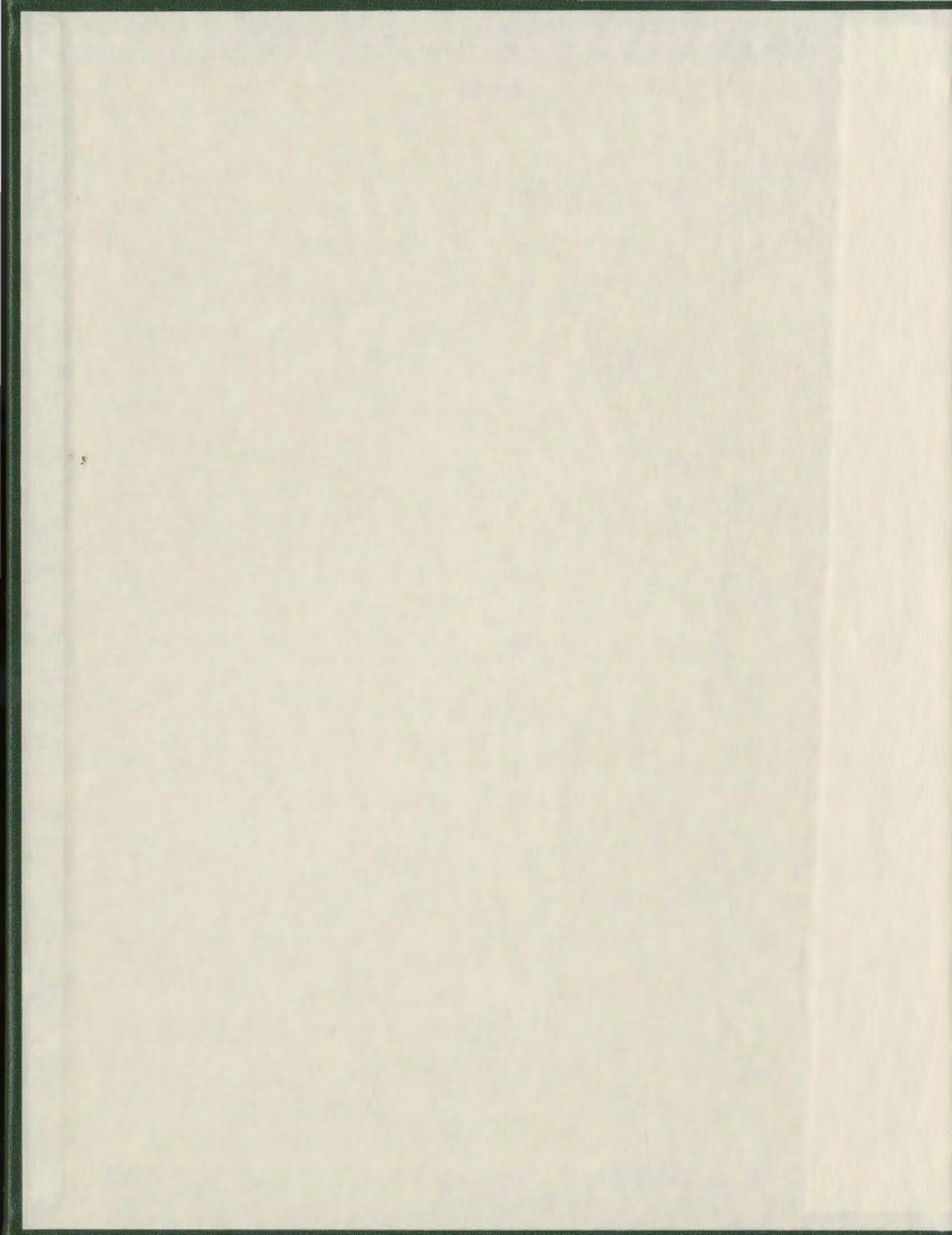


A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF INUIT  
CHILDREN WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN IN SCHOOL  
AND GRADUATE

JOHN STRUTYNSKI









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SCHOOL AND GRADUATE**

by

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## Abstract

Six participants were interviewed in this phenomenological research study in order to hear their stories of their elementary school experiences that encouraged them to remain in school and graduate. These participants were carefully chosen based on a set criteria they all had in common including, but not limited to, being of Inuit heritage, being first language Inuktitut speakers, having lived their entire lives and received their education from kindergarten to grade 12 in the same Inuit community, and having successfully completed or nearly completed high school. Data was collected in two interviews with each individual participant. Interviews were carefully managed to keep any personal bias of the researcher from being revealed. The nature of these interviews was a form of guided conversation, eliciting participants' past educational experiences rather than following a direct question/answer approach. Once data from interviews was collected, it was analyzed and categorized into six broad themes: *Relationships with Significant Adults*, *Relationships with Peers and Socialization*, *Recognizing Inuit Culture in School*, *Feeling Valued/Self Esteem*, *Safe and Welcoming Schools*, and *Having Future Goals and Aspirations*. The information gathered in this study confirms that in Nunavut, Inuit students have the same basic needs and require the same support in school to be successful in life, as do their southern counterparts. Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut are designed to reflect the Inuit perspective and worldview.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research study was conducted to identify school related factors that affect school retention in Inuit children. More specifically, it was designed to investigate the elementary school experiences that influenced Inuit students to remain in school, invest themselves in their own learning, and ultimately become successful high school graduates. Six adults who lived and received their education in Arviat were interviewed. Their stories revolved around their elementary school experiences, examined in context of the current research on school retention and dropout, identified a deep understanding of what school experiences Inuit youth need in order for them to want to remain in school, learn, and ultimately graduate.

This introductory chapter outlines the overall purpose of the research, its rationale, questions it answers, and background information on the education system in Nunavut. In keeping with phenomenological methodology, it also contains disclosure of personal bias of the researcher regarding the concept of chronic absenteeism and school dropout in Nunavut Schools.

#### **Statement of Purpose**

The issue of school dropout has been researched worldwide for many years. Of particular concern to this researcher is the serious dropout phenomenon amongst Inuit students in Nunavut, which far exceeds the national average. According to Statistics Canada 2001 Census, an alarming 5.1% of northern Inuit students between the ages of 15 and 19 graduated high school in the year 2001.

Ward (2005) states that “dropping out of high school is a serious concern for both individuals and society” (p.2). “Indeed, it has obvious psychological, economical, and social ramifications. For instance, dropouts may undergo a loss of self-esteem, turn to drugs, and become a financial burden to society (Mensh & Kendel, 1988; Tidwell, 1988)” (as cited in Fortier, Guay, & Vallerand 1997, p. 1161). According to the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2007):

The drop out rate of Inuit adolescents at the high school level far exceeds the national average, stressing families, contributing to the social ills that trouble communities, often leading to crime and suicide. These dropouts are the future troubled parents of unfortunate children who must bear with them as they attempt to succeed at school (p.2).

Within Nunavut today, even in their early elementary school years, students can be chronic non-attenders, inevitably paving their way to become school dropouts. In fact, truancy rates alone among students ranging from kindergarten to grade 12 has increased from 16.3% in the 2001-2002 school year to 22.4% in the 2010-2011 school year

This said, the Nunavut Government has considered the role of schools in motivating students to remain in school and graduate. Bill 21, the first made-in-Nunavut Education Act, came into effect in August, 2008. This Act clearly mandates community-based District Education Authorities (DEAs) to become directly involved in reducing dropout rates by developing registration and attendance policies suited to their community schools. This mandate constitutes a major change in the mindset and attitudes towards the cause of school dropout in Nunavut in comparison to the 1996 Northwest Territories Education Act where, according to Kwarteng (2006), “Inuit parents

are made responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly and punctually, regardless of the nature of the school program” (p.9).

At this point, it is unclear what these ‘attendance and registration policies’ will look like and how they will motivate students to remain in school, however, the information collected through this research study, in conjunction with current research on the subject of school dropout in Nunavut and elsewhere, may assist local District Education Authorities in developing registration and attendance policies for their community schools. In addition, it has the potential of contributing to the improvement of the orientation, training, and mentorship of new and veteran Nunavut teachers, ultimately improving Inuit students’ engagement in their own learning, thus leading to a reduction of the dropout rate in Nunavut schools and an increase in high school graduates.

### **Rational**

The importance of elementary school as a source of influence on early school dropout was recognized as early as 1959. Livingston (1959) stated:

It is probable that many forces that contribute to the withdrawal of students in later grades are first felt during the elementary-school years. It is clearly evident that any effort to keep these pupils in school should be started as early as possible in their elementary-school career (p. 267).

In Nunavut today, chronic absenteeism and dropout begins as early as grade-one.

In consideration of the plethora of research correlating elementary school experiences and high school dropout, this researcher decided to add to the literature by



conducting a qualitative research study, phenomenological in nature, to present the stories of successful Inuit high school graduates themselves. The researcher wanted them to reflect on their elementary school experiences, which motivated them to continue to attend school, invest themselves in their learning, and finally graduate high school.

The rationale behind this research study is clear. Lumsden (1994) asserted that “awareness of how students’ attitudes and beliefs about their learning develop and what facilitates learning for its own sake can assist educators in reducing student apathy” (p.1). Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere (2002) stated that “experiences at ages ten and eleven are related to dropping out of school at ages sixteen and seventeen” (p. 9). Eidson and Tomlinson (2003) noted:

...young students’ early experiences have a profound impact on their views of school, their conception of the learning process, and their perceptions of themselves as learners. By igniting students’ love of learning early in their schooling and by helping them to respect not only their own but also others’ strengths, weaknesses, and interests, elementary school teachers establish the groundwork upon which students build their future learning (p. X).

### **Research Questions**

This research study was designed to answer the ultimate question: “What school related factors affect school retention in Inuit children?” More specifically, it wanted to identify the elementary school experiences that influenced students to continue to attend school, invest themselves in their learning and graduate high school. The two main questions that guided this research study were:

- 1. What factors from within the school environment motivated and encouraged successful Inuit high school graduates to attend school and pursue their education?*
- 2. What strategies employed by teachers in their classrooms motivated and encouraged successful Inuit high school graduates to attend school and pursue their education?*

The answers to these questions were further analyzed by:

- 1. comparing them with current research in best classroom practices that promote school retention;*
- 2. comparing them with current research in best school practices that promote school retention;*
- 3. contrasting them with current research in school factors that influence school dropout;*
- 4. contrasting them with current research in classroom strategies that influence school dropout;*

From these analyses, school-related factors necessary in reducing Inuit students' dissatisfaction with school and increasing their motivation to learn are explored in this study.

### **Nunavut Context**

According to the Inuit Tapariit Kanatami (2007), "To understand the current challenges facing Inuit in the area of education, it is necessary to review some of the rapid social changes that have impacted Inuit over the past fifty years" (p.1).

Formal education is a very recent institution in the arctic. Once part of the Northwest Territories, the earliest formal schools in what is now known as Nunavut were built no earlier than half a century ago, in the late 1950's. In fact, as late as the 1950's and 1960's "the majority of Inuit continued to live primarily in small semi-nomadic groups relying upon the resources of the land and sea for sustenance" (p.1).

The rearing and teaching of children was never viewed as the sole responsibility of one, but the responsibility of the family as a whole. Children watched and learned from their siblings, parents, grandparents, and others who were more experienced than they, and were able to approach anyone of them for assistance if necessary. Learning reflected a collectivist rather than individualist culture. In addition, "Elders were revered for their wisdom and knowledge including valuable advice and expertise in the area of child rearing and parenting" (p. 1).

In the 1950's Inuit began to be relocated from their outpost camps to community centers, where their children were formally taught in community schools that reflected the southern Canadian education system.

In some cases such as in residential missionary schools, "children were taken from their families where they were disciplined and stripped of their culture" (p. 1). This new form of formal education system stressed the use of English and discouraged the use of the Inuit language. In addition children were taught in ways that reflected the *Kabloona*, non-Inuit, way of learning, one that did not reflect the Inuit culture and worldview. To this day, many older Inuit who attended these residential schools continue to recall this tragic experience in their lives and this negative feeling about school is transcended to their progeny, today's students.

By 1968, schools were built in all communities in the Northwest Territories, however according to Inuit Tapariit Kanatami (2007), “The curricula followed by the new community schools were based on that of southern Canadian mainstream schools and spoken Inuktitut continued to be discouraged until about the mid-1970’s” (p. 2).

Efforts to revitalize and integrate the Inuit culture and language into schools had begun in the Northwest Territories in the 1980’s, and by 1993 many schools employed Inuit teachers who instructed children in their primary grades in the Inuit language, gradually moving to instruction in English after grades two and/or three. At this time, not all communities provided senior high school, making it necessary for students in smaller communities to leave their families and relocate to larger communities in order attain a high school diploma.

Nunavut became its own territory in April 1999 and a new Department of Education in Nunavut was established that same year. Twenty-six communities, all of which are accessible by air or water, make up Nunavut. These twenty-six communities are divided among three educational regions: Qikiqtani in the east, made up of fourteen communities including all communities on and to the north of Baffin Inland as well as one community on the island of Sanikiluaq located in southern Hudson Bay; Kitikmeot in the west, made up of five communities; and Kivalliq in between, made up of seven communities, five of which are situated off the western coast of Hudson Bay, one situated on South Hampton Island in northern Hudson Bay, and one, Baker Lake, which is the only inland community in Nunavut.

According to Statistics Canada 2011 Census, the total population of Nunavut is 31,906. Among the twenty-six communities, population numbers vary from 130 in Grise Fiord to 6,699 in Iqaluit, both of which are in the Qikiqtani region.

All twenty-six communities within Nunavut offer a K-12 education program, ensuring no child need leave his or her community to complete a high school program of study. In many communities, children continue to be taught in the Inuit language by Inuit teachers within their primary grades, with a planned gradual transition to instruction in English from grades-3/4 onward.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2005) posited, "Inuit presently participate in a school system that has been drawn from southern Canadian school system models, although Inuit staff are working in the schools, the majority of teachers and principals are non-Inuit"(p. 2). Since its inception, the Nunavut Department of Education has worked on developing new curricula based upon the new curriculum framework for Nunavut titled *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, reflecting the traditional Inuit culture and heritage of *Nunavummiut*, the people of Nunavut. However this process has been slow, therefore much of the daily school program for Inuit children continues to reflect that of southern Canada. Much of the current senior secondary curriculum continues to come from Alberta Education and it will be some time before Nunavut schools are able to follow a K-12, made in Nunavut, curriculum.

The conditions in which Inuit live within these communities present a challenge for children of school age. Although Inuit now live in settled communities, the majority of Inuit continue to be unemployed. Many families receive government funded welfare and/or child support. According to Karting (2006):



In terms of economy, most communities depend on subsistence economic base in the form of hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering; while a few others have a small service-based employment, mainly in government administrative jobs. As well, all communities are fly-in communities... And they are extremely isolated geographically from each other (p. 2).

Thus the life experience of the majority of Inuit is very different to those individuals living in southern Canada.

Upon comparing the Inuit with the rest of the Canadian population, according to Inuit Tapariit Kanatami (2007), “53% of Inuit live in overcrowded conditions compared to 7% of the rest of the population. This no doubt hinders an individual’s ability to study and learn in all environments” (p.7). In addition, many students continue to come to school hungry, sleepy, and often neglected. In a Nunavut Inuit Health Survey, Egeland (2010) wrote, “Nearly 70% of Inuit preschoolers resided in households rated as food insecure” (p. 243). CBC News (2010) reported:

Dr. Isaac Sobol, Nunavut’s chief medical officer, told CBC News that while the reported levels of hunger are nothing like those in impoverished nations, the lack of nutrition does have an impact on Inuit child’s concentration and alertness.

‘Children aren’t very well prepared to engage properly in school if they’re hungry,’ Sobol said (p. 2).

Gambling as well as physical and/or sexual abuse is not an uncommon experience for many children and early teenage pregnancy is often seen as normal. According to the Government of Nunavut Department of Health and Social Services (n.d.), “Nunavut reports the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the country – 24% of live births were to

mothers under the age of 19 years compared to □the national average of 5% in 2004” (p. 6).

Suicide, unfortunately, is also not an uncommon occurrence in the territory. From their research into mortality rates among children and teenagers living in *Inuit Nunangat*, the Inuit term for Inuit Homeland, Oliver, Peters, and Kohen (2012) conclude, “In 2004-2008, children and teenagers in Inuit Nunangat were more than 30 times as likely to die from suicide as were those in the rest of Canada... Half of all deaths of young people in Inuit Nunangat were suicides, compared with approximately 10% in the rest of Canada” (p. 4).

### **Personal Bias of the Researcher**

As a Student Support Consultant, Student Support Teacher, and Classroom Teacher in Nunavut for the past nineteen years, I have come to learn and experience much of Inuit culture. Although I neither hunt nor speak good Inuktitut, nor eat that much Inuit food, I am considered an Inuk (the Inuktitut word for man) by many of my Inuit friends and colleagues. It is believed that one need not be born an Inuk to be considered one, nor does one need to speak the Inuit language, nor hunt. An Inuk means much more. The cultural nuances of the Inuit go far beyond language, food and the practice of providing for one’s family; they are the day-to-day interactions with one another, the manner in which one thinks and works, in essence Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit - Nunavut’s eight guiding principles to live and work by. (See Appendix E.)

I will often comment to friends that I *grew up* in Nunavut, as since the onset of my northern career in August 1993, who I am, my essence, has evolved from that of a

Kabloona from Montreal to an Inuk at heart, living and working in Baker Lake, Nunavut. And although I say this with conviction, I am very much aware that I have far to go in understanding the Inuit culture in the same way as my Inuit friends and colleagues.

My northern journey began in August 1993 when I was hired to work as the Student Support Teacher in Levi Angmak Elementary School in Arviat, in what was at that time Northwest Territories. Having come from the busy and bustling city of Montreal, where one rarely spoke or interacted with one's neighbors, I was taken by surprise by the genuine warmth of community inhabitants in Arviat. Upon my arrival, I was warmly welcomed by the principal of the school, who took me to her home for a meal, instantly offering me the chance to meet other members of the community. Within my first week there, I was adopted into an Inuit family, as was the tradition within this community for any new southerners coming to work in the schools for the first time, and within several months, I was given my Inuktitut name *Iquala*, the Inuktitut word for *fire*. In a short amount of time, this small isolated community within the Arctic became my home. And in a very short time, I was living and working within a culture very different than what I was used to.

Although my training in special education prepared me somewhat for the job of supporting students with special needs in school, the differences between Inuit and Kabloona cultures required me to make many adjustments in my thinking. Children were learning in their first language, Inuktitut, and when I spoke to them I needed to realize that they may or may not have understood what I was saying because they had limited skills in communicating in English, not a language processing disorder.

I also needed to realize the various cultural differences from my own culture. Behaviours within the classroom, which I would have interpreted as inappropriate and rude within my Montreal environment, were considered to be normal in Inuit culture and it took me some time to get used to them and not feel offended by them. I needed to be aware of how respect was given and received, both from teacher to student and from student to teacher.

I needed to learn to use a calm and gentle voice when directing students and to never ask students to look directly at me, as that would be considered very disrespectful. I learned that students respect for their teachers involved discovering who they were – where they came from, who their parents were, names of their brothers and sisters, etc., and not simply because the teacher was the teacher. Respect was given to teachers who were fair and caring toward them, and not because they were teachers.

I learned that children did not appreciate teachers drawing too much attention to them in the classroom, as drawing them out in the crowd, making them look better than their classmates, was frowned upon. Inuit are collectivist in nature and everyone is to work together for a common purpose and not stand out among one another as better.

I especially needed to learn that children learned at their own pace and that their achievement should not be measured against southern age or grade norms. When this was done, it caused more harm than good, as it often resulted in misdiagnoses and placement into inappropriate programs geared for lower achievers.

After five years in Arviat, I moved to Baker Lake, taught within the classroom, and then moved into the position of Student Support Consultant for the Kivalliq region. Currently, my job as Student Support Consultant involves consulting within all twelve

schools in the Kivalliq region. This job allowed me the opportunity to share my limited experience and wisdom regarding programming for students with special needs within the Inuit Culture so that teachers can teach their students in the most appropriate manner.

Throughout my northern journey, I have observed and experienced the successes and failures of many students, many who have become good friends in adulthood. Students with similar life experiences in their youth have made different life choices. Some attended school, graduated, and are leading productive adult lives. Others withdrew themselves from school at an early age and struggle in their adult lives today. Some, including an individual who became a good friend, ultimately chose the path of suicide.

Life has been difficult at times as a teacher, having developed relationships with Nunavummiut (the Inuktitut word for citizens of Nunavut) of all ages. Upon hearing that a student has quit school, one often asks why. At times, I questioned my own teaching as well as the teaching of my colleagues. Did we as educators meet this student's needs while in school? Did we teach this student in a manner that reflected his strengths and learning styles? Or did we push him to leave school because we created an environment that did was not inviting and welcoming and did not reflect a culture that he so valued in his life.

Experiencing the suicide of a student triggers the same questions and doubts regarding my effectiveness as a teacher. Did I contribute in this student's decision to leave school, and ultimately take his own life? Could I have done something to prevent this student's fate? Although one is told that suicide is an individual's choice and that



one need not blame oneself, one naturally thinks about what could have been done to prevent it?

This said, as I watched students develop and mature in school from kindergarten onwards through high school, I continued to be awed by the fact that, even with the variety of disadvantages they have experienced in their lives, i.e. abuse, poverty, lack of parental support, culturally inappropriate curriculum and teaching, thoughts of suicide, learning disabilities, etc., many have made the conscious choice to regularly attend school and are successful graduates at this time and are living productive and fulfilling adult lives. When I considered what motivated these students to continue on in their education, I believed much of their motivation came from their early school experiences. I believed that what we as teachers do with and for our students and the attitudes we convey to them regarding who they are as individuals have a strong influence on their conscious decisions to attend school daily and invest themselves in their learning.

Currently, one of my major concerns is that many teachers new to the north who are unfamiliar with the ways of the Inuit (their culture, language, and ways of teaching and learning) continue to teach in ways that are not respectful of Inuit culture and cause more harm than good, which can push students away from school rather than attract them and encourage them to learn. When teachers continue to teach in this manner, their students often do not understand, become frustrated, develop a negative relationship with their teachers, become disengaged from their learning, inwardly withdraw from their school experiences, and become chronic non-attenders.

As a Student Support Consultant who is very involved in coordinating supports to children who need them to be successful learners, I fear that as the percentage of chronic

absenteeism rises in our schools, so will the need for more supports, needs that could be prevented simply by an increase student engagement and attendance rates.

Most of my career has been in Nunavut where I have gained a respect of my colleagues and their experience in the north and their corporate history of what has occurred in the past twenty years. I am hopeful that my research into the experiences that Inuit students had in their early elementary school years that encouraged them to stay in school, invest themselves in their learning, and ultimately graduate high school. Hopefully, this will help to clarify what our educators today need to do in order to reduce chronic school absenteeism, decreasing the burden on Support Services, and ultimately increasing the graduation rate in schools.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

Bushnik et al. (2002) reported, "It is widely accepted that dropping out of school is best thought of as a process, not a decision made in a single point in time... experiences at ages ten and eleven are related to dropping out of school at ages sixteen and seventeen" (p. 9). Kwartang (2006) stated, "Contemporary literature on student absenteeism and premature departure approaches the problem from multiple perspectives rather than exclusively pathologizing students' families" (p. 9). Subsequently, no single factor motivates an individual to drop out of school; rather a combination of causative factors eventually leads to that result. The following literature review investigates school dropout from several angles and is presented in two sections. The first reviews research studies that have investigated the interrelationship of various clusters of factors that lead to school dropout, including references to research studies conducted in the Northwest Territories with Inuit students. The second reviews in detail those school related factors gleaned from the first section that influence school dropout.

#### **Factors Contributing to School Dropout**

Morris, Pawlovich, and Douglas (1993), noted that students leave school "for a complex and often interrelated set of academic, social, economic and personal reasons" (p. 29). In addition, "Dougherty (1997) identified student alienation, different cultural values, academic rigour, the failure of the school to teach social responsibility, school climate, and chaotic family life as the primary causes of student absenteeism, truancy or dropout" (as cited in Kwarteng 2006, p. 9).

The Canadian Association of School Administrators (n.d.), listed clusters of factors related to the community, the family, the student, and the school that “combine to increase the risk of school drop-out” (p.16). See Table 2.1.

Figure 2.1:

<b>Community Related Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate family services</li> <li>• High crime rates</li> <li>• Loss of community spirit</li> <li>• Inadequate health services</li> <li>• Social norms which do not emphasize education</li> <li>• Inappropriate employment services</li> </ul>	<b>Family Related Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-economic status</li> <li>• Student obliged to work</li> <li>• Stress in home</li> <li>• Low parent expectations</li> <li>• Poor parent-school communications</li> <li>• Abuse</li> <li>• Transient home life</li> </ul>
<b>Student Related Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor-school attitudes</li> <li>• Low motivation aspirations</li> <li>• Prior attendance</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Behaviour problems</li> <li>• Early pregnancy</li> <li>• Drug abuse</li> <li>• Poor peer relationships</li> <li>• Illness/disability</li> <li>• No extra-curricular involvement</li> </ul>	<b>School-Related Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low teacher expectations</li> <li>• No ESL instruction</li> <li>• Home-school culture clash</li> <li>• Inadequate counseling</li> <li>• Poor facilities</li> <li>• Inappropriate curriculum</li> <li>• Inappropriate student options</li> <li>• Poor school discipline</li> <li>• Failure in earlier grades</li> <li>• Low academic achievement</li> <li>• Poor reading, math skills (p.16).</li> </ul>

Similarly, Lutra Associates Ltd (1992), who researched students’ reasons for dropping out of school in the Northwest Territories, listed home, school, personal, and community factors as major contributors to early school leaving. See Table 2.2:

Figure 2.2:

<p><b>School Factors:</b> The student...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has low home/school contact</li> <li>• experiences problems with school work, teacher and school rules</li> <li>• has likely failed a grade</li> <li>• spends most of school time working at desk or listening to teachers rather than working cooperatively/interacting with other students</li> <li>• fades out of school rather than quits</li> <li>• has poor school attendance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Factors:</b> The student...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is uncertain about the quality of community life</li> <li>• is uncertain about the future in his/her community</li> </ul> <p>Community members...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are dissatisfied with control of education</li> <li>• are concerned about lack of community support for education</li> <li>• are unclear about the value and purpose of education</li> </ul>
<p><b>Home Factors</b> The Student...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has poor economic circumstances</li> <li>• lives in an average sized household</li> <li>• is required to work at home</li> <li>• considers wage employment important/necessary</li> <li>• doesn't participate in household decisions</li> <li>• expects no discipline at home</li> <li>• lives in a troubled home</li> <li>• has low home/school contact</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal Factors</b> The Student...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uses alcohol</li> <li>• has been exposed to suicide</li> <li>• has unrealistic expectations for the future</li> <li>• is clear about the value and purpose of education</li> <li>• has strong/influential peer relationships (p.13).</li> </ul>

Maguire (2001) identified four clusters of factors listed that motivate Inuit students to drop out of school as culture, communication, poverty, and motivation - many of which are directly related to the school experience. See Table 2.3:



Figure 2.3:

<b>Culture</b>	<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Poverty</b>	<b>Communication</b>
Lack of relevance Different backgrounds Discontinuity Insensitivity Loss of identity Pregnancy Large schools	Motivation Inappropriate curriculum Passive teaching Negative school experiences Negative school climate Negative school structure Alienation from school	Poverty Low parental support SES family backgrounds Poor parenting skills Home responsibilities	Poor home-school Poor literacy Differences Language differences Uncaring teachers Untrained teachers (p. 1).

Such research underscores the assertion that one set of factors is seldom solely responsible for motivating an individual to drop out of school. For example, a student who lives an unstructured transient family life may not be able to attend school on a regular basis, which may inevitably affect his academic achievement and self-esteem, lower his motivation for learning, contribute to feelings of alienation, lead to chronic absenteeism, truancy, and finally influence his decision to drop out of school. According to Maguire (2001), when considered together, these factors together can result in “poor attendance and/or mental, emotional, or physical issues that leads to drop out” (Clusters Connections Factors section, para. 4).

### **School Related Factors Contributing to School Dropout**

Livingston (1959) initially recognized the importance of the elementary school as a source of influence on the early school dropout. He shared:

Thus far, much attention has focused on the high school. Various aspects of the high school program have been examined in connection with early withdrawal. But till now, only limited attention has been given to the question of identifying

potential dropouts early enough to permit the development of sound remedial programs... (p. 267).

The remainder of this chapter constitutes a review of information resulting from various research studies that focused on correlations between elementary/middle school experiences and the decision to drop out of high school.

**Culturally inappropriate school curriculum.** According to Kwarteng (2006), “It could be argued that Nunavut school environment – what teachers teach, the way they teach, methods of assessment, and language of instruction – has the potential to drive away Inuit students because it is culturally alienating to them” (p.10). In addition, Lutra et al. (1992), observed, “Community members seem to be uncertain about the content and the delivery of the school instructional program” (p. 33).

The “Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (1999) documentary film titled, “Link between School and Inuit Youth Suicide”, concluded that the school system in Nunavut is partly to blame for the escalating rate of suicide among Inuit youth. The film based that conclusion on the observation that the school environment is culturally alienating to the Inuit youth” (as cited in Kwarteng 2006, p. 11).

The importance of culturally relevant curriculum was identified in a critical ethnography of the dynamics of black students disengagement from school in the greater Toronto area. Sefa Dei, Mazzuce, McIsaac, Zine, (1997) asserted that “lack of representation in the curriculum also relates to the sense of invisibility many black students and dropouts report experiencing” (p. 145).

According to Shade, Kelly, and Observe, (1997), “Students bring certain human characteristics that have been shaped by their socializing group to the classroom, and

teachers must be able to recognize these traits and build on them if children are to reach their academic potential. The cultural, social, and historical backgrounds of children have a major impact on how they perceive school and the education process” (p. 11).

In a research study by Tyler (2008) that investigated Inuit perceptions of modern guideposts (Nutaaq Inuksui) that will help students stay in high school, participants from both communities replied that “school activities, exchange programs, and elders helped them to stay in school” (pg. 187).

**Alienation from school.** The Government of Canada (1990), reported:

Students’ whose appearance or manner of dress was unusual frequently reported feeling they were discriminated against and were pushed out of school because teachers felt that they set a poor example, or were perceived as trouble-makers.

This was especially true in non-metropolitan areas (p. 9).

In addition, “most native school leavers felt that racism had affected their decision to leave school... They felt a conflict between their culture and that of the school” (p. 11).

Often students who come from different cultures have a difficult time relating to the educational experience to which they are subjected in schools. Shade et al. (1997) assert that “students must perceive that the information has meaning for them, that it will fit with their current lifestyle and reality and that it has potential for helping to make this connection by establishing a culturally responsible learning community” (p. 21).

In addition to curricula being culturally biased, teachers often demonstrate cultural bias in their daily instruction. Sefa et al. (1997) found that “some teachers...felt that including groups other than the founding groups in Canadian history was unnatural and not part of the teacher’s responsibilities” (p. 139). Kaiser and Rasminsky (2003) cite

LaGrange, Clark and Munroe (1994) describing the relationship between self-concept and the acceptance of one's own culture:

To form a positive self-concept, children need to honor and respect their own culture and to have others honor and respect it, too. This is a vital human need. When we don't recognize a child's identity – or when we misrecognize it – we can actually harm her by putting her self-concept at risk (p. 54).

Oldfather, West, White, & Wilwarth (1999) cautioned that “to their students, teachers represent authority concerning what counts for knowledge and whose knowledge counts. When teachers fail to acknowledge students' worlds, the students are likely to be alienated or even invisible” (p. 12).

Livingston (1959), in a study into early school factors that influence high school dropout, described “major reasons that contribute to early withdrawal” (p. 268). One of these was a feeling of being “Aloof from school life” (p. 268) meaning their participation in both formal and informal school activities was recorded as low and easily overlooked in school and able to “drift through elementary school” (p. 270). The second reason was “The overly quiet” (p. 269) who are “often passed by because they are not aggressive enough to attract the attention of teachers or classmates” (p. 269). These students are ranked from high to low IQs suggesting their needs were simply not met in schools, which made them leave.

**Grade Retention.** Grade retention was also found to play a part in motivating Inuit students to drop out of school. Lutra et al. (1992) stated, “Early school leavers and students at risk of leaving school early are likely to have failed a grade(s)” (p. 32).

A longitudinal research study by Melissa Roderick (1994) in which she investigated the association between grade retention and school dropout, it was found:

...youths who repeated grades were much more likely to drop out than those who were never retained... 70% of students who repeated one grade between kindergarten and eighth grade dropped out compared to approximately 27% of those who never repeated a grade. Students who repeated two or more grades were almost exclusively dropouts. (p. 735).

In addition, the results “lend additional support to the conclusion that promotion with remediation is the appropriate alternative” (p.749) to grade retention.

Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2004) examined the relationship between grade retention and dropping out of high school by reviewing fifteen research studies related to this phenomenon. Several of these research studies “reported that grade retention was found to be the strongest predictor of later dropout status” (p. 443).

Tagalik, Ball, Joyce, and DeMerchant, senior managers in the Department of Education, Government of Nunavut (Personal Communication, n.d.), cited Pratt (1997) who stated that “retained children lose ground, not only in social and emotional adjustment, but in self-concept and in attitude to school... Students who repeat two grades have almost a 100 percent probability of dropping out (of school)” (p. 3).

Tagalik et al. (n.d.) added, “One researcher studying childhood stress found that children and youth ranked retention as the third worst thing that could happen to them. Number one and two were going blind and losing a parent (See Yamamoto, 1980, cited in Harvard Education Letter, May/June 1991, p. 2)” (p. 3).

Tagalik et al. (n.d.) also noted, “the cost is measured in lowered self-esteem, a lower probability of graduating from high school, and serious consequences for lifetime educational and economic benefits” (p. 3).

“Radwanski (1987) pointed out that...children who are held back a year or more are more likely to drop out eventually, and that unsuccessful students who are promoted with their age group ultimately do somewhat better in school than similar pupils who are retained” (as cited in Zeigler 1992, p. 26).

Tagalik et al. (n.d.) offered several beliefs and strategies for accomplishing annual promotion rather than retaining, this includes but is not limited to, the following:

- Strong respect and value for parental involvement and input
- Well-researched and appropriate curricula
- Culturally-appropriate classroom practices
- Access to exemplary children’s literature and instructional programs
- Strong teacher training and on-going staff development
- Frequent assessment, student progress and checking on the appropriateness of methods and materials to match students’ levels of readiness and achievement
- Skilled individual tutoring for students who require greater support to improve their rate of progress, with content which is integrally related to the regular classroom reading program (p. 8).

**Misperceptions of behaviour.** According to Lutra et al. (1992), “Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school have difficulty with school rules and disciplinary actions” (1992).

Black African Canadian students also view authority differently than what is considered normal in Canadian school culture. Sefa et al. (1997) noted that “Black African Canadian youths are generally having a tough time dealing and/or coming to grips with authority structures in the school system. They perceive these structures as intended to subordinate them further” (p. 106).

Sefa et al. (1997) further explained, “Black students’ experiences with authority within the school system do not appear to get explained to them. They feel frustrated at their inability to participate in resolving conflicts and feel that they are silenced” (p. 107). In the end the results of such experiences may be suspension, expulsion, or simply dropping out from school. Rothstien-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) state, “Failing to capitalize on students’ culture-based strengths does not result in simply a lost opportunity; it undercuts the cultural values of the family and can cause students to feel torn between the behaviours valued at home and those valued at school” (p.29).

Rothstein-Fitch and Trumbull (2008) stated “Sometimes cultural differences can lead to undeserved punishment” (p. 105). “Once teachers recognize that the family is the central organizing schema for students’ behaviour, then they can construct classroom practices that work *with* instead of *against* that orientation (Gay, 2006, p. 22)”. In addition, “when teachers leverage this knowledge into classroom organization and planning, the benefits are manifest: students engage in more learning because they are not uncomfortably isolated from peers, confused about what counts as appropriate behaviour, or fearful of risk taking” (p. 22).

**Learning styles.** Lutra et. al. (1992) discovered, “Students at risk of leaving school early and early school leavers spend their time at school working by themselves at

their desks or listening to teachers rather than working cooperatively in small groups” (p. 34). Learning in isolation is contradictory to that of traditional Inuit culture, one that is collectivist in nature.

All world cultures can be referred to as either individualist or collectivist, representing two contrasting value systems. According to Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2008), “The fundamental distinction between these two systems is the relative emphasis placed on individual verses group well-being” (p. 9). They further elaborate on the main differences between these value systems. See Table 2.4:

Figure 2.4:

<b><i>Individualism</i></b>	<b><i>Collectivism</i></b>
<i>Representative of mainstream United States, Western Europe, Australia, and Canada</i> <i>Well-being of individual;</i> <i>Responsibility for self</i> <i>Independence/self-reliance</i> <i>Individual achievement</i> <i>Self-expression</i> <i>Self-esteem</i> <i>Task orientation</i> <i>Cognitive intelligence</i>	<i>Representative of 70% of world cultures (Triandis, 1989), including those of many U.S. immigrants</i> <i>Well-being of group;</i> <i>Responsibility for group</i> <i>Interdependence/cooperation</i> <i>Family/group success</i> <i>Respect</i> <i>Modesty</i> <i>Social orientation</i> <i>Social intelligence (p.9 ).</i>

According to Rothstein-Fitch et al. (2008), “many immigrant families (as well as American Indians, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, and African Americans) socialize their children to be more collectivistic. In their child-rearing practices, these families emphasize maintenance of close bonds to tasks together as a group” (p. 11).



The Inuit family unit reflects this collectivist value system, where all members within the family unit work together toward a common goal, and where individual needs are superseded by the overall needs of the group. Rothstein-Fitch et al. (2008) explained:

Students from collectivist homes do not get rewarded for working well together; they are expected to do so without an extrinsic reward. The contingencies that are most powerful are social ones, based on relationships. It is likely that, for these students, working together is already an intrinsic reward (p. 47).

“Motivation affects students’ engagement in learning and classroom behaviour, and both are predicated on not only personality differences but also on cultural values” (p.102). Lumsden (1994) asserted that “the sources of their motivation may differ” (p. 1). For example, according to Rothstein et al (2008), “Praise and criticism as rewards may not seem genuine to children from collectivist societies” (p. 116).

Although changing, to this day school culture in many Nunavut schools continues to reflect a western individualist value system in contrast to the collectivist system that continues to be embedded in Inuit culture and Inuit family values today. Working independently, showing one’s talents over another, and competing against one another to be seen as ‘the best’ are all contradictory to the Inuit culture and Inuit family values, and inevitably cause problems; loss of cultural identity being one.

**Relationships and support.** In their study on student dropout, Bushnik et al. (2002) noted that students cited school related reasons for their leaving the school establishment. “School related reasons include being bored or not interested in school, problems with school work, problems with teachers, being ‘kicked out of’ school...” (p. 8). In addition, they reported:

...previous research from the Youth in Transition Survey, based on 18-20 year olds, showed that dropouts tended to be less engaged in school than graduates...

Dropouts were more likely to view school less favourably, to have less favourable perceptions of their teacher and peer relationships... and to have less involvement in extra curricular school activities” (p. 13).

DaSilva and Hallet (1997) discovered, “Students who have recently left school did so because of poor relationships with peers or teachers; they found school boring and/or had difficulty with schoolwork; or they got into trouble/suspended/expelled” (p.31).

Wentzel (1998) noted that “perceived social and emotional support from peers have been associated with motivational outcomes such as the pursuit of academic and pro-social goals, intrinsic value, and self concept” (p. 203). DaSilva et al. (1997) posited that “strong, supportive peer relationships are very important for successful students” (p. 6). When students were asked what teachers did to help students succeed, responses included “being around before and after school, sticking around; staying in the same school for several years; having a sense of humour; a willingness to listen to students and being available to provide extra help before or after school” (p. 6). Goodenow (1993) found that “early adolescents may derive much of the academic motivation from the perceived supportiveness of others in the school environment” (p. 37). Brophy (2004) identified, “When middle and junior high schools provide more personalized and supportive environments suited to their students’ psychological needs, the students do not demonstrate the same declines in motivation or increases in rates of misconduct seen in more traditional schools” (p. 349).

Although peer relationships have a positive affect on influencing school retention, the group that a student associates with can have a negative influence on that student and their view on school. In their longitudinal study examining those configurations and determinants from Grade 7 that are associated with early school dropout, Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman (1989), found that “subjects who subsequently dropped out tended to affiliate with persons who were also at risk for dropout” (p. 1437).

**School calendars.** The Government of Canada (1990) reported that, “Native school leavers described being forced to choose between going away to hunt and attending school. Many felt that full participation in the school involved a denial of their culture” (p. 14).

**Transition from school to school.** In his research study on achievement loss associated with the transition to middle school and high school, Alspaugh (1998) found that there was a considerable achievement loss in students who transitioned to middle school from elementary school and that “the increased high school dropout rates for the students attending middle schools may have been associated with the achievement losses and the double transitions at grades 6 and 9” (p. 24).

A study on student mobility and the increased risk of high school dropout (Rumberger & Larson, 1998) concluded that “student mobility represents an important risk factor that greatly reduces the odds of completing high school” (p. 31).

Supportive relationships play an important role when transitioning from elementary school to middle or high schools. From a research study on transitioning into middle school, Wentzel (1998) stated that “it is possible that supportive relationships

have a particularly strong association with student motivation during these critical years of transition into middle school..." (p. 208).

**Motivation.** In a study of several communities in Nunavut, Davis (2001) reported what teachers from one Inuit community shared regarding student motivation:

...non-attenders and dropouts at Senior High School are seen as the least successful aspects of their school...parents appear unable to motivate their students to go...They lack motivation to complete school. They drop out because of pregnancy, or for short-term jobs, or even because they can't get up in the morning (p. 8).

Defined simply, motivation is the purpose for which one undertakes an activity. In the context of this research proposal, it refers to the activity of learning. Wentzel (1998) noted, "Interest in school has been identified as a powerful motivational construct related to the formulation and regulation of goal directed behavior" (p. 202). According to Rothstein-Fitch et al. (2008), "Motivation, in the classroom context, can be defined as whatever it takes to get students interested and engaged in learning" (p. 113). When asking successful students what they liked about coming to school, DaSilva et. al. (1997) found that "virtually all respondents said that learning new things holds a strong attraction for them" (p.4). Rothstein (2008) cited Maslow (1970) as stating: "Motivation is said to be strongly affected by the degree to which basic human needs are met, such as the need for food, safety, a sense of belonging, or self-esteem" (p. 114).

**Assessment.** Assessment practices can be a major contributor to lowering students' self-esteem and promoting extrinsic rather than intrinsic learning goals. Mercer and Pullen (2005) confirmed, "When we constantly make kids worry about how they are doing, they ignore satisfaction with their accomplishments" (p. 61). Learning becomes

all about the mark attained, rather than the internal gratification that comes from learning and students fail to invest themselves in their learning for learning's sake.

Wells (1992) reported that "dropouts ... tend to perceive little interest, caring, or acceptance on the part of teachers, and are discouraged by the school's constant signals to them about their academic failures" (p. 5). Lepper (1988) noted that "most schools in this country tend to value and stress the cultivation of individuals with superior abilities..." (p. 291).

The chances of dropping out of school are heightened when the only motivation to learn is extrinsically based. According to Oldfather et al. (1999), "The problems with extrinsic rewards are directly tied to issues surrounding grades and assessment. ... Grades, rather than intrinsic motivations can become the end, the purpose, the reason for taking part in school" (p. 20). Wentzel (1998) posited:

When children do not view themselves as basically competent and able, their freedom to engage in academically challenging pursuits and capacity to tolerate and cope with failure are greatly diminished. To them, failure following high effort appears to carry more negative implications especially for their self-concept of ability than failure that results from minimal or no effort (p. 202).

Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani (2001) reviewed fifteen research studies related to school dropout and concluded that "a record of poor performance causes children to question their competence and weakens their attachment to school. Dropout under such circumstances is a means of escape from an environment that is psychologically punishing" (p. 763).

Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, and Hawkins (2004) reviewed and summarized research findings by the Social Development Research Group on the importance of bonding to school for healthy development. They found that “school dropout was consistently predicted by three independent factors: poverty, delinquency and drug use, and academic competence” (p.260). Academic competence and delinquency and drug use ranked both high in producing school dropout.

**Labeling and streaming.** Also detrimental to retaining students is the practice of streaming. Sefa et al. (1997), noted that “often minority and working class students are targeted for admission to the lowest streams... Students who enter high school at the basic level find barriers and little encouragement to proceed to another stream and eventually they realize their options are extremely limited” (p. 115). In addition, “labeling and streaming can also be a great issue, as when you are labeled and placed into a stream, it is very difficult to get out” (p. 117).

Labeling plays a large part in, as Bushnik et al. (2002) noted, “ensuring the reproduction of social status through the educational system” (p. 115). Labeling theory, the notion that one behaves according to how one is perceived, has major implications regarding students’ self-concept and further ambition to remain in school. Oldfather et al. (1999) argued, “The language that we use shapes and is shaped by our membership within families and communities” (p. 10).

Johnstone (2001) posited, “Labels emerge as a consequence of embarrassment, shame or stigmatization. One of the inherent evils of labeling is that the label comes to be viewed as an attribute of the individual concerned” (p. 9)

There is also evidence that minority groups are being encouraged to follow education programs that limit their prospects toward future academic progress. Sefa et al. (1997) noted that "... often minority and working class students are targeted for admission to the lowest streams, ensuring the reproduction of social status through the educational system " (p. 115).

In one interview, Black students reported being counseled by a teacher to drop out of certain courses for the sake of easier ones they could handle, while at the same time recommending to White students to do the opposite, as they would otherwise miss out on many future job opportunities (Sefa et al. 1997).

### **Summary**

This chapter consisted of a review of the literature related primarily to those school related factors that influence students' decision to drop out of school. As discussed, the decision to drop out of school is not a decision made in a single point in time, but a gradual process that spans several years in a student's school experience. The factors influencing school dropout discussed in this chapter do not work in isolation, but likely work together to create the conditions that influence students' decisions to leave school. These factors often begin very early on in students' school experience, as early as primary. In a longitudinal study that tracked school children from their entrance into first grade in 1982 through to early spring 1996, Alexander, Entwisle, and Hosey (1997) found that among other factors, first grade experiences also influence dropout of students in later years. They noted that once disengaged from school, "prospects for 'reengagement' later are not good when children are plagued early in their school careers

by self-doubt, are alienated from things academic, are overage for their grades, are  
relegate to remedial courses, are prone to “problem” behaviours, are labeled  
troublemakers, and have academic skills that are far lower than the standard at which the  
curriculum is keyed (p. 98). Schools need to become more aware of students’ early  
school experiences and the messages they receive from education staff regarding whether  
they should or should not stay in school.



### **Chapter Three Methodology**

The approach this researcher took to collect, analyze, and interpret the data from this qualitative study are typical of the phenomenological research genre, an approach that, as Lester (2012) put it, is “particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives” (p.1). Through a series of guiding questions, during several interview sessions, participants were able to share their personal stories directly with the researcher, more specifically those experiences within their school lives that motivated them want to stay in school and continue their education rather than leave early like so many of their peers.

#### **Site Selection**

One specific hamlet within the Kivalliq region in Nunavut was chosen as the location in which this research was conducted. The reasons for choosing this location were threefold. First, the population within this community continues to practice a traditional Inuit life style in regard to Inuit language and culture. Most families continue to use Inuktitut as their primary mode of oral communication in the home as well as within the community in general. Second, the schools within this community continue to support Inuktitut in their daily work, one where Inuktitut is used as the primary language of instruction from kindergarten to at least grade three, followed by a gradual introduction to English as the language of instruction from grades-four to twelve. Third, there were a sufficient number of participants in this community who met the criteria set out for the sample group. Given the complexities of travel in the north, all participants in one community proved particularly convenient.

Interviews were held on several occasions spanning a two-year period and in several locations within and outside the community. Several interviews were taken in the boardroom of a hotel within the community. As participants already knew the researcher, they were very comfortable meeting with him at the boardroom to participate in the interview during the evenings after work hours. On another occasion, the researcher met with a participant for an interview at one of the community schools. On yet another occasion, the researcher was pleased to be invited to interview a participant in her home, under the supervision of her mother who noticeably ran the household. This participant explained that although she was over 25 years old, it was traditional that her mother, the elder within the family, was the leader in the family and permission from within the household for certain activities to occur still came from her mother. This said, her mother was very pleased to grant the researcher permission to interview her daughter. Lastly, several follow-up interviews were conducted from a distance over the telephone.

### **Participant Selection**

Six participants made up the sample group for this study. These participants all shared the same criteria:

- Inuktitut was their mother tongue, and they could all speak, read, and write English.
- They received their Education from kindergarten to grade-twelve in the same Nunavut community.
- They had successfully completed, or nearly completed, high school

- They received their early elementary education, kindergarten to grade-three, in Inuktitut
- They were over eighteen years of age.

This sample group was carefully chosen based on the criteria above. In setting the criteria for the sample group, it was decided that one could include participants who had perhaps not yet graduated high school, but who were definitely nearing completion.

In addition, the decision to include only participants who were eighteen years and older was to ensure that all participants had a good grasp of the English language, as this was the language of communication within this study. Students who were younger than eighteen years old and had not yet completed high school may not be able to adequately express themselves in English, thus limiting the quality of information gathered.

Another reason for choosing participants at a legal age is that of convenience, as no parents needed to be involved in giving their consent for this research. Participants were free to share what they were comfortable sharing with the researcher without permission from a guardian. However, on two occasions, two participants felt they still needed to ask their parents permission to participate in this interview, even though they were already in their early twenties. On one of these occasions, the parent escorted with her daughter to where the researcher was interviewing in order to understand exactly what the research was about and what it involved before allowing her daughter to participate, perhaps for fear of exploitation. After explaining the purpose of these interviews to the mother and inviting her to stay for the interview, she decided not to, but definitely gave permission for the interview to take place.

Interestingly, the researcher did not consider this element when organizing this research strategy. This was a learning experience for the researcher. In the end, on both of these occasions, the researcher explained to the parents what the research was for and that it was not to exploit their culture or their child in any way.

### **My Role as a Researcher**

It should be noted that I, the researcher, do have a personal bias regarding the concept of school dropout. My belief is that within cultures involving second language and where there is a potential for hegemony, the approaches and methods that teachers and schools generally take with students play a direct and indirect influence on their motivation to learn and their choice to attend school. Simply stated, if teachers teach students in a manner that sends the message to them that their culture is inferior and that they need to conform to that of the teacher, students' comfort level is compromised, their engagement within the learning environment is diminished, and they often make the choice to leave school early.

Although my biases and assumptions were strong and emotionally charged, I understood that they could not interfere or influence neither my methods of data collection nor interpretation. As Gearing (2004) states, "Essentially, to know is to see, and to see is to look beyond constructions, preconceptions, and assumptions (our natural attitude) to the essences of the experience being investigated" (p.1430). In keeping with Gearing's standpoint and with respect to sound phenomenological research practices, I made sure to use 'bracketing' (also known as 'phenomenological reduction' or 'epoche'), the first step in the phenomenological research process, in order to hear and understand,

without personal bias, the true essences of what my participants were sharing with me. In fact, those interview questions that guided my conversations with the participants contained no mention of school dropout as a possible outcome of cultural discord. The participants were free to share all their experiences and the researcher noted all that they shared with equal weight and importance.

**Indwelling.** Tite (2006) stated that “recognizing that it is necessary to look at the world from different perspectives, and trying to understand what gives meaning to those perspectives is what qualitative approaches attempt to do” (Instructor Notes 5, p. 1:2). Lester (2012) stated, “The establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of information, particularly where investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake” (p. 2).

The researcher was fortunate, as he already knew all the participants within this study. They all were former students of the researcher when in their grade-four school year. Because of this, all the participants and researcher already shared a good, healthy and respectful rapport with one another. This placed the researcher in a better position to be a listening ear, hearing the participants share their life experiences, and to understand what they were saying in more depth than he would have been able, had he been an outsider.

In fact, prior to beginning the interview, when the participants were to read and sign the *Interview Consent Forms*, several participants expressed that they were already very comfortable speaking with the researcher and that they already trusted him. This said, the researcher still had them read and sign the Interview Consent Forms prior to beginning their first interview.

The researcher believed that this rapport with the participants afforded a greater sense of relaxation, and allowed the participants to more willingly share their school experiences and personal stories, adding depth and quality. Giorgi (1994) describes this casual conversational tone as adding, “an embarrassment of riches” (p. 191) to the text.

Kvale (1996) also commented on this conversational tone during a qualitative interview, stating:

...is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,’ where the researcher attempts to ‘understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples’ experiences’ (p. 1-2) (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 13).

There were definitely times when the researcher and participant reminisced together about the past, laughed, and continued on in their conversation. As a result, the data collected represents the collective voices of what factors made school important for them and what made them want to continue attending school and ultimately graduate. As Lester (2012) posited:

Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action (p. 1).

Sharing this information from this study with Nunavut schools that continue to struggle with low attendance and graduation rates may help these schools begin to make major changes in their approaches and teaching strategies, which in the end may increase attendance and graduation rates.

### **Access**

Prior to beginning the process of collecting names of possible participants, the researcher wrote to the Nunavut Research Institute in Iqaluit, requesting a research license to conduct this research study in Nunavut. Once the researcher received his research license, he was able to begin the process of acquiring participants for this research.

The researcher began by gathering names of those students who had recently graduated from high school as well as those who were near graduating. He did this by contacting the Principal and Guidance Counselor of the high school in his chosen community, asking for names of these students. This was the only time the researcher communicated with the principal about this research study, keeping confidentiality at a maximum from this point on.

Having established a list of names of suitable candidates, the researcher attempted to contact each of them by telephone, explaining the research study in detail, including its purpose, description, potential harms if any, as well as commercialization or conflict of interest, e.g. what would be done with the results of the research. The researcher was only able to contact three participants by telephone, as many no longer had telephones in their homes or had changed their telephone numbers. However, upon traveling to the

community and frequenting public areas such as the store, the elementary school, and the hotel, the researcher was able to find the remaining participants, explain the research study to them, and set up a meeting for formal interview at a later date and time in the week.

Although the intent was to telephone each participant, explain the research, and then send the *Interview Consent Forms* to them for signature and for them to mail them back to the researcher, it was found to be more productive to meet them in person and go over the consent forms and have them sign in person at the onset of their interview.

## **Ethics**

Every effort to maintain confidentiality of the participants in this study as well as the location in which it occurred has been made. The names of each participant have been replaced with numbers and the name of the community has been replaced with the simple description of a Kivalliq community within Nunavut in which Inuktitut continues to be the language of instruction from kindergarten to grade-three.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this study was collected from participants on two separate occasions. Both were in the form of informal interviews, one-to-one with each participant.

**First interview.** The first interview was more formal in nature, as it involved signing the consent form prior to beginning the interview. This interview took the form of a conversation, with specific guiding questions that led the participant to speak about certain aspects of their elementary school experiences. Due to established rapport with each participant interviewed and the researcher, it became a very relaxing forum, where



the researcher would pose his guiding questions, and the participant would share his/her experiences.

Once all first interviews were completed, the researcher examined the data from each interview separately and horizontalized it by drawing out key points and finally sorting these key points into specific themes.

The researcher then followed by writing (textured) descriptions for each interview, outlining the themes within, and describing the participants responses reflecting a life-course point of view. After these textured descriptions from all interviews were completed, the researcher revisited each of the participants individually in order to have a second interview.

**Second interview.** This second interview served two purposes. First, it allowed the researcher to share his data from the first interview with participant in narrative form and to clarify any information that may not have been fully understood using questions such as, “Is this what you wanted to say here? Is what I have written correct?”

This step proved to be invaluable, as the participants were able to add to, delete, and edit the information in the textured descriptions so that what they wanted to say was conveyed accurately. In fact one participant was very good at editing her sentence structure from the first interview so that it did not convey a different meaning than what she intended.

This participant originally stated, “*Most other communities lost their language and we should be proud of it...*” This sounded like one should be proud that most communities have lost their language. However, this was not what this individual wanted

to convey. She wanted to convey that we should be proud of the fact that our language is still alive in our community, as so many communities have lost their language.

After editing their responses from the first set of interviews, the researcher asked each participant one additional set of questions. These were, “What advice would you give to a new Inuk teacher teaching for the first time your community school?” and, “What advice would you give to a new Kabloona teacher from the south teaching for the first time in your community school?”

Once the data collection from the second set of interviews was completed, it was further analyzed, adding to the already emerging themes and creating new ones when appropriate. Both of these interviews were sufficient to achieve saturation, generating more data than was necessary to answer the research questions. Thus further research into additional themes that emerged from this research is encouraged.

**Group focused conversation.** It should be noted that originally a third occasion with the participants was listed in the research proposal, more specifically a focused group with all of the participants. However, due to confidentiality reasons, the researcher decided that this was not an appropriate strategy to use for this study, as it would compromise the trust that the participants had in him and it could have inhibited their ability to share their experiences if others were watching and listening.

**Interview questions.** The guiding questions used in these interviews were just that, designed to guide the conversation. More often than not, these questions were not directly asking for reasons why the participants remained in school. They were designed to get participants thinking about their past and from there responses, important information about what kept them in school were gleaned.

In addition, in keeping with current literature's view on dropping out of school as a process that begins early in a student's educational career and not a decision made in one point in time, these guiding questions were not designed to focus on one grade level, but to span many possible grades in school. Answers to questions such as, "*What was your favourite classroom?*" did not center on one grade level or one subject area, but varied depending upon the participant. Answers to the question, "*Why was it your favourite class?*" were as equally valuable, as they varied from "*our teacher taught us how to respect one another*" to, "*Our teacher had a sense of humour.*"

With the aid of these guiding questions, interviews were like trips through memory lane, so to speak, where participants talked about various experiences they had long ago with fondness and a new look at their past through adult eyes, in essence sharing their perspectives regarding what school meant to them. Having taught these participants, the researcher was able to share in their remembrance, not always because he was there at the time of their experiences, but because he could empathize with them as they told their stories.

By providing two separate occasions for the participants to share their experiences, the researcher was able to more fully understand who they were as Inuit students, some of their personal struggles that influenced their school experiences, as well as those factors that continued to motivate them to complete their education.

While reminiscing about their school experiences in the past, the participants would often veer off the specific topic and share a story they could remember that made them happy. For example, one participant very fondly remembered going on a land trip in the winter where all the students were playing on the ice. Her teacher accidentally fell

through the ice and laughed with the students all the way back to the school. Although this was not an answer to the specific question posed, this kind of recall added to the richness of the interview experience and the data collected there in. In essence these interviews became a time to reflect on where they are now in their lives and where they came from, the experiences that made them who and where they are today.

**Final analysis and discussion.** Final analysis took place after the interviews were complete and this analysis forms one of the chapters in this document. This final analysis took an in-depth look at the consistent themes that surfaced during the interviews and compares them with existing literature on the subject of motivation and school dropout. Finally, recommendations for further research into specific themes that came out of the researcher's analysis are made.

### **Credibility and Transferability**

This research project collected only those school experiences and views of those participants who were selected to be part of the sample group. This study was intended for a specific population of students in one specific community, those who were instructed from kindergarten to grade three in Inuktitut, followed by a gradual transition into instruction in their second language, English, from grades four to twelve.

Although the results of this research study provided information pertaining to one specific sample group from one community, they may be transferable to other communities where conditions within the population and school are similar. There are some communities in Nunavut whose student population does share characteristics similar to those participants in this study with regard to culture, language, educational programming, and issues that prevent and/or promote school retention in students.

## Summary

The phenomenological method within the qualitative research genre proved to be the most appropriate method to use to successfully meet the goals of this research study. In gathering, analyzing and interpreting the data for this study, the researcher followed what Groenewald (2004) describes as "a simplified version of Hycner's (1999) explication process" (p. 17). Groenewald (2004) outlines this process as follows:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction,
2. Delineating units of meaning,
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes,
4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it,
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary (p. 17).

The researcher, aware of his own biases, explicitly made use of bracketing and phenomenological reduction in order to maintain an objective point of view at all times. The process of bracketing proved particularly helpful.

Several changes were made to the original proposed methodology including the method of contacting participants for the interviews, the manners in which interviews were made, and the elimination of the third interview, which was to be a group meeting with all participants present.

Finally, one positive outcome of the strong rapport between the participants and the researcher was that participants shared more than was necessary, making interviews rich and personal, allowing the researcher the unique and valuable opportunity to view their worlds much more fully.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Analysis**

Upon careful consideration regarding how to present the data in this paper, it was decided that the responses from each participant interviewed should be individually presented. In this manner, each participant's school experiences are presented in a way that is unique to him or her, and is safe from confusion with other research participants. Participants' stories are presented in narrative style, and within each participant's story, several themes that emerged from the horizontalization are outlined. Participants read their narrative and requested appropriate changes. In addition, each participant's name was replaced with a single digit number, in order to maintain confidentiality and aid in distinguishing participants. Below are the textured descriptions of the individual voices of each participant.

#### **Participant One**

The researcher met with the first participant at the elementary school at the end of a regular school workday. As she works in the school, this location provided the most convenient environment for them to talk in privacy and confidence. Although the school was still quite busy with afterschool activities, the office was quiet with no distractions from outside.

**Textured description.** Participant One was born in 1988. She has lived in Nunavut all her life. Upon discussing her elementary school experience, she recalled her elementary school teachers. Surprisingly she was able to recall the names of all her teachers except for grade-five. Naturally, she named her teachers using their first names

only. (Traditionally, Inuit only had one name given to them, as the concept of family names did not exist. Although in modern times all Nunavumiut now have last names, most people young and old continue to use first names when communicating, including students addressing their teachers.)

***A place for friends.*** When in elementary school, Participant One remembered school to be a place where one could meet up with friends. At the time when she was growing up, one did not see friends so often when school was not open. Participant One went on to say, *“At home we hardly saw our friends, but in school we did see our friends.”* Although she was not as sociable as others, she still valued the need for friends in school.

***Peers and socialization.*** In Participant One’s high school years, she and another classmate became best friends and they both stayed best friends until their grade 12 graduation. She as well as her close friends have all graduated from high school.

***Safe and welcoming.*** When in elementary school, Participant One remembered school to be a safe place. She remembered that upon entering school the principal at the time always greeted her at the door. Also, she commented about the quietness of the hallways, *“pretty quiet compared to today... not many students out in the hallways.”* Participant One could hear students talking loudly, but not shouting.

She remembered how the hallway was important for her to take a break from classwork. Now and then she would leave the classroom for an errand, but she would take extra time by walking slowly. Although she did this from time to time, she did not take advantage of it. She said, *“Walk really slowly so I could get out a bit and walk around. But I never stayed out for 10/15 minutes.”*

She remembered feeling safe in classrooms as well. She went with the rest of the class on community field trips, the girls in the class would have their hair brushed by the classroom teacher. The teacher and the students had a good relationship with one another.

***Traditional culture.*** She also remembered that in her elementary years, the classroom that stood out the most had shelves around the room containing many Inuktitut books. She remembered many cultural learning experiences with elders, “*Activities with elders, sewing, interactions with elders, teach us how to sew, scrape skin of caribou, igloo in the spring, tent in the fall.*”

***Rapports with teachers.*** She remembered favourite teachers and teachers as role models with whom she had good rapports. They demonstrated good teaching, explained concepts so she could understand them. She described favourite teachers as being happy, friendly, good explainers, and ones who wanted her involvement.

***Traditional culture and language.*** She also described favourite teachers as Kabloona teachers (English speaking teachers from southern Canada) who made the effort to learn and speak in Inuktitut.

When asked what advice she would give to a new teacher coming from the south, she said that new Kabloona teachers should learn more about the Inuit culture, and not take certain actions that their students take towards them. “*...they have a different way of saying thank you and sorry, and not to be offended about how the kids are treating the teacher...*” She explained that through time, when teachers do not react to their students’ behaviours, the students gradually respect the teacher. Respect is earned. “*I see kids who*



*don't have manners towards new teachers, but the respect grows when the teacher doesn't take it personally or get offended by it..."*

***Self esteem - feeling valued.*** She described times when the teacher relied on her Inuktitut skills and academic skills to explain concepts to other students. *"They were friendly, depended on me to help other students if they didn't understand. (Teacher) and I would explain in English or Inuktitut."*

***Success in learning.*** She was more academically inclined and learned easily in the classroom. Later on, she described as becoming much better in math and science, and continuing to be good in these subjects throughout high school.

***Future goals.*** Through life, since being very young, she wanted to work outdoors and not behind a desk in an office. She said, *"Always been, wanted to do something with wild life, land, or archeology. First marine biology, geology – on the land, stuff like that instead to sitting in the office."*

## **Participant Two**

The second participant, also a female, was interviewed in her home under the supervision of her mother, who is the matriarch in the family. Although in her mid-twenties, her mother is still the one in the house to makes the rules. She views her mother as the elder in the family who makes the decisions for the family. The participant explained that she still needed to respect her mother's wishes. After discussing with her mother what the interview was for, her mother gladly allowed the interview to take place.

**Textured description.** This second participant was born in 1985. Upon discussing her school experience, she was able to recall all her elementary and secondary school teachers. She did however have difficulty recalling one teacher from Junior Secondary 2. Interestingly, She was able to access all her school files including her school reports from kindergarten onward to grade-twelve from her bedroom closet. She is proud to have graduated school and, as seen from her actions in keeping everything so intact, she values the importance of school and is proud to have successfully finished school.

**A place for friends.** She recalled liking to go to school because it provided an opportunity to learn, but not only academics, but to learn how to get along with others. She said that school helped her to “*learn how to be polite, respect others, and punctuality.*” She went on to describe school as a place to “*make new friends and get to know people...*”

**Traditional culture.** She spoke about classrooms that were welcoming. She mentioned a favourite classroom as having a banner with *welcome* written on it in Inuktitut (Tungasugiitsi). Inuktitut was spoken in the classroom that was remembered most. In addition she recalled being taught to be proud of being who you are, proud to be an Inuk?

When asked what advice she would give a new teacher from the south, she responded saying, “*Let the Kabloonas know about the Inuit culture, about what they do, and understand the first language, getting to know the Inuit more, so they are prepared to work in the schools after.*”

**Self esteem.** She recalled how she was often asked to help out in the classroom, helping students who required extra help. She said, *"I used to be in front to the class, telling classmates to do this, do that, how to do things. Be a group leader in the class."* She also described how one teacher allowed her to stay after school and help *"clean up classrooms, wash desks, teachers' desk, how to put things back the way they were before, help organize teacher for tomorrow, made photocopies."* Feeling needed is very important to her.

**Safe.** She recalled favourite classrooms and teachers as ones where the environment was clean, colourful, drawings on the wall. A place where it could be calm but busy at times. Teachers would be ones who were respectful. *"He used to treat Inuit students well, gave breakfast before nine, soup, candies."* She also recalled the classroom teacher as someone to provided time for students to get things right by trying again, if they did not succeed the first time. The teacher taught students to *"be who we are."* She also recalled the teacher as one who was very friendly, respectful, and smart, who had a good sense of humour.

She recalled one favourite teacher, whom she misses to this day, as one whom she thought was a singer because of her hair. She explained that she still has a grade-six class picture with this teacher in it.

She recalled one classroom feeling as if it were like a second home. She said, *"Favourite classroom, second home to attend school and have a teacher with Arden."*

She also recalled working in small groups in a favourite classroom.

**Welcoming.** She recalled school being a welcoming environment; people like principals and teachers would welcome her to school. In addition, in one of her

classrooms in elementary school, a banner with *welcome* written on it in Inuktitut *Tungasugiitsi* was hung in the classroom.

**Peers and socialization.** She explained that she did not hang around a peer group through school for fear of getting in trouble. This said, she did work in small groups in the classroom.

**Future goals.** She recalled that in school she did not have any major career goals, but did know that she wanted to graduate school so that her job opportunities would be greater. She mentioned, “*Like mother, like daughter.*” Participant Two’s mother has also graduated high school.

**Rapport with teacher.** When asked about what advice she would give a new teacher, Participant Two responded saying, “*Teach them how to get to know the students or participants in the first day.*”

### **Participant Three**

The third participant, a young man, was interviewed at the local hotel.

**Textured description.** Participant Three was born in 1986 in Winnipeg, Manitoba and after several days moved to Nunavut with his mother who was returning after delivering. After several months, he was sent back to Winnipeg after developing pneumonia. He then returned to his home community. Inuktitut was spoken in the home all his life.

Upon speaking about his school experiences, he recalled all his teachers from his elementary school years up to grade-seven. He graduated from grade 12 in 2005 and

graduated from an Office Administration program delivered in Arctic College in May 2010.

At the time of this interview he was interested in applying for a pre-employment electrician course in Rankin Inlet. At the time of the writing of this narrative, he has been accepted in this program and is at work studying for this.

***A place for learning.*** He remembered that his reason for going to school was because he wanted to learn. During a second interview, he added that it was his grandmother's influence that encouraged him to go to school:

*My late grandmother used to tell me to go to school, that without education it would be hard to find a job, something like that. She said that without finishing grade 12, social services and welfare would not be enough for me to support myself and my future family.*

***Good teaching.*** He recalled his favourite teacher as being someone who taught well. In elementary school, when the language of instruction is one that is not one's mother tongue, learning can be difficult. He said the following about his favourite teacher, "*Joked around a lot, played with students, when he teacher he explained more details to get us to understand what he was trying to teach.*"

***Future goals.*** He spoke a lot about his personal goals for life. He said, "*I wanted to have a better future, I want to reach my goal.*" He spoke about family members, uncles, who kept telling him about being a journeyman, working as an electrician. He said, "*The course came up, so I took it.*" During the time of the second interview, hesitated that he was now working as a heavy equipment operator at Meadowbank, "*I'm*

*now driving, still planning to go back to school for another electrician course this coming fall.*” (I conducted my second interview with Participant Three by telephone).

**Peers and socialization.** He described most of his friends, those he was close to in school, as currently having successful lives and jobs. He spoke of one who always wanted to study to operate heavy equipment and so now he has graduated and drives a water truck. Participant Three also wanted to be heavy duty equipment operator, but he changed his mind, *“I wanted to be heavy equipment operator, but changed my mind, pre-employment electrician.”* Another friend is a *“mechanic helper”*. Like him, both these friends have also graduated high school. Both had future goals while in school.

He also mentioned that these same individuals were for the most part in the same classes as he during his elementary and middle school years. He recalled working sometimes in groups and sometimes alone. There was no indication that one manner of learning outweighed the other when speaking to him.

**Role model.** Although not a role model in the traditional sense, he spoke about the reason why he wanted to get a good job and be financially successful. *“If I could to finish electrician course in Rankin Inlet, I could go into the Navy Armed Forces and work there as an electrician, always see it on the commercial, looks like fun to me.”* He was talking about working in this role so that it could take him to Newfoundland to visit his favourite teacher and his wife, as that is where they live presently.

**Safe and welcoming.** He described hallways as ones that felt welcoming and safe. *“Hallways were clean, I could say, the teacher were good too, they treated the student how they should treat them, friendly and respectfully. There was also a lot of students’ work and drawings hanging on the walls of the hallway as well.”*

He recalled classes he remembers the most as those that made him happy. He spoke about the class in this way, *“Happy when we started singing songs, a lot of fun with him.”* He also recalled a sense of belonging, describing how the teachers were respectful to him, *“Yes, mostly teachers, by teaching, respectful to me.”*

*“Our teacher was fun to be around with, he played around with students, joked around with them, always made students happy with his wife...”*

***Feeling valued.*** Class was also a place where he was made to be responsible for keeping it clean. He recalled times when students needed to clean their messes when they made them. *“Neat, but when we started cutting papers to make shapes, it would be messy in the class. Students would start putting things in the garbage and go back to their seat.”*

Student work was always displayed in the hallways and he recalled walking in school and through the halls seeing student work on the walls.

***Family and school.*** He recalled that his immediate family (parents) did not have an ongoing relationship with school staff. They would meet during report card time, but did not otherwise associate with teachers. When asked if parents had a relationship with teachers, he said, *“Yes, only through report card, got a long with parents.”*

#### **Participant Four**

The fourth participant, a female, was also interviewed at a local hotel. When she arrived, she was with her mother. Her mother wanted to know more about this interview and what the dangers, if any, existed. I explained the purpose of the interview and the confidentiality clause to her and so she was satisfied and gave permission for the

interview to take place. I asked if she wanted to stay to observe the interview, but she said that she was satisfied with me interviewing her daughter alone.

**Textured description.** She did not share any life history with me during her interview. However she did explain that she almost finished her high school program, having only two more courses to complete.

**Need to learn.** When asked if she liked school and why, Participant Four responded explaining that school helps us learn. She said, *"I like it also because learn and feed our brain."* She went on to explain the importance of school. She explained that if one wanted to get further in life they needed to have an education. *"I did not really like math, but I needed to learn it."*

**Future goals.** Since a child, she had future goals, *"When I was younger, I wanted to become a policeman, but I now changed my mind."* She explained her need to learn. *"I want to take a pilot course, but I need to know my math."* During the second interview together, she did announce to the researcher that she passed her math course, and as she said, *"...but hardly made it."*

**Socialization.** She recalled the importance of socialization in school. She said, *"When you are little kid you like to play outside. I was always happy to go back to school. Friends, teachers to talk around with."*

Having friends was important and she recalled having the same peer group for most of her elementary and middle school life:

*From kindergarten to grade 8 almost all (students) were in the same class. High School was different though... There were older kids (in the high school) but got*



*used to it after one year in high school. Made lots of friends from older kids. Still some peers are from my earlier class. We would still help each other... At first the older kids would tease us, but then they got tired of it.*

She recalled that she worked in groups until grade five. *"We did not fight in groups, but go along."* She also recalled that it was the teacher who organized the groups and not the students. She also recalled how much fun soup time was during class. It was also a reason to come to school. *"We would bring to school for soup."* Soup was this participant's favourite food. *"I did have food at home, but we did not have soup very much because my mother and sister did not like it."*

***Peers and socialization.*** She recalled her age peers. *"I liked my classmates because they were around my age."* She recalled a sense of belonging in school, as her friends made it so. *"Friends, we would stick to each other."*

She had two very good friends when she was growing up. Both these friends have not yet finished high school. *"Emilia has one more course to graduate. Sharon has not finished high school."* She also has not yet completed high school, but is wanting to.

Although in her mid twenties at this time, she continues to see her school friends periodically. However she makes a point not to hang around peers who are bad influences. She explained, *"I still see my classmates, but not the boys."* She explained that several boys were in trouble with the law because of their own bad influences. *"Some peers wanted to be like their friends."*

*"We would all help one another during school work. That is how Frieda and I became friends. When there was no school, we would walk around in town then."*

She spoke a lot about the influence of peers in one's life and schoolwork. She shared, "*Students should hang around good influences instead of bad ones.*" She recalled working as a guard in the RCMP and speaking with a former classmate who was in jail awaiting transfer to a more permanent location. She recalled asking him why he went the opposite direction than her. "*In grade-nine he was hanging around not so good influences who made him choose to do bad things. He said that he should have listened to his own thoughts rather than these classmates.*"

**Responsibility.** She recalled several times when responsibility and making sound choices was instilled in her and her peers as students. These included how to treat others by helping and assisting when necessary and also helping to clean the classroom when they made messes. "*Teacher taught to make our decisions... We would help each other in groups... It was sometimes clean, sometimes it was dirty so we would clean up cause we made the mess.*"

**Rapport with teachers.** She recalled teachers whom she looked up to as role models. In her school experience, there were several who provided support to her. She recalled,

*Sometimes I would visit her outside of school, she would help with schoolwork problem or I would simply hang around. Another teacher would give students rides on her new van. Another would warn her about staying out late. "Felt comfortable, you could talk about anything you wanted to say, supportive of my school problem. 'Don't' stay out late, go in when mom says to, because of bears.'*

She also recalled a time when the teacher and the kids were playing out on the ice, when the teacher wound up falling through the ice. *“Everyone started to laugh after, including (teacher).”*

She recalled several stories where teachers were looked upon as people, rather than authority figures, mother figures so to speak. She talked about one teacher in grade six. *“We tried to set her up with (community member) and they finally did get together. When they got together, we were happy...”*

In her case, being Inuk, several of her teachers were related to her in some way. *“My mother is my teacher’s half-cousin and other of my teachers is her cousin.”*

**Role models.** Her teachers also provided encouragement to her to remain in school. She recalled several teachers mentioning the importance of education. *“(Teacher) Told me to keep going, attending school so that after I graduate all the doors will be open.” ... She said that if I graduate, I could become a teacher and help other students.”*

She had one teacher she especially wanted to be like. *“(Teacher) was a cashier and hairdresser and knew how to sew parkas. I wanted to be like her and wanted to do what she did. I can’t sew parkas, but I was a cashier, but can only cut brush cuts.”*

**Safe and welcoming.** She recalled school as a safe and welcoming place to be. *“The atmosphere within the hallway was safe, friendly and clean. It was good...”*

She also recalled a teacher explaining to the students. *“The teacher would say, ‘If you want to be treated good by others, you have to treat them the same.’ and taught us to make the right choices.”*

She recalled her favourite teacher, explaining her this way, *“Friendly, helped us a lot, cared for us, cause (teacher) was my teacher three times.” Having the same teacher for more than one year in a row has good points, as the teacher gets to know the child much more but good rapports can be built up.”*

She only felt unwelcome once when she first entered the high school. After a year, once she made friends, she was comfortable.

She also spoke about the hazards of being a bully. *“Don’t be a bully. It may seem fun, but when you are being a bully and doing it, it is no good.”*

**Traditional culture and language.** She recalled the importance of culture and language in school and to her as an Inuk. She shared:

*I enjoyed it (school) because we used to do Inuktitut stuff with a bit of ESL (English Second Language)... We should be proud that we still have our Inuit language, as most other communities lost theirs... Inuktitut is the most important one, English is the second one... We spoke Inuktitut (in the classroom) and there was one boy in the class who was Kabloona, so the teacher would explain in English what we were saying... Schoolwork was awesome because the teacher would speak Inuktitut and we would help the students... If we only spoke Inuktitut, we will not be understood.*

**Feeling valued.** She talked about several things that made her perhaps feel more valued in the classroom. When asked about how she felt in her favourite class, she responded with, *“Good, being myself.”*

She also mentioned that as the schoolwork was taught in her mother tongue, Inuktitut, at times she and other students would help others in the classroom.

***Appropriate teaching.*** Throughout my conversation with her, she spoke about good classroom teacher strategies, for example when the students worked in groups, they did not fight with one another. Perhaps, as she puts it, because “*the teacher made our seating plans.*”

When asked about giving advice to new teachers in the community school, her response reflected the need to be have some understanding that children were just that, children and that many behaviors should be accepted and tolerated. She stated, “*Don’t be a strict person because they are just kids and they would like to have fun, because kids are kids.*” She continued to talk about what was important for students to learn:

*Teach them to have respect for others and not be rude, because some of the students right now seem rude, some of them. Tell them not to get pregnant too early because there are lots that are sixteen and over having kids. A lot of kids having kids now. Have respect for Elders. In the past, teachers always said to us to respect Elders.*

When asked what advice she would give new Kabloona teachers coming to teach in the community school, Participant-Four stated the importance of teachers working together. Although resources on teaching are valuable, it is often good to work together and learn from one another. “*When they have a problem, talk to one of the Inuk teachers, like instead of following the books on teaching, talk to the Inuk teachers because they know more about the community and/or culture.*”

She also described good Kabloona teachers as those who were sympathetic to Inuit culture and language:

*Kabloona teachers who were good to have in the elementary school were those who knew what we wanted to say. They spoke some Inuktitut, and they taught us how to speak more English. Some of the students are not always sociable and do not like to speak English. Sometimes they don't like to speak English because they cannot pronounce the words. Sometimes I have a hard time pronouncing words and so I sometimes don't want to speak English but would rather speak Inuktitut.*

She continued to describe reasons for Kabloona teachers learning Inuktitut.

*Kabloona teachers should be ready to learn Inuktitut and all that, for reasons such as field trips and elders so they can understand what is being said. Sometimes students are the translators, and there is often a misunderstanding between the elder and the Kabloona.*

### **Participant Five**

The fifth participant, a female, was also first interviewed at a local hotel. However the second interview occurred at her home with her family. She is presently married with several children.

**Textured description.** Participant-Five was born in Churchill, Manitoba in 1985. She soon moved back to Nunavut with her mother, who went to Churchill to deliver her. Inuktitut was the language spoken in her home. When she entered school at age 4, Inuktitut was the language spoken and the language of instruction. Upon discussing who her teachers were in the elementary school, she was able to recall all the names of her teachers from kindergarten to grade-six. She spoke with fondness at this time about

school, in fact adding the name of her best friend with whom she associated with throughout school, including this persons' current occupation and how often they see one another presently. Friends are obviously important to her.

**Peers and socialization.** When asked about why she wanted to attend school, among several reasons, she mentioned how it was fun to make new friends. Several students were very close to her, especially one individual in particular who used to sit beside her in class and actually was in her same classes from grade five through to high school.

In addition, her close friends from school were also successful in school. One was mentioned as having graduated and worked in school, but has since died. Another was also very successful in school.

When asked about the classroom remembered the most, she recalled her grade-two class because it was the one where she felt best. She stated, *"I felt happy, liked class, friends with most of the students, felt comfortable being in that class."*

**Peer/cross-age support.** She also remembered several peers in the classroom who were older than she and who could assist with her work if it was too difficult.

When asked why she thought some of her classmates did not graduate while she wondered aloud why people who were smarter than her did not graduate:

*I knew some of my classmates were very smart, smarter than me, but not sure why they didn't finish grade twelve, perhaps living their teenage lives. Amaou (I don't know). I remember (student), one of the smartest students, in grade twelve in my class, (student), also smarter than me, but I don't know why, what happened to*

*them, why they dropped out of grade twelve. I think they were on the potential grade list, but they never went back to school.*

She then described the support that she received to help her graduate school:

*With my common law's help, I finished grade-twelve. My common law, he encouraged, forced me to go to school, do my homework, help me with my homework. He even took one year off when I had my oldest one so that I could finish grade twelve. I would have probably been one of the dropouts if it wasn't for his help.*

**Appropriate teaching.** When asked about her favourite class, she remembered that it was Math. *"I liked to play cashier, count money."* This participant became a cashier and would still love to be one although at this time she works in the school as school secretary. *"There was a toy plastic cash register in the grade 2 classroom...Played with a real casher register as well. I was a cashier from 2002 to 2005 at the northern and then lumber."* She compared school in the past to how it is in the present:

*Used to be better then than now. Most of the kids are not listening now. I think it is that sometime I notice the teachers giving easy worksheets to the students, mostly coloring and drawing, making cards at school. Teachers were more organized than now. Some are still professionals, but very different now. Teachers are not professional now. Only a few now that I know are more professional than others.*

When asked if she would recommend anything to new teachers regarding how to work with kids, she responded, *"Be friendly to students, and be fun."*



***Feeling valued.*** When asked about the classroom she remembered the most, she recalled that her favourite classroom had many drawings and other work from the students on the wall, and that the classroom was clean and white.

***Role model.*** She was very independent in nature, had future goals early on in her school experience and followed through with them. This said, she did recall an aunt of hers whose model she did follow. *“My aunt was also a cashier...I enjoyed playing with cash register.”*

***Traditional Culture.*** She recalled having drawings of igloos and hunting on display in the classroom. The language of instruction within her favourite classroom was Inuktitut.

***Future goals.*** She knew in grade-two what she wanted to do when she grew up. She wanted to be a cashier. She recalled the reason why she stayed in school, *“I knew that more jobs would be easier. Most jobs look for diplomas so had to graduate.”*

She reported feeling that many of her classmates in school were much smarter than she, but for some reason they did not continue in school and graduate. She did not speculate as to the reason for this.

***Safe and welcoming.*** At no time did she feel alienated in school. *“I felt I belonged in the school.”* She recalled both teachers and students as being very friendly. *“Teacher in the hallway would welcome them to school.”*

*“It felt comfortable.”* She described the hallways as clean and quiet, having less kids than now, a friendly place. One thing that she remembered was that there were rules to adhere to. She recalled one rule, *“Walking in the hall, no running.”*

She recalled students being less shy than they are now in school, especially during Christmas concerts, *“Now most students are shy to get on the stage now.”*

She also remembered the School Community Counselor. *“He talked to students in the office. Was a friendly man.”*

At one point in our interview, she elaborated on what she thought of the present school environment:

*Lots of fights now at school, little boys. These days kids are more acting like they are little adults, like their own way. Parents spoil their kids too much. Like it’s say if she doesn’t want to go to school, most parents let them stay home and play. I used to go to school everyday. Now a days less students going to school, maybe afraid of the bigger kids or being bullied. Cause little boys are bullying each other.*

**A place for learning.** Participant-Five recalled enjoying school and that school was a place she wanted to go to because it was important to learn. *“I wanted to learn and make new friends...I enjoyed everything in school; gym, art, learning new things and making new friends.”*

### **Participant Six**

I interviewed the final participant, a female, at the hotel as well and had to conduct our second interview over the telephone.

**Textured description.** Participant Six was also born in Churchill, Manitoba in 1986. She had lived in Nunavut ever since, always in the same community. The

language spoken in her home was always Inuktitut and so her early experiences were in Inuktitut. Upon talking about her elementary school teachers, she was able to recall most of them except for her grade-three teacher. She also went on to say that although she began her school experience in Inuktitut, she learned to speak English, but did not recall the time she began to learn it.

***A place for learning.*** She recalled enjoying school a lot, “*I really enjoyed school because we had to learn, learned a lot of stuff going to school.*”

***Peers and socialization.*** She recalled that in her favourite class she sat with her best friend, a friend that she spent a lot of time with in school throughout her school experience. She stated, “*Sat with my best friend...were together from kindergarten to grade eleven. Both of us failed grade-10 together.*”

Her peer group consisted of about three other best friends. Although two friends separated from the group, one remained. She recalled this being good. “*We all got separated except for (friend), which was so good!*” Out of this group, two of the three friends graduated.

She recalled several times when she worked with her peers in the classroom. When reading English books in the grade-four classroom, she recalled what the teacher did. “*She would let us read English books but with partners. I would read to my partner and my partner would read to me.*” She also worked in groups in her favourite class, which was Art.

***Future goals.*** Recalling her own personal goals, she shared, “*Back then everyone wanted to be a pilot, nurse, police, etc.. I always wanted to be a hairdresser.*”

**Feeling valued.** She recalled how the hallways and classrooms always had students' work on display. *"You could not see the wall. Students' pictures, paintings, you name it, was there."*

**Peer support.** She also recalled how helpful it was having peers to work with. She said, *"They were helpful. When I had a problem spelling, I would go to friends first instead of the teacher."*

She also speculated however that perhaps other friends of hers who did not continue in school to graduate did not do so because of relationships with boys. She said, *"Other friends got boyfriends early, the boyfriend was not attending school, so they followed in his footsteps and quit."*

**Transition years.** She also stated that she had difficulties in Junior Secondary, as it was very different from elementary school. *"I will never forget the JS school years, as they are the worst."*

**Parental support.** She recalled having parents who supported her in school, by basically ensuring that she and her siblings attended school and did not get into trouble. Both her parents were education staff, so they likely valued education. *"My parents were watching us like a hawk in the school."* She also recalled how when she was young she did have curfews and her parents were strict. She argues that this played a big role in her graduating in the end.

Her mother was related to the teacher with whom she had most esteem for. *"Mom and this teacher used to go to basketball tournaments together when they were young. They might be somehow related but not sure."*

**Role model - rapport with teacher.** She remembered very clearly who her role model was in school. It was her favourite teacher who helped and supported her throughout her schooling. She taught her right from wrong and especially supported her throughout her school experience:

*She taught me right from wrong and I made it through grade eleven...Even through she was not my teacher in junior high, I would go ask her to help and she would help me...She even has my old files and books...She called me a few months ago to come and look at my old files...She is still my idol today, still pretty close... Still treats me like a student even though I am not anymore.*

When asked in her second interview what advice she would give new teachers in her community school, her response was the same for both Inuk and Kabloona. She would suggest to any new teacher that they bond with their students on their first day of school and even prior to. She went on to say that it is even difficult for her husband, who is Kabloona from the south. Again, for non-Inuit teachers, she would advise them to bond with their students both at school and outside in the community. Bonding between student and teacher is important to her.

**Safe and welcoming.** When asked if she was greeted by anyone when coming into the school, she recalled that teachers would always say good morning. She eluded to the fact that this is not happening so much these days. *"It is not how it used to be, one of the reasons I quit school was because I did not get along with my teacher so I didn't go back."* For the most part, at the time, she did feel welcomed and never felt alienated when at school. *"It felt good."* She also recalled how she felt in her favourite classroom. *"Safe. Happy – always used to make us laugh, always a good thing."*

She recalled how the school smelled and how it often smelled of soup cooking, which was a good smell. *"...but the soup smell was great. It was not a moldy smell. It was cheesy smell. I liked the soup smell the best."*

She recalled the classroom she remembered that most as one that was bright and colorful. She remembered it the most because there was so much to do. *"Because there was a lot of things to do there."* The teacher of this classroom had a personality that was very positive and caring toward all students. She made an effort to make everyone feel good around her.

When recalling her favourite teacher, she described this teacher as someone who was for the most part in good cheer and who made the students feel safe. *"Really friendly. Never strict, only when something really bad happened, we would see it for five minutes and then she was friendly again."*

**Positive experience.** When speaking about her favourite class, she recalled how the teacher taught the students how to draw. She loved drawing and she appeared to excel in the subject of art. She stated, *"(Teacher) taught us how to draw different things...got attached to it."*

She enjoyed the subject of art and enjoyed being in that class. She continued to study art throughout high school.

**Culture.** She is proud of her heritage and culture. Although she speaks English and is bilingual, she is very much an advocate for Inuit culture and language. She stated, *"I will never forget my culture. Even if I get a kid someday, the first language will be Inuktitut for my child."*

She remembered that culture was an important part of her school experience as well. Her elementary school teachers, mostly Inuit, always conveyed the importance of culture and language to their students. *“I never forget this that almost every teacher said that Inuit believed we never have to let it go, we got to keep it going for generation to generation.”*

She remembered most classrooms had traditional things for them to learn. Although Inuit language was important and was her first language in school, she remembered that in her favourite classroom both Inuit and English languages were spoken. In fact, it was in this class where she first began to learn to read English.

### **Summary**

When interpreting the data and transcribing it into textured descriptions, the researcher made every effort to ensure the essence of what the participants were sharing. Note that several themes were present among all six participants stories, while others were shared among several of the participants but perhaps not all. Others were shared by only one or two participants. Within the following chapter these themes are discussed in more detail.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Implications**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine those elementary/middle school experiences that positively influenced Inuit students to remain in school and to ultimately graduate from secondary school. Upon analyzing the data from interviews with the six participants who participated in this study, shared experiences and views emerged. These can be organized into following themes:

- Relationships with Significant Adults
- Relationships with Peers and Socialization
- Recognizing Inuit Culture in School
- Feeling Valued/Self Esteem
- Safe and Welcoming Schools
- The Importance of Future Goals

The following discussion investigates each of these themes separately. Each theme begins with a review of what participants shared in relation to it. The theme is then discussed in context of related literature. It is then discussed in context of Nunavut and the implication for the school system. Finally, the discussion ends with suggestions on how it could inform and improve education in Nunavut. These suggestions are related to classroom and/or general school practice.

#### **Relationships with Significant Adults**

**What participants shared.** Maintaining relationships and attachments with significant adults was a common thread among participants speaking about their school



experiences. These significant adults, often consisting of a favourite teacher, provided educational support and conveyed the importance of a good education.

One participant recalled a particular teacher, with whom she continues to have a good rapport. Even though this participant is an adult with children of her own, this teacher continues to keep in touch with her:

*She taught me right from wrong and I made it through grade eleven...Even though she was not my teacher in junior high, I would go ask her to help and she would help me...She even has my old files and books...She called me a few months ago to come and look at my old files...She is still my idol today, still pretty close... Still treats me like a student even though I am not anymore.*

Another participant recalled there were several teachers who provided support to her. She recalled:

*Sometimes I would visit teacher outside of school, teacher would help with schoolwork problem or I would simply hang around... Felt comfortable, you could talk about anything you wanted to say, supportive of my school problem, 'don't' stay out late, go in when mom says to, because of bears.'*

A participant identified his grade-six teacher as his favourite, along with that teacher's wife. This participant explained that he wanted to graduate school because it would enable him to get a good job and travel to where this teacher now lived. He said, *"If I could to finish electrician course in Rankin Inlet, I could go into the Navy Armed forces and work there as an electrician. Always see it on the commercial. Looks like fun to me."* This participant was talking about working in the Navy because he would most likely travel on a ship to Newfoundland to visit his favourite teacher and his wife. This

same participant also mentioned family members, uncles, who kept supporting and encouraging him about being a journeyman, working as an electrician. He said, "*The course came up, so I took it.*" During his second interview, this participant also mentioned his late grandmother who encouraged him to stay in school. When he was young, she would encourage him to remain in school, telling him that social services would not provide him with the money he needed in order to raise his own family when he was older.

Another participant spoke about her mother as her role model. "*Like mother, like daughter,*" was how she explained how her mother guided her in making the right decision to stay in school and graduate.

In response to the question, "What advice would you give a new teacher coming to teach in your community school for the first time?", all participants who answered this question talked about the importance of student/teacher relationships. One participant answered, "*Teach them how to get to know the students or participants on the first day.*"

In addition to meeting students' needs for connectedness, significant adults play another important role. Adults are the natural transmitters of life's values to the next generation. If families cannot fulfill this function, then school becomes the default environment where cultural values are conveyed and encouraged.

One participant recalled several of her teachers stating the importance of education. "*Teacher told me to keep going, attending school so that after I graduate all the doors will be opened. Teacher said that if I graduate, I could become a teacher and help other students.*"

Another participant recalled having parents who supported her in school, ensuring that she and her siblings attended school and did not get into trouble. Both her parents worked in the school as educators and paraprofessionals. *“My parents were watching us like a hawk in the school.”* She also recalled how when she was young she did have curfews and her parents were strict. She maintains that the support her parents gave her and her siblings played a major role in her success as a high school graduate.

**Supporting literature.** The literature has long recognized the importance of school as establishing a significant relationship in a child’s life. Sefa et al. (1997) argues “for many students with difficulties at home, the school often serves as a surrogate, where students hope to receive the attention and personal support missing in their lives” (p. 127). Gossen (1996) stated, “For children who are not getting the support they may need at home or the acceptance of their peers, the genuine interest of the teacher is crucial” (p. 35). Hughes and Kwok (2006) cited the following regarding the value of teacher/student relationships:

The teacher may serve as an attachment figure for young children, such that a secure and close relationship with the teacher enables children to cope better with social and academic challenges in pre-school and the early elementary grades (Howes et al., 1994; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Sroufe, 1983; van Ijzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992) (p. 466).

Korhonen (2007) posited that “an understanding, caring, supportive teacher is often the most important positive influence for many people who are in emotionally challenging family situations. Often just one strong, stable, caring relationship is all it

takes to enable a child or youth to become a resilient adult” (p. 17). To increase resiliency in people, Korhonen recommends “strong positive relationships that provide ongoing support, listening, belief in our ability, kindness and caring” (p. ii).

“Importantly, the quality of teacher-student relationships in the early grades has implications for children’s future academic, social, and behavioral outcomes (et al., 2001; Ladd et al., 1999; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Pianta et al., 1995; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004)” (as cited in Hughes et al. 2006, p. 466).

Hughes et al (2006) added that “early supportive relationships elicit greater engagement in learning and improved peer relatedness, both of which has been shown to forecast positive academic and social trajectories” (p. 470). In addition, Brophy (2004) concluded, “When middle and junior high schools provide more personalized and supportive environments suited to their students’ psychological needs, the students do not demonstrate the same declines in motivation or increases in rates of misconduct seen in more traditional schools” (p. 349).

Conversely, in their discussion on school connectedness and the implications of what happens when students don’t feel their teacher cares about them, Good, Grumley, and Roy (2003) state, “they usually do either of two things, they act out or withdraw...” (p. 46).

Oldfather et al. (1999) cautions that “to their students, teachers represent authority concerning what counts for knowledge and whose knowledge counts. When teachers fail to acknowledge students’ worlds, the students are likely to be alienated or even invisible” (p. 12).

Being a friend to a child not only meets the child's need for connectedness, as stated earlier, but as Gossen (1996) stated, "It also results in the child putting the teacher in his quality world so that he is receptive of the academic material and values we present" (p. 35).

Goodenow (1993) added, "Relatedness, the presence of 'secure and satisfying connections with others in one's social milieu in this view, fosters internalization of the important values of the others to whom one is connected" (p. 23). According to Wentzel (1998), "perceived support from teachers has been related to student reports of pursuit of goals to behave pro-socially and responsibility, educational aspirations and values, intrinsic values, and self concept... In addition, having supportive parents, teachers, and peers has been associated with academic success" (p. 203).

Neufeld and Mate (2004) emphasized the importance of child to adult relationships by discussing the dangers of the absence of them. They believe that there has been a decrease in child/adult relationships and an unhealthy increase in child/child attachments. They believe that there is danger in peer attachment if it outweighs the necessary attachment to significant adults. They elaborated:

Parental values such as studying, working toward a goal, the pursuit of excellence, respect for society, the realization of potential, the development of talent, the pursuit of a passion, the appreciation of culture are often replaced with peer values that are much more immediate and short term. Appearance, entertainment, peer loyalty, spending time together, fitting into the subculture, and getting along with each other will be prized above education and the realization of personal potential (71-72).

In their discussion on child to adult attachment, Neufeld et al. (2004) refer to the term *compass point*. They define this term as “the human point of reference that is created by attachment from which a child gets his bearings and takes his cues. Every child needs a human compass point” (p. 267), a role model from which to follow, more importantly, one that depicts a healthy lifestyle within which to follow. “A parent is by far a child’s best compass point – or another adult, like a teacher, who acts as a parent substitute” (p. 19).

**Nunavut context and implications for education.** The importance of teacher connecting with students as a potential “significant other” in their lives holds implications for Nunavut teachers. Healthy child/adult relationships will facilitate child development, promote healthy self-esteems, encourage effective coping skills as well as strengthen core cultural values.

Huges et al. (2005) comment on this:

... research suggests that children with high levels of externalizing behaviours are the very children who are most likely to benefit from a supportive relationship with their teachers, in terms of decreases in aggressive behaviours (Silver et al., 2005). Thus it is critical to find ways of helping teachers connect with children who enter school with poorly regulated and aggressive behaviours (p. 477).

Awareness of the significance of their role in the lives of their students is especially crucial for teachers living in a community of a different culture. Kabloona teachers should give extra diligence to this and recognize that it is essential for them to truly get to know their students and their culture.

This said, all teachers, Inuit and non-Inuit need to have the same positive relationships with their students.

**Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut.**

- (1) Encourage teachers to facilitate connecting activities throughout their school days with their students.
- (2) Encourage teachers' awareness that their behaviour inside and outside of school is observed by many students and may influence their decision making in life.

**Relationships with Peers and Socialization.**

**What participants shared.** Relationships with friends/peers played a major role in the school experiences of the participants interviewed. Relationships with peers created a safe and nurturing learning environment, where participants felt a sense of belonging, where they would socialize, learn together, and support one another's learning. Relationships with peers played a part in influencing the choices that students made in their lives and their education.

One participant recalled, *"I liked my classmates because they were around my age."* She outlined that this resulted in a sense of belonging in school. *"Friends, we would stick to each other."* Having friends was important to this participant and she also recalled having the same peer group for most of her elementary and middle school life. *"From kindergarten to grade 8 almost all (students) were in the same class."*

Another participant recalled how helpful it was having peers to work with. She said, *"They were helpful. When I had a problem spelling, I would go to friends first"*

*instead of the teacher.”* In addition, she recalled that in her favourite class, she sat with her best friend, with whom she spent a lot of time throughout her school experience. She recalled, *“I sat with my best friend...were together from kindergarten to grade eleven. Both of us failed grade 10 together.”*

There was a strong correlation between the academic successes of the peers and their own academic success. One participant described most of his friends that he was close to in school as currently having successful lives and jobs. Like him, most of his friends have graduated. Another participant stated that in her high school years, she and another classmate became best friends and they both stayed best friends until their grade 12 graduation. One participant described the support she received from her spouse to help her graduate school. *“With my common law’s help, I finished grade-twelve. My common law, he encouraged, forced me to go to school, do my homework, help me with my homework. He even took one year off when I had my oldest one so that I could finish grade twelve. I would have probably been one of the dropouts if it wasn’t for his help.”*

There were however several participants who shared their concerns about friendships being negative influences. One participant explained that she did not hang around a peer group in school for fear of getting in trouble. She did say that she worked in small groups in the classroom but this did not extend to socializing after school. One participant recalled while working as a guard in the RCMP she spoke with a former classmate who was charged and in jail awaiting sentencing. She spoke with him, asking him why he *“went the opposite direction than me.”* She paraphrased his response as: *“In grade-nine he was hanging around not so good influences who made him choose to do bad things. He said that he should have listened to his own thoughts rather than his*



*classmates.” This same participant went on to say, “Students should hang around good influences instead of bad ones.”*

One participant speculated that perhaps other friends of hers did not continue in school and graduate because of their relationships with boys. She said, *“Other friends got boyfriends early, the boyfriend was not attending school, so they followed in his footsteps and quit.”*

**Supporting literature.** The literature supports a correlation between peer relationships and the successes that students experience in school. Wentzel (1998) stated that “perceived social and emotional support from peers have been associated with motivational outcomes such as the pursuit of academic and pro-social goals, intrinsic value, and self concept” (p. 203). Gibbs (2001) states, “The power of being included and valued by peers motivates students to active participation in their own learning” (p. 22).

Hughes et al. (2006) conclude, “Children who experience support from teachers and peers feel more comfortable in school, like school more, and participate more actively in classroom activities” (p. 468).

Belle (1989) adds to this discussion, “Peer friends represent a major source of social support for children and adolescents” (as cited in Hirsch & DuBois, 1992, p. 334).

“Youniss and colleagues (Youniss, 1980; Youniss & Volpe, 1978) have argued that peer relationships may also offer a uniquely appropriate context for fostering several important aspects of social development, such as empathy and cooperative behavior” (as cited in Hirsch et al., 1992, p. 334).

Conversely, Bushnik et al. (2002) also stated that from “previous research from the Youth in Transition Survey... Dropouts were more likely to view school less favourably, to have less favourable perceptions of their teacher and peer relationships, to have poorer study habits and to have less involvement in extra curricular school activities” (p. 13).

In addition “dropouts were less likely than continuers or graduates to have friends who valued education” (p. 12). And, “As with negative peer attitudes toward education, dropouts were much more likely than continuers and graduates to report that their friends engaged in negative behaviours” (p. 13). According to Goodenow (1993), “Relatedness, the presence of ‘secure and satisfying connections with others in one’s social milieu in this view, fosters internalization of the important values of the others to whom one is connected” (p. 23). Wentzel (1998) noted that social “goals reflect desires to achieve a particular social outcome” (p. 203). This is evident within the stories of the participants. Their academic achievement seems to match that of those peers they are close friends with. However for some students, this can be an adverse effect.

Neufeld et al. (2004) posited that children’s attachment to peers has increased to the point that it is outweighing those needed attachments that children should have with significant adults. They often seek acceptance from peers because it is immediate. In other words, students often will adopt the attitudes of their peers in order to be accepted, which often result in unhealthy choice making, compromising happiness and success in the long run. They elaborated,

Parental values such as studying, working toward a goal, the pursuit of excellence, respect for society, the realization of potential, the development of talent, the

pursuit of a passion, the appreciation of culture are often replaced with peer values that are much more immediate and short term. Appearance, entertainment, peer loyalty, spending time together, fitting into the subculture, and getting along with each other will be prized above education and the realization of personal potential (p. 71-72).

In their research on peer relationships in the early grades, Hughes et al. (2006) discovered that “peer relationships in the early grades have consequences for children’s short-term adjustment...” (p. 467). They go on to cite Ladd (1990) as concluding “that children’s peer relations in kindergarten predicted changes in attitudes toward school, school avoidance, and school performance from early in the school year to the end of the school year” (p. 467).

**Nunavut context and implications for school.** It could be said that friendship and a feeling of belonging is not only a social need but a psychological one as well. Peer relationships help to increase self-esteem, increase ones ability to cope with stress when confronted with it in life. Although family is important and children need to have a compass point to follow, they also need to have relationships with others that are their own age. The outcomes from having relationships with peers are positive, but they can also be negative if the peers one chooses to socialize with do not have a sound value system.

In Nunavut Schools, where inclusion is practiced, schools strive for all students to be accepted by their peers, and develop good strong relationships with others. The challenge is to ensure that students choose their peer groups wisely and that the child is

not attaching to the peer beyond what is healthy. The student should have a parent or significant adult, who will transfer their value system to that child through time.

Nunavut schools have for many years practiced the *Circle of Friends* model, especially when helping those students with special needs develop healthy friendships in and out of school. The *Circle of Friends* is made up of a series of four concentric circles that represent different levels of friendships that all human beings should have in order to be psychologically healthy. The innermost circle is the *Circle of Intimacy*, which basically includes those people to which the child is most closest and could not live without such as loved ones and family members. The second innermost circle is the *Circle of Friends*, which includes the child's best friends and others those who did not fit into the *Circle of Intimacy* but are close to it. The third innermost circle is the *Circle of Participation*, which includes those social groups the child is involved with, where he/she socializes with peers but at a much broader distance, such as a soccer team, choir, and book club. The fourth and last circle, the outermost circle, is the *Circle of Paid Services*, which represents those people the child comes into contact with in order to be served, such as the dentist and physician.

Nunavut has also supported a program titled *Tribes TLC – A New Way of Learning and Being Together*. This program developed by Jeanne Gibbs, has been approved by the Nunavut Education Elder Committee as a method for teaching and learning within the Nunavut School System that is reflective of Inuit Societal Values and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*.

### **Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut.**

- (1) Encourage socialization in school between students and their peers, ensuring that the supervising teacher is continually aware of what is going on so that negative values are not being taught or transmitted from peer to peer.
- (2) Ensure that the teacher continues to be aware of their potential to be a “significant adult” and that they establish rapports with their students.
- (3) Make every effort to ensure that students’ peer groups are not a negative influence.

### **Recognizing Inuit Culture in School.**

**What participants shared.** The importance of Inuit culture represented within the classroom setting was something that participants felt was important to them in their school experiences. Interestingly, when asked what classroom was their favourite, most mentioned classrooms where Inuit culture was represented. In addition, they conveyed a deep appreciation for teachers who tried to learn their culture and language. In fact it was recommended by several participants that new teachers should learn about the culture of their students as well as the language they speak.

One participant specifically spoke about cultural activities within the classroom, “*Activities with elders, sewing, interactions with elders, teach us how to sew, scrape skin of caribou, igloo in the spring, tent in the fall.*” Another participant talked about her favourite classroom having a banner with *Tungasugiitsi*, the Inuktitut word for *welcome*, written on it. Inuktitut was also the language of instruction in this classroom.

One participant recalled the importance of culture and language in school and what it meant to her as an Inuk. She shared, *"I enjoyed it (school) because we used to do Inuktitut stuff with a bit of ESL (English Second Language)... We should be proud that we still have our Inuit language, as most other communities lost theirs.... Inuktitut is the most important one. English is the second one... Schoolwork was awesome because the teacher would speak Inuktitut ..."* Another participant recalled having drawings of igloos and hunting on display in the classroom. The language of instruction within her favourite classroom was Inuktitut. One participant recalled how her teachers expressed the importance of maintaining the Inuit culture. *"I never forget this that almost every teacher said that Inuit believed we never have to let it go, we got to keep it going for generation to generation."* Interestingly her favourite classrooms were those where this attitude was conveyed to her.

When asked what advice they would give new Kabloona teachers entering the school for the first time to teach, participants expressed the need for teachers to learn about the Inuit culture, the behaviours, the language, the nuances in general, as they are very different than Kabloona culture. One participant shared this about what new teachers from the south should understand, *"... they have a different way of saying thank-you and sorry, and not to be offended about how the kids are treating the teacher..."* She added that through time, when teachers do not react to their students' behaviours, the students gradually respect the teacher. *"I see kids who don't have manners towards new teachers, but the respect grows when the teacher doesn't take it personally or get offended by it..."*

Another participant shared that although resources on teaching are valuable, it is often good to work together and learn from one another. *“When they have a problem, talk to one of the Inuk teachers, like instead of following the books on teaching, talk to the Inuk teachers because they know more about the community and/or culture.”*

Good Kabloona teachers were also those who were sympathetic to the Inuit culture and language. This participant shared the following:

*Kabloona teachers who were good to have in the elementary school were those who knew what we wanted to say. They spoke some Inuktitut, and they taught us how to speak more English. Some of the students are not always sociable and do not like to speak English. Sometimes they don't like to speak English because they cannot pronounce the words. Sometimes I have a hard time pronouncing words and so I sometimes don't want to speak English but would rather speak Inuktitut.*

She added:

*Kabloona teachers should be ready to learn Inuktitut and all that, for reasons such as field trips and elders so they can understand what is being said. Sometimes students are the translators, and there is often a misunderstanding between the elder and the Kabloona.*

**Supporting literature.** There has been much literature regarding the importance of respecting the cultural backgrounds of students in the classroom. Much of this literature supports what participants shared regarding the importance of Inuit culture represented in the school. Shade et al. (1997) noted:

Students bring certain human characteristics that have been shaped by their socializing group to the classroom, and teachers must be able to recognize these traits and build on them if children are to reach their academic potential. The culture, social, and historical backgrounds of children have a major impact on how they perceive school and the education process (p. 11).

In addition, Shade et al. (1997) argued that “students must perceive that the information has meaning for them, that it will fit with their current lifestyle and reality and that it has potential for helping to make this connection by establishing a culturally responsible learning community” (p. 21).

In her discussion on student engagement, Lent (2012) instructs educators to ask themselves several reflective questions prior to introducing new material to their students:

- How is this particular topic, information, or chapter relevant to this group of students?
- Why does this topic, information, or chapter matter?
- How can this information be used by my students?
- What connections can I make from this topic to students’ lives, interest, or needs? (p. 17).

In addition to meaningful content, another factor that contributes to one’s educational experience is the student’s impression of what the teacher thinks of him or her. Oldfather et al. (1999) cautioned that “to their students, teachers represent authority concerning what counts for knowledge and whose knowledge counts. When teachers fail to acknowledge students’ worlds, the students are likely to be alienated or even invisible”



(p. 12). The participants' reflections on their favourite classes, which were taught in Inuktitut and which included cultural activities, illustrates how they connected what they were exposed to in school with their life experience as Inuit.

One important aspect with regard to cultural differences in schools is the teacher's interpretation of student behaviours. Behaviours mean different things within different cultures. Shade et al. (1997) elaborated:

Although all teachers are not prejudiced and many will deny that they function in this manner, there is evidence that, consciously or unconsciously, teachers project through procedures, interactions, body language, and classroom management techniques the idea that some children are not worthy of being taught by them. Children perceive these negative messages and internalize them to the point that it affects their evaluation of their work and, most of all, it impacts on there relationship between the students and the teacher. For children from cultures in which the teacher or the elder is revered (Hmong and American Indian), where teachers are considered the most significant adult along with parents in their lives (African American), or where warm personalized relationships are important cultural dimensions and considered just good manners, as in Latino culture, these types of behaviours are rejection and create a sense of not belonging" (p. 47).

This is an important strategy to prevent a teacher misinterpreting a cultural difference as being a problem behaviour.

**Nunavut context and implications for school.** The majority of students in Nunavut classrooms today are of Inuit heritage. At least one of their parents' and/or

grandparents' mother tongues (first language) is Inuktitut and they have likely lived on the land and practiced a traditional Inuit life-style at some point in their lives. Inuit children who enter school today bring with them cultural values reflecting the Inuit. These values are often not understood by Kabloona teachers (as well as many northern teachers).

Creating school environments that respect the Inuit culture in their daily functioning contributes to a positive school climate. Shade et al. (1997) suggest five principles for creating learning communities that ensure cultural diversity:

- Principle I: Learning communities must be inviting.
- Principle II: The leader of the learning community must send personally inviting messages.
- Principle III: Inviting classrooms have firm, consistent and loving control.
- Principle IV: An inviting learning community provides students with a sense that they can accomplish tasks being asked of them.
- Principle V: An inviting community stresses collectivity rather than individualism. (p. 42-56)

Shade et al. (1997) go on to state, "Culturally responsive teachers are warm, supportive, personable, patient, understanding, enthusiastic, flexible, and stay on task... When teachers transmit acceptance, children become academically successful" (p. 47). Such cultural responsiveness will help that children feel accepted, respected, loved, and included. Such conditions optimize their opportunity to achieve academically and develop holistically.

### **Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut.**

- (1) Teachers should be encouraged to use a team approach in their lesson planning and instruction, with help from their Inuit colleagues.
- (2) Teachers should be encouraged to learn as much as they can about the Inuit language and culture.
- (3) Teachers' daily teaching and classroom management should reflect Inuit cultural values.
- (4) Teachers should continue following strategies for teaching in a second language within their classes, as provided by the Nunavut Department of Education.

### **Feeling Valued / Supporting Self-Esteem.**

**What participants shared.** Participants spoke about their experiences that made them feel valued for who they were. One participant described times when the teacher relied on her Inuktitut skills and academic skills to help explain concepts to classmates. *"They (the teachers) were friendly, depended on me to help other students if they didn't understand. The teacher and I would explain in English or Inuktitut."*

Another participant recalled a similar experience. *"I used to be in front to the class, telling classmates to do this, do that, how to do things. Be a group leader in the class."* She also reflected on her experiences helping out after school. *"Clean up classrooms, wash desks, teachers' desk, how to put things back the way they were before, help organize teacher for tomorrow, made photocopies."*

When asked about how she felt in her favourite class, one participant responded with, *"Good, being myself."* She also mentioned that the schoolwork was taught in her

mother tongue, Inuktitut, and that she and other students would help others in the classroom.

Several participants recalled the classroom having so much student work on the walls that you could barely see the walls themselves. One participant shared, "*You could not see the wall. Students' pictures, paintings, you name it, was there.*" Knowing that one is helpful in the classroom, being treated and accepted, being taught in one's first language, and seeing one's work displayed for others to see was consistently reported as contributing to students' self-esteem.

**Supporting literature.** Literature clearly outlines an interrelationship between students feeling valued, their self-esteem, their motivation in school, and their ability to learn. The Manitoba Department of Education, Training and Youth (2001) reports, "A positive school climate exists when all students feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, and secure in an environment where they can interact with caring people they trust" (p. 3.3). They add that research "has consistently shown a link between positive school climate and other important measurements of school success, including: Academic achievement, High morale, Staff productivity, Effective management" (p. 3.3).

Rothstein et al. (2008) cited Maslow (1970) as stating: "Motivation is said to be strongly affected by the degree to which basic human needs are met, such as the need for food, safety, a sense of belonging, or self-esteem" (p. 114). Shade et al. (1997), posited, "Through their actions, teachers send messages to children as to whether or not they are accepted, whether or not they are competent, whether or not they can accomplish the tasks they are given, and whether or not the classroom actually 'belongs' to them" (p. 41). Several participants also stated that their teachers let them be who they were, "*Good*

*being myself.*” Accepting children for who they are, their present level of performance and their cultural background, is valuing them as individuals.

When speaking about her favourite class, one participant recalled how the teacher taught the students and her to draw. She loved drawing and she appeared to excel in the subject of art. She stated, “*(teacher) taught us how to draw different things...got attached to it.*” She enjoyed the subject of art and enjoyed being in that class. She continued to study art throughout high school.

Sefa et al. (1997) noted that “when talking about their favourite teachers, most students described specific styles of teaching. Teachers who answer questions in class (and outside of class) without making students feel uncomfortable, less intelligent (stupid), as though they were wasting the teachers’ time were commended for their abilities to encourage student participation in the classroom” (p. 126). Conversely however, “these same students generally were of the opinion that there is only a small number of teachers in the schools who make attending school worthwhile” (p. 125).

Wentzel (1998) posited, “When children do not view themselves as basically competent and able, their freedom to engage in academically challenging pursuits and capacity to tolerate and cope with failure are greatly diminished” (p. 202), especially when one’s competencies, or lack there of, are exposed for public scrutiny.

**Nunavut context and implication for education.** Gibbs (2000) cautions, “80% of students entering school feel good about themselves. By the 5<sup>th</sup> grade only 20% do. One out of five high school students have positive self-esteem” (p. 18). Such a caution is of particular relevance to Nunavut where the process of dropping out of school is such a

concern. Most children come to school already feeling valued and loved by their families and are motivated to learn and do well. Their experiences in school, as well as in their daily lives as they mature, can send a different message, accumulating in a different outcome.

Several suggestions by Jensen (1998) help to maintain students feeling they are valued in schools and directly correlate with experiences shared by several participants during their interviews.

Jensen (1998) recommends that one “engage emotions as a part of the learning, not as an add-on” (p. 80), and she lists several ways to do this, one being celebrations to “show off student work in different ways” (p. 80). Interestingly, during their interviews, participants reminisced about how their classrooms and hallways were covered with student work; a form of celebrating who they were. Jensen (1998) also noted, “Studies suggest that classroom status or social hierarchies can and do change the brains’ chemistry. This makes a good case for the importance of changing roles often to ensure everyone has a chance to lead and follow” (p. 54). In their elementary school experiences, several participants remembered with fondness being a teacher’s helper, leading small groups of students and translating instructions from the teacher. Being assigned such responsibility conveyed to students that they are valued and needed members of their classrooms.

Brophy (2004) talked about the concept of self-worth and the efforts students take to protect it in front of peers, which is ultimately detrimental to one’s learning and motivation in school. Brophy (2004) cited the following:

Martin Covington (1992) emphasized classrooms' threatening aspects, especially their tendencies to create situations in which students are publicly revealed to be ignorant, confused, or unable to respond successfully, leading to embarrassment and other social costs. He developed a self-worth perspective on achievement motivation, suggesting that in classrooms where ability comparisons are often made or easily inferred, students may become more concerned with preserving their sense of self-worth than with mastering the curriculum. This can lead them to face-saving but ultimately counterproductive reactions such as pretending to understand when they do not, refusing to ask for help, or engaging in various self-handicapping strategies (such as not studying for a test) that position the students so that if they do poorly, they can blame their failure on something other than lack of ability (p. 88).

Covington (1992) recommended six general strategies for minimizing self-worth protection problems:

1. *Provide students with engaging assignments.* Appeal to students' curiosity and personal interests that offer challenging yet manageable goals. To the extent feasible, allow them some choice of tasks and control over the level of challenge they face (but encourage them to increase levels of challenge in response to increases in their levels of expertise).
2. *Provide sufficient rewards.* Arrange the reward system so that all students (not just the brighter ones) can earn desired rewards. Also, dispense rewards in ways that reinforce students for setting meaningful goals, posing

challenging questions, and working to satisfy their curiosity. Seek to make the act of learning itself a sought-after goal.

3. *Enhance effort-outcome covariation beliefs.* Help students learn to set realistic goals and develop confidence that they can be successful and earn rewards through reasonable (not superhuman) effort.
4. *Strengthen the linkage between achievement efforts and self-worth.* Help students learn to take pride in their accomplishments and their developing expertise, and to minimize attention to competition and social comparison.
5. *Promote positive beliefs about ability.* Help students to adopt multidimensional definitions of their abilities and to take an incremental rather than an entity view toward them.
6. *Improve teacher-student relations.* Emphasize your role as a resource person who assists these students' learning efforts, not your role as an authority figure who controls their behavior (as cited in Brophy, 2004. p. 138).

It is important to note that most families interact with their children at a pre-school age in a way that makes them feel safe and valued in their home environment. Nevertheless, it is also important for schools to ensure that children continue to feel the same safety and value in schools. This is especially critical for children who do not have such security at home.

### **Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut**

1. Create safe and welcoming classrooms and schools.
2. Display students work inside and outside of the classroom.



3. Implement the six strategies suggested by Covington (1992) to minimize self-worth protection.
4. Create shared leadership within the classroom so that all students have a chance to be leaders.
5. Encourage students to work within their area of strength.

### **Safe and Welcoming Schools.**

**What participants shared.** All participants mentioned that they felt the school was a safe and welcoming place in which to be. This was demonstrated within the school in general as well as within specific classroom settings.

One participant recalled that when she entered the school each day, teachers and the principal would welcome her. Another participant mentioned, *“I felt I belonged in the school.”* She recalled both teachers and students as very friendly, and she mentioned that teachers in the hallways would welcome her to school. Another participant described hallways in the school. *“It felt comfortable.”* She also recalled the hallway rule, *“Walking in the hall, no running.”* Rules were a big part of a safe environment. Another participant shared, *“The atmosphere within the hallway was safe, friendly and clean. It was good...”*

Another participant recalled teachers always saying good morning when she entered the school. She alluded to the fact that this is not happening so much these days. *“It is not how it used to be, one of the reasons I quit school was because I did not get along with my teacher so I didn’t go back.”*

One participant recalled that in one of her classes, a banner with the Inuktitut word for *welcome* written on it was hung for all students to see. Another participant described one classroom in particular as feeling like a second home. *“Favourite classroom, second home to attend school and have a teacher with (teacher).”*

Participants also described their teachers as treating them with respect. One participant shared, *“The teachers were good too, they treated the students how they should treat them, friendly and respectfully.”* This participant shared, *“He used to treat Inuit students well, gave breakfast before nine, soup, candies.”* Another participant recalled the classroom teacher as being someone who provided time for students to get things right by trying again. The teacher taught students to *“be who we are.”* She also recalled this teacher as being very friendly, respectful, smart, and with a good sense of humour. Another participant recalled feeling *“Safe. Happy – always used to make us laugh, always a good thing.”*

One participant described her favourite teacher this way. *“Friendly, helps us a lot, cared for us...”* Another participant recalled one of her favourite teachers as being someone who was in good cheer and who made the students feel safe. *“Really friendly. Never strict, only when something really bad happened, we would see it for five minutes and then she was friendly again.”*

A safe and welcoming school environment was not only the responsibility of the school staff. Students were also taught to be respectful. One participant recalled, *“The teacher would say, ‘If you want to be treated good by others, you have to treat them the same,’ and taught us to make the right choices.”*

One participant recalled several times when responsibility and making sound choices were instilled in her and her peers as students. These included how to treat others by helping and assisting when necessary and also to help clean the classroom when they made messes. *“Teacher taught us to make our decision... We would help each other in groups... It was sometimes clean. Sometimes it was dirty so we would clean up cause we made the mess.”*

**Supporting literature.** There is much literature that conveys the importance of safe and caring classrooms and that directly compares with those experiences shared by the participants regarding their feelings of safety and belonging in school.

According to Bushnik, Barr-Telford, and Bussiere (2002), “School climate is related to school engagement and refers to the school environment. This includes how students are disciplined at school, whether the school is, in relative terms, a friendly place and if people respect one another and are accepted” (p. 15). Shade et al. (1997) add, “When teachers establish a trusting relationship, a sense of community is developed and students become motivated to achieve...” (p. 41). In addition, Lumsden (1994) noted, “If students experience the classroom as a caring, supportive place where there is a sense of belonging and everyone is valued and respected, they will tend to participate more fully in the process of learning” (p. 2).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) posited, “Learning occurs best in a positive environment – one that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, that contains comfort and order, and in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated.”

Conversely, Wells (1992) stated that “negative school environment or school climate may contribute to dropping out” (p. 5). Gazaniga (1988) noted, “Chronic stress also impairs a student’s ability to sort out what’s important and what’s not” (as cited in Jensen, 1998, p. 53). Similarly, Jensen (1998) posited, “Learners with lower stress can put together relationships, understand broad underlying theories, and integrate a wider range of material. Stress threat, and induced learner helplessness must be removed from the environment to achieve maximum learning” (p. 57).

Gibbs (2000) stated, “All agree that one of the most important things educators can do is to create caring classrooms and school environments, places of learning that the body-brain perceives as non-threatening and capable of nurturing reflective thinking” (p. 66). She goes on to say, “We need to provide our students with places of learning that the brain perceives as non-threatening” (p. 67). Gibbs goes on to suggest four community agreements that create an environment in which students feel safe, or trusting in a group. These agreements are “Attentive listening, Appreciation/No put-downs, Right to Pass, and Mutual Respect” (p. 92). She explains these in greater detail:

- Attentive Listening is a gift to be given. It depends upon acknowledging the person who is speaking with full attention and eye contact...
- Appreciation/No Put-Downs... Encourage students to exchange statements of appreciation (positive regard and recognition)...
- The Right to Pass... The right to pass means that each person has the right to choose the extent to which she or he will share in a group activity...

- Mutual Respect... to assure everyone that their individual cultural values, beliefs, and needs will be considered and properly honored. It also means respect by adults for children's right, needs, and differences (p. 92 – 96).

**Nunavut context and implications for education.** The concept of “Positive School Climate” is increasingly recognized as a major component to creating classrooms where students’ basic needs of safety, love, and belonging are met so that ultimate learning can occur. In Nunavut, where the legacy of residential school experience continues to impact generations of citizens, including today’s children, this becomes of critical importance.

A proactive approach to creating positive school climates affords healing for the communities affected as people see a different articulation of schools and a different opportunity for children.

Positive School Climate is also very much in keeping with the collectivist approach to working and living together, indigenous to First Nations people. Respect is much valued within Inuit culture. When asked about giving advice to new teachers in the community school, one participant responded, *“Teach them to have respect for others and not be rude, because some of the students right now seem rude, some of them... Have respect for elders. In the past, teachers always said to us to respect Elders.”* Another participant responded with, *“Be friendly to students, and be fun.”*

As children spend a third of their day in school, teachers have a significant impact on their core cultural values. Again, this is of critical importance for children from families which may not afford such healthy environments.

When asked about giving advice to new teachers in the community school, one participant's response reflected the need to have some understanding that children were just that, children and that many behaviours should be accepted and tolerated. She stated, *"Don't be a strict person because they are just kids and they would like to have fun, because kids are kids."*

Nunavut schools must be places that are welcoming and safe so that children feel they belong and can learn to their fullest and be motivated to attend school and learn. This means that children should feel safe and welcomed in all areas within the school, such as the hallways, the classrooms, the office, and the schoolyard. All education staff within the school, including school personnel such as custodian and secretary, need to practice those strategies that reflect and promote positive school climate.

#### **Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut.**

1. Schools need to investigate ways to continue to provide those basic needs that children require to learn to their full potential.
2. Ensure that all school staff are trained in and continually use those strategies that promote positive school climate.

#### **Having Future Goals and Aspirations.**

**What Participants Shared.** Many participants shared that they enjoyed coming to school because it offered new learning opportunities that they could not necessarily get at home.

One participant explained that school helps us learn. She said, *"I like it also because we learn and feed our brain."* She went on to explain that if one wanted to get further in life they needed to have an education. *"I did not really like math, but I needed to learn it."* Another participant shared, *"I wanted to learn and make new friends. I enjoyed everything in school; gym, art, learning new things and making new friends."*

One participant recalled, *"I really enjoyed school because we had to learn. Learned a lot of stuff going to school."* Another participant said that throughout her life, since being very young, she wanted to work outdoors rather than behind a desk in an office. She stated, *"Always been, wanted to do something with wild life, land, or archeology. First marine biology, geology – on the land, stuff like that instead to sitting in the office."*

Another participant recalled that she did not have any major career goals, but did know that she wanted to graduate school so that her job opportunities would be greater. She mentioned, *"Like mother, like daughter."* This participant's mother had graduated high school and modeled the importance of this for her daughter. However, due to her having to take care of and provide for her family, her mother did not go on to further studies. This was not considered to be a negative thing as the decision to care for one's family is reflective of Inuit cultural values and the collectivist view where everyone works and is dependent upon one another. One participant said, *"I wanted to have a better future. I want to reach my goal."* He spoke about family members, uncles, who kept telling him about being a journeyman, working as an electrician. He said, *"The course came up, so I took it."*

A participant recalled, *“When I was younger, I wanted to become a policeman, but I now changed my mind.”* She explained her need to learn. *“I want to take a pilot course, but I need to know my math.”* Another participant reported knowing in grade-two that she wanted to be a cashier when she grew up. *“I knew that more jobs would be easier. Most jobs look for diplomas so had to graduate.”*

**Supporting Literature.** There is little literature on the possible correlation between elementary students’ having future goals and high school graduation rates. Research to date investigates post-secondary students and the link between goal setting and their motivation to continue their studies and not drop out.

Research does, however, support the need for children to understand the importance of what they are asked to learn and how it fits into their current lives, as well as their futures. Shade et al. (1997) stated that “students must perceive that the information has meaning for them, that it will fit with their current lifestyle and reality” (p. 21).

When students set goals for themselves, the results are positive. Baylor University (2004) posited, “People who use goal-setting effectively suffer less from stress, are better able to concentrate, show more self-confidence, and seem to feel happier” (p. 77). Baylor University (2004) noted both Hellriegel, Socum, & Woodman (1992), and Martens (1987) as reporting the following to be the most important purposes of goal-setting:

- Goals guide and direct behavior.
- Goals provide clarity.



- Goals provide challenges and standards.
- Goals reflect what the goal setters consider important.
- Goals help improve performance.
- Goals increase the motivation to achieve.
- Goals help increase mentee's pride and satisfaction in his/her achievements.
- Goals improve mentee's self-confidence
- Goals help decrease negative attitude (p. 77).

**Nunavut context and implications for school.** These participants clearly have not stopped dreaming of the possibilities that are out there for them. Although some aspirations may be impossible to attain, given their current levels of education and skill, these participants do not seem deterred from continuing to dream.

Within Nunavut schools, students are taught to consider their futures at an early age. In fact, within the new Nunavut curriculum students are encouraged to begin to look at what goals they have for their lives as adults as early as grade seven. Starting to think about one's future at an earlier grade level appears to pave the way to a much more focused and successful high school experience. It underscores the critical importance of career planning in Nunavut schools.

Nunavummiut believe in the concept of life long learning, which goal setting at an early age sets the stage for. In fact, all the participants interviewed shared the need to go to school to learn new things and then to ultimately graduate in order to become who they wanted to be. DaSilva et al. (1997) found that "virtually all respondents said that learning

new things holds a strong attraction for them” (p. 4). Again, it underscores the importance of career planning in the curriculum.

This implies that Nunavut schools should make every effort to talk to students as early as possible, when they begin to think beyond themselves and understand there is a world outside their immediate environment, about what futures they would like to see for themselves. Some advocate for these discussions as early as grade-five.

#### **Suggestions to inform and improve education in Nunavut.**

- (1) Teachers should encourage students to begin to think about their futures early on in their school career, possibly as early as grade-five.
- (2) Teachers should make every effort to help students recognize the utility of curricula and academic success to both their cultural values and their career goals.
- (3) Career planning needs to be strengthened in Nunavut schools.

#### **Summary**

After carefully analyzing the data from interviews with the six participants in this research study, six major themes emerged and the discussions within each theme have resulted in several suggestions to improve and inform instruction in Nunavut schools.

One interesting phenomenon that is prevalent among all these themes is that no two themes are autonomous from one another. In fact this phenomenon correlates with the literature, where it was continuously identified that students’ decisions to disengage from learning and ultimately dropout is seldom the result of one factor, but a cacophony of factors and experiences that combine to this result.

Likewise, an equal combination of positive factors and experiences strengthen student retention and optimize academic achievement and holistic development. Central to such positive experiences is students establishing healthy relationships with significant adults, socializing and learning within positive peer groups, and feeling valued, safe and welcomed in their school environments. Finding the confidence to believe in oneself and the resilience to continue to work toward one's dreams, even when faced with challenges, can be encouraged by a positive school climate.

The collective voices of these participants, each successful in their own right, afford educators an opportunity to reflect on their practice. It informs them of the critical role they play in the lives of children, not only for promoting academic success, but in ensuring cultural identity and self regard. It calls for an engagement of teacher with culture, with one another, and with children.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Letter of Introduction and Consent (English)**

#### **John Strutynski**

*Graduate Student, Department of Education  
Memorial University of Newfoundland,  
PO Box 447  
Baker Lake, NU X0C 0A0*

*Tel: 867-793-2644  
Work: 867-793-2803 Ext: 31  
e-mail: j\_strutynski@kin.dfile.dun.ca*

May 6, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: Letter of Introduction/Informed Consent**

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "*A Phenomenological Study of the Elementary School Experiences of Inuit Children who Choose to Remain in School and Graduate.*"

The following pages are part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please take the time to read the information contained in this package carefully and to understand any other information given to you by the researcher. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please feel free to ask.

Sincerely,

John Strutynski

### **Introduction:**

This study is designed to collect valuable information that will help to improve future teaching of and learning for Nunavumiut in Nunavut Schools. The following pages explain this study in more detail. As it is your right to accept or decline this invitation at any time, I urge you to read the following pages carefully prior to making any decisions regarding your consent to participate.

### **Purpose of This Research Study:**

The purpose of this study is to highlight Inuit students' positive elementary school experiences that played a major role in motivating them to remain in school and ultimately become successful graduates. You are being asked to participate in this study because, as having successfully completed public school, you are in a position to share what motivated you to stay in school and complete your public education. The information that you share is important, as it has the potential to influence how Nunavut schools will approach the teaching and learning of Nunavumiut in the future.

My intention in this study is to raise awareness of those challenges experienced by Inuit students who learn within a second language and culturally different environment, and to provide recommend strategies that will make learning easier and more meaningful for Inuit students so they will want to remain in school, rather than drop out.

### **General Procedure and time Commitment**

#### **Participation in This Research Study:**

You will be asked to participate in three different sessions; one *focus group* followed by two *private interviews*.

Focus Group: The focus group will consist of several people who have both life experiences and education backgrounds similar to yours. During the discussion you and others will be asked to share your school experiences. I will facilitate the focused discussion with guiding questions that I will provide you ahead of time in order for you to better prepare yourself for this discussion.

First Interview: Several weeks following the focus group, I will meet with you privately to conduct the first private interview. During this interview I will ask you to again discuss your past experiences in public school, sharing anything you may have forgotten to add during the focus group discussion. If there is anything that you did not want to share within the discussion group, but you think is worth sharing for the sake of this research study, this interview will allow you the chance to do so in confidence.

Second Interview: After several months, I will meet with you one last time in order to review with you what you said already and to allow you to add any more information that you may have remembered that is important to collect.

The length of this research study will be no longer than one year.

#### **Foreseeable Risks and Benefits**

##### **Possible Risks:**

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. You will simply be asked questions about your school experience and what motivated you to continue to attend school. From the information gathered from you and others, recommendations will be made with regard to in school strategies that help to motivate children to stay in school to complete their education.

Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any other information given to you by the researcher.

Through participation within focused groups and contemplation of the questions that you will be answering, you will naturally gain insight as to what made you successful in your education, how teachers helped you become successful, and in the end possibly help you use strategies with your own children that will encourage them to attend school and be successful.

#### **Measures to Ensure Confidentiality**

##### **Confidentiality:**

Your identity in this study will be strictly confidential. The only person who will have access to the raw data from this research study is the researcher himself. The research study report will be written in a manner that does not mention any participant's name, ensuring your personal confidentiality.

As this research project is associated with Memorial University of Newfoundland is overseeing its integrity, the university will be granted access to the information gathered.

##### **Anonymity:**

Under no circumstances will your name be mentioned in any reports or publications. What will be described is the participant's characteristics as well as those of the community they reside.

##### **Recording of Data:**

All focused group discussions and individual private interviews will be recorded using an audio tape recorder. The purpose for this method is simply to ensure that we accurately record the information you share.

**Reporting of Results:**

The information that you share during focused groups and private interviews will be taped in order to ensure accuracy of information. The information will be reported within the research thesis through indirect or direct quotation. Without disclosing the actual names of the participants.

**Storage of Data:**

All data, including written and audio, will be kept in a secure place to protect the anonymity of all participants until such time when the research study is complete and published. At this time, these recordings will be destroyed.

**Commercialization and Conflict of Interest:**

Neither institution nor the researcher stands on obtaining any profit from neither the research conducted nor from the information you share. As said before, the benefit of this research is to improve the teaching and learning of Nunavummiut in Nunavut schools.

**Rights to withdraw from the study, and to have data withdrawn**

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future. In addition you have the right to withdraw the data you have contributed as well.

**Any Questions?**

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact me, the researcher, or Dr. David Philpott, my supervisor at the telephone numbers below:

**Researcher**

*John Strutynski  
Graduate Student, Department of Education  
Memorial University of Newfoundland.  
PO Box 447  
Baker Lake, NU X0C 0A0*

*Tel: 867-793-2644*

*Work: 867-793-2803 Extension 31*

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**Supervisor**

*Dr. David Philpott  
Immediate Supervisor, Faculty of Education  
Rm ED3042  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
PO Box 4200  
St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 5S7*

*Tel: 709-737-3576.*

*Email: [philpott@mun.ca](mailto:philpott@mun.ca)*

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icchr@mun.ca](mailto:icchr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-737-8368.

### Consent Form

Your signature on this form means that:

- *you have been able to ask questions about this study*
- *you are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions*
- *you understand what the study is about and what you will be doing*
- *you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.*

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights, and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **Your Signature:**

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### **Researcher's Signature:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Letter of Introduction and Consent (Inuktitut)

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Ġ 6, 2009

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## **Appendix C**

### **First Interview Guiding Questions**

#### **First Interview Guiding Questions**

##### **LIFE STORY**

**Did you enjoy school, coming to school and if so why?**

##### **SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

**Describe the overall environment in the school at the time.**

- Describe the atmosphere within the hallways of your school. Use characteristics such as inviting, quiet, lots of rules, chaotic, unfriendly, friendly, safe, etc.
- Do you remember what it looked like?
- Do you remember what it smelled like?
- Do you remember what it sounded like?
- What did it feel like?

**Did you feel like you did or did not belong at the school?**

- What do you think made you feel this way?
- Was there someone to welcome you to school in the morning?

**Was there any time when you felt alienated in the school?**

- What do you think made you feel this way?

##### **CLASSROOM**

**Describe the classroom you remember the most and explain why it stands out.**

- Activities you participated in?
- Students in the class.
- Who was the teacher?
- How did you feel in that class?
- How did it look? Walls, bright-dark, clean-dirty, calm-busy, colorful.
- What language was spoken in the class?

**Was this your favourite class? If not describe your favourite class.**

- What made it your favourite?
- Did you excel in this class?
- Can you remember any specific activities that you participated in within this class?
- Do you remember whether you worked and learned independently or within small groups or partners?
- Did you sit with someone in class with whom you were close?

**Describe how you think that your culture was represented in the school classroom and/or general environment.**

### **TEACHER**

**Did you ever have a teacher who was a role model, an idol, someone you wanted to be like? Describe this teacher.**

- In what way did this teacher influence you?
- Do you know the teacher's relationship with your family and parents?
- Was this teacher your favourite teacher?
- Male or Female.
- Young or Old
- What was his/her approach? Provide characteristics (friendly, strict, enthusiastic, fun to be with, sense of humour, laugh, smile, etc.)
- How did you feel when you were around him/her?
- What language did they speak?

### **PEERS**

**Did you belong to a peer group?**

- Describe this group of friends.
- Where are these friends now?
- What are they doing with their lives?
- Did they already know what they wanted to be when older, did they already have future aspirations?
- Were there extra curricular activities and if so what were they?

**When did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up?**

- Who influenced your decision?
- How did you know what you wanted to be?

**So many of your peers have not continued their education and go on to graduation. Do you know of any causes as to why this has occurred?**

## **Appendix D**

### **Second Interview Guiding Questions**

#### **Second Interview Guiding Questions**

##### **REVIEW OF INFORMATION GATHERED FROM FIRST INTERVIEW**

##### **ADVICE FOR NEW TEACHERS**

What advice would you give to a new Inuk teacher from within your community who is teaching for the first time in your community school?

What advice would you give a Kabloona teacher, from southern Canada, who is teaching for the first time in your community school?

## **Appendix E**

### **Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit**

#### **Inuit Qaujimatuqangit Defined.**

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit constitutes a set of guiding Inuit societal values and/or principles that directly affect how Nunavummiut should live and work together. The Nunavut Department of Education (2008), describes Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit as a “philosophy that encompasses all aspects of traditional Inuit culture, including values, world-view, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations. *IQ* provides the foundation for the restructuring of the Nunavut education system” (p. 50).

#### **Inuit Qaujimatuqangit Mandate.**

The Nunavut Education Act (2008) clearly mandates the presence of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in all aspects of school life. It states, “The public education system in Nunavut shall be based on Inuit societal values and the principles and concepts of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit” (Part 1, Section 1). In addition, “It is the responsibility of the Minister, the district education authorities and the education staff to ensure that Inuit societal values and the principles and concepts of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit are incorporated throughout, and fostered by, the public education system” (Part 1, Section 1).

#### **Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Principles.**

The Nunavut Education Act (2008) clearly lists the eight Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles upon which education will be based as follows:

- (a) Inuuqatigiitsiarniq (respecting others, relationships and caring for people);
- (b) Tunnganarniq (fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive);
- (c) Pijitsirniq (serving and providing for family or community, or both);
- (d) Aajiqatigiinni (decision making through discussion and consensus);
- (e) Pilimmaksarniq or Pijariuqsarniq (development of skills through practice, effort and action);
- (f) Piliriqatigiinni or Ikajuqtigiinni (working together for a common cause);
- (g) Qanuqtuurniq (being innovative and resourceful); and
- (h) Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq (respect and care for the land, animals and the environment) (Part 1, Section 1).

### **Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Cross Curricular Competencies.**

The goal of the Nunavut Department of Education is for all curricula to nurture the development of the knowledge and skills (*cross-curricular competencies*) related to each of the eight IQ principles. The Nunavut Department of Education (2007) describes these competencies in relation to the eight Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles:

***Inuuqatigiitsiarniq:*** Showing respect and caring attitude for others. When people consider their relationship to people and behave in ways that build this relationship, they build strength both in themselves and in others and together as a community. This is foundational to Inuit ways of being.

***Tunnganarniq:*** Being welcoming to others, being open in communications and inclusive in the ways of interacting. Demonstrating this attitude is essential in building positive relationships with others.



***Pilirqatigiingniq:*** The essential Inuit belief that stresses the importance of the group over the individual should pervade all our teaching. Expectations for students will reflect working for the common good, collaborations, shared leadership and volunteerism. Pilirqatigiingniq also sets expectations for supportive behaviour development, strong relationship-building and consensus-building.

***Avatimik Kamatsiarniq:*** The concept of environmental stewardship stresses the key relationship Inuit have with their environment and with the world in which they live. Students will be expected to articulate respect for this mutually interdependent relationship and to demonstrate responsible behaviors that seek to improve and protect the relationship in ways that meet global challenges to environmental wellness.

***Pilimmaksarniq:*** The concept of skills and knowledge acquisition and capacity building is central to the success of Inuit in a harsh environment. Building personal capacity in Inuit ways of knowing and doing are key expectations for students. Demonstrating empowerment to lead a successful and productive life, that is respectful of all, is a powerful end goal of our educational system.

***Qanuqtuurunnarniq:*** The concept of being resourceful to solve problems, using innovative and creative use of resources and demonstrating adaptability and flexibility in response to a rapidly changing world, are strengths all our students

should develop. Resourcefulness should be demonstrated in all learning and also thinking that seeks to improve the context in which Inuit live.

***Aajiiqatigiingniq:*** The concept of consensus decision-making relies on strong communication skills and a strong belief in shared goals. All students are expected to become contributing members of their community and to participate actively in building the strength of Inuit in Nunavut. Being able to think and act collaboratively, to assist with the development of shared understandings, to resolve conflict in consensus-building ways, and to consult respecting various perspectives and worldviews, are expectations that cross all curriculum areas.

***Pijitsirniq:*** The concept of serving is central to the Inuit style of leadership and as such is the measure of the maturity and wisdom of an Inuk. Key here is the understanding that each person has a contribution to make and is a valued contributor to his/her community. Students will be expected to demonstrate this kind of leadership and commitment to serving the common good (43-46).

For further information regarding Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and its incorporation within the Nunavut education system, refer to the document *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum (2008)*.





