in particular, have always been vocal about their fear that China’s admission could marginalize their role in what had once been an exclusive club of Arctic actors. As climate change and globalization open up resource exploitation and shipping routes, a long list of non-Arctic nations applied for Observer status, among them economic powerhouses Brazil, China, and India. Handicapped by financial and staff shortages, Permanent Participants feared being shunted aside.

Outsiders had expected protracted debate on the applications by China and the EU. China refused to express support for the rights of the Arctic’s Indigenous peoples, as Arctic Council rules required for Observer applicants. Inuit leaders, including Mary Simon, have expressed real fears about the Inuit voice and Arctic environmental values being sidelined by a resource-hungry and powerful state that does not respect minority rights. Ultimately though, China, India, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore were admitted as Observers.

The Arctic Council put the EU application on hold, likely resulting from Canada’s objection to the EU ban on the importation of seal products, despite an eloquent plea to Prime Minister Stephen Harper from president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso: “The EU respects the values, interests, culture and traditions of Arctic Indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants.”

The admission of China, therefore, is curious. The Arctic Council criteria should have excluded the country from Observer status. Chinese representatives have declared they agree with the first rule,
but have “no position” on the second. What might this mean for the Arctic Council and Canadian Indigenous voices – the Athabascans, the Gwich’in, and the Inuit?

In May 2013, at Kiruna, Sweden, Canada took over the Chair of the Arctic Council for the second time. Leona Aglukkaq, recently appointed as Canada’s environment minister, took the gavel from outgoing chair Carl Bildt, former Swedish prime minister.

According to John English, who attended the Kiruna conference, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry “talked almost exclusively about climate change.” Aglukkaq, who presented on “Development for the People of the North,” mentioned it not once. Given the Arctic Council’s beginnings as an organization fostered by Canadian diplomacy, and its focus on the vulnerability of Arctic lands and waters (not to mention China’s enormous appetite for natural resources), Canada’s silence on this question was deafening.

When surveyed, Northern Canadians and Alaskans both objected vehemently to China’s admission. Apparently, the decision was made at a private meeting. But who was Canada’s representative at this meeting, Minister Aglukkaq or Foreign Minister John Baird? Did the prime minister, who rejected the EU bid, make the China decision?

There may be good arguments for inviting China into the Arctic Council, but nobody from the American or Canadian governments has yet to articulate those arguments. Given the domestic opposition, one might expect some democratic accountability on this point.

Tony Penikett is Fulbright Visiting Scholar in Arctic Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. He served as the third premier of Yukon from 1985 to 1992.
The Government of Yukon has a significant number of employees engaged in science-related activities. Activities include research, data collection, surveillance, monitoring, traditional knowledge studies, community-based monitoring, scientific facility management, science education, and science policy development. While working within many different disciplines, all government science practitioners and professionals have some things in common – they engage in professional development activities, they collect and analyse data, they disseminate their findings in a variety of formats, and they support and inform decision-making both inside and outside of government.

Science practitioners are individuals with a leadership role in facilitating, coordinating, conducting, funding, regulating and promoting science activities or developing science related policies. Science professionals are those with expert and specialized knowledge in a field in which one is practicing the professional application of scientific knowledge.

Communities of practice, such as the Government of Yukon’s Policy Community of Practice, is becoming a common way of developing capacity and enhancing coordination. A community of practice is a group of people who share a craft or a profession. Communities of practice provide opportunities for members to learn from each other and to develop themselves personally and professionally through the sharing of information and experiences. Communities of practice can exist online, within discussion boards and newsgroups, or in real life, such as in a lunch room at work, in a field setting, on a factory floor, or elsewhere. Communities of practice are not new phenomena. This type of learning practice has existed for as long as people have been learning and sharing their experiences through storytelling.

The Yukon government’s Interdepartmental Science Committee recently established a Science Community of Practice (SCOPe) to facilitate dialogue, collaboration and information sharing amongst members of the Yukon science community. Since the ultimate objective is to enhance scientific capacity, literacy and coordination in Yukon, the Science Community of Practice is open to participation from science practitioners and professionals within federal, First Nation and municipal governments, as well as consultants, industry, and academia (including students).

Led by its members, the Science Community of Practice provides an opportunity for members to learn from each other, and to have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. To date, activities have included lunch and learns, field tours, informal discussion groups, workshops, webinars and networking opportunities.

Launched in March 2013, the Science Community of Practice has almost 200 members. Membership includes scientists, science practitioners and professionals in physical, biological, engineering, health and social science disciplines, as well as science educators and students – all of whom live or work in Yukon.

Participation in SCOPe offers a number of benefits to individual practitioners, departments and agencies as a whole, including:

1. Greater access to opportunities for personal and professional development;
2. Increased collaboration across departments, agencies and scientific disciplines;
3. Greater and more efficient use of data;
4. Identification of opportunities for cost-sharing on training and professional development activities;
5. Reduction in duplication of data collection and research activities;
6. Creation of mentorship opportunities for early-career science practitioners;
7. Increased profile of science practitioners;
8. Increased visibility and credibility of science;
9. Increased opportunities for partnership development

For more information about SCOPe, on how to become a member, or to offer to host a SCOPe activity, please:

1. Join our listserv and be notified of upcoming activities, by contacting Yukon’s Science Advisor.
Paleah Black Moher, PhD  
Toxicology and Human Health, Artisanal Gold Council  
Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Victoria  
www.artisanalgold.org

The level of mercury in traditional foods in Nunavut has been the topic of much concern and research in recent years but where does the mercury come from? We know that mercury can travel long distances in the atmosphere before falling onto the ground and water, eventually making its way into the food chain. Did you know that the biggest source of mercury is not burning coal or industry but is actually artisanal gold mining? (UNEP, Mercury: Time to Act, 2013) There are about 20 million artisanal gold miners working all over the developing world, and almost all of them use mercury to separate gold from dirt. Many of these miners are poor and have few other employment options to support their families.

Our research brings improved technology and education to these miners, and tests to see if these efforts make a positive change in their lives and environment. We see that by providing and facilitating access to appropriate equipment and knowledge by working with the miners, we can help them to generate more gold, while using no mercury. This has led to improvements in their health and local environment, the overall well-being of their families; and it also reduces how much mercury is released into the global atmosphere and ends up in our food. In fact, the international community has come together to create the Minamata Convention, an international treaty to reduce mercury signed in October 2013 in Japan. Many Indigenous organizations, such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council, were there to shape the terms of this treaty, as they know all too well its importance. We hope that the Minamata Convention will help our efforts, and assist countries with artisanal miners to achieve the difficult but crucial goal of reducing mercury releases. For more information please visit www.artisanalgold.org.

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The Kativik School Board (Nunavik) is collaborating with scientists from Quebec Universities to introduce a new tool for teaching environmental science to high school students. The AVATIVUT Initiative combines the development of hands-on learning activities for the science courses of Nunavik high schools and the establishment of an environmental monitoring database. It proposes innovative Learning and Evaluation Situations (LES) developed around standard scientific protocols, with themes closely related to the Inuit culture and local climate change issues. To date, these themes are: 1) Berry productivity and snow; 2) Ice monitoring; and 3) Permafrost. Through these activities, students collect real environmental data in their communities. To ensure data quality and comparability, standard protocols and scientific concepts are explained in cool video clips produced in French, English and Inuktitut, while permanent experimental sites are selected, characterized and equipped in each community. To enable data archiving and viewing by the students, an Internet portal has been developed and a discussion forum was also set up (http://www.cen.ulaval.ca/Avativut/).

Through the LES, students have the opportunity to learn about their environment using scientific approaches (observation; interview; description; sampling; measurement; and analysis) as well as traditional ecological knowledge (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit [IQ]) through discussions and interviews with Elders in the community. The university scientists provide support before, during, and after the execution of the LES. They also validate the data collected and provide feedback to the classes. The LES on “Berry productivity” was [successfully?] implemented in the Nunavik high school science and technology curriculum in 2012. The LES on “Ice monitoring” will be added to the curriculum in 2013, while the permafrost LES is planned for 2014. The Nunavut Department of Education has expressed interest for a potential application in Nunavut. The AVATIVUT program is a candidate for the 2013 Arctic Inspiration Prize, adjudicated by ArcticNet.
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