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Kathy Snow, Kathy_snow@cbu.ca

Cape Breton University, Canada

Heather Ochalski, htick078@uottawa.ca

University of Ottawa, Canada

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Making Room: cultural resistance through *Pilimmaksarniq*

Kathy Snow, Kathy_snow@cbu.ca

Cape Breton University, Canada

Heather Ochlaski, htick078@uottawa.ca

University of Ottawa, Canada

Abstract

The investigators and participants contributing to this research have been involved in a two year project examining the factors that impact student persistence and success in Inuit Nunangat (Inuit Homelands). Inuit Nunangat is the collective term used by the Inuit residing in the four land claims regions of Canada which geographically include, the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec and Nunatsiavut in Northern Labrador. Observations made from comments and activities in this project suggest that the integration of making modern and traditional crafts support cultural resilience in students and foster personal and professional success in their teachers. The data informing this research was gathered from participant comments at the Inuit Education Forum (held in Nain, February 2017) and five community case studies conducted across Inuit Nunangat in 2017-2018. The suggestion arising from narratives and observations of participants is that there is a greater need for the seamless integration of traditional making and skills in the formal education spaces because learning of these skills leads to greater Inuit identity development for youth, supports positive self-esteem, educational attainment and reduces gender barriers. This paper explores the relationship between traditional skills development and schools as a means to bridge the distance between Inuit and southern traditions of education. Imbedded in this discussion is the concept of *Pilimmaksarniq* (the development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice and effort) as resistance to formal industrial format curriculum.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, traditional crafts, student success, makerspaces, resilience, curriculum reform, *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit (IQ)*

Introduction

Visit any Inuit community or event in Canada and you will see the pride and dedication to high quality hand crafted products. The products may represent artistic expression like carvings and wall hangings, or they may represent creative solutions such as *komatik* (sled pulled by dogs) or *qulliq* (traditional oil lamp), but more often than not it is a combination of the two, as illustrated by traditional clothing design that is rich in story as well as highly functional for the environment. The Inuit have lived in one of the most unique and challenging environments in the world long before the arrival of European explorers and thrived because the values and teachings of Inuit society encourage resourcefulness and skillful adaptation to any eventuality. However, the assimilation practice of the school structures installed across Inuit Nunangat as early as the 1800s by missionaries has served to devalue and erode traditional Inuit educational practices. In opening the Inuit Education Forum held in Nain in 2017 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) president, Natan Obed, reiterated some of the hard won reform efforts for education in Inuit Nunangat and outlined some of the challenges still being faced by youth in school. Obed stated,

“Even in the strongest regions, language, culture and education converge in the minds of Inuit; it’s not that education should replace the teaching in community but [we should be] fighting for an education system that supports community learning”.

Based on this notion of education, as a holistic process of personal and community growth, the distinction between formal and informal education and activity becomes blurred. While participating in the forum, as researchers we noted beyond the topic of the forum, participants shared crafts they had made, techniques and ideas from home communities, and worked on new projects while there. A weather delay at the end of the conference saw many participants pull out project bags and begin working while waiting. This observation of craftsmanship as inherent in participants’ ways of being, caused us to pause and return to interviews which the team had been conducting through a series of five case studies (2016-2018) across Inuit Nunangat and ask: what impact does learning Inuit practices of making have on youth in communities in Inuit Nunangat? This paper presents an argument for increased investment of so called informal education into the formalized structures of public education to support academic achievement and the need is evidenced through narratives of teachers, youth, elders and community members as they reflect on their experiences with education.

Literature Review

The legacy belief ingrained from colonization that the southern education systems in school in Inuit Nunangat is “better” at least in the minds of those in positions of power, is the root of many challenges in the development of youth identity and self-efficacy. The conflict of values between knowing how to live, speak and do traditional activities with expectations for success as defined by southern curricular objectives and priorities was reiterated throughout the 2017 forum as participants shared both the successes and frustrations of working in the varied school

environments across Nunangat (ITK, 2017). Concurrently we see the increased loss of Southern curricular traditions of making through home economics, industrial arts, music art and other programs which allow for creative expression and, when well-constructed, can support traditional learning. In efforts to counterbalance the impact of industrialized schools and increasingly restrictive budgets, communities are working to create a third learning space, one that bridges formal and informal learning through traditional creating/life skills to support students and communities. These programs may be found in schools through initiatives associated with *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)* curricular design, while at other times they stand separate from formal schooling in community activities.

The Impact of Industrial Models of Education on Inuit children

It has been long documented that imposing “southern” or non-Inuit formal teaching practice and worldviews on Inuit children leads to negative self-perceptions and low self-esteem for Inuit students (Douglas, 1994; Lipka, 1989; Ryan, 1989). Howard (2003) states teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students’ social and cultural realities. In the current climate of educational reform few would disagree with demands made by critics of education that what is needed is culturally relevant pedagogy to respond to the needs of culturally diverse students (Gay, 1993 Howard, 2003, Ladson-Billings, 1995). In Nunavut the establishment of education based in *IQ* since 2007 has led to positive changes. However, we still observe Inuit students struggling socially, emotionally and academically in Canadian schools (McGregor, 2013). The lasting effects of residential school experiences and intergenerational trauma means that schools do not fully represent Inuit culture but they are also places of painful memories. In interviews of over 35 community members in a small community in Nunatsiavut we repeatedly heard grandparents, parents and young people explain the need for a high school certificate to be successful in a *Qablunaat* (non-Inuit) society (O’Gorman *et al.* 2015-2018). But at the same time we heard few comments about schools supporting success in Inuit society, with references to school taking the tone of acquiescence, or the hoop that must be jumped to pass through to something else.

According to McGregor (2013) engaging youth in education goes far deeper than curriculum but rather making systemic changes that allow for traditional life skills using local language and local practices, alongside university or technical school preparation. She continues to ask “why shouldn’t schools be a spiritual and intellectual home, a safe(r) place for elders and youth?” (p. 109). Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) in writing on Aboriginal wellness and healing present the same call to action by stating “the only way to address the healing needs of Aboriginal people is to open culturally-appropriate avenues for producing change in existing memory structures and belief systems that will allow Aboriginal people to regain collective strength” (p. 80). Great strides in the improvement of education have taken place, and with Inuit leadership growing stronger in schools and school systems more changes will develop, but there is still work to do. Graduation rates for youth in Nunavut for example are 35% according to statistics Canada 2011

results. Tootoo (in Walton & O'Leary, 2015) outlines how elders identified traditional knowledge, hunting and fishing as keys to success for Inuit men, who in her observations are struggling more with western education, but that these opportunities to develop are not always available for youth formally or informally, which can leave young men feeling lost and caught between two worlds.

Bringing Traditional Inuit Education into Public School

Since the implementation of a large scale southern style school system in the 1950s Inuit communities have been working to regain control over education (McGregor, 2013). One of the shifts in Inuit education was the creation of an educational model known as *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)* in Nunavut which could be used as the backbone for curriculum design and understanding Inuit principles of education. *IQ* is often referred to as Inuit epistemology but is defined by elders as “knowledge that has been passed on to us by our ancestors, things that we have always known, things crucial to our survival” (Bennett & Rowley, 2004, p. xxi). *IQ* was officially adopted as the educational framework for Nunavut Curriculum (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007). However, its implementation has been problematic when curricular objectives defined from southern perspectives drive learning. Recent revisions to the Education Act go so far as recommending the removal of *IQ* as an integrated principle and suggest switching to *IQ* as a standalone subject. This conflict represents one of the issues southern education is grappling with as well in its own attempts to meet a higher number of curricular objectives now found in schools.

Both southern and northern schools aim to offer the best education possible, but find that limited budgets and time impact the ability to offer quality programming. In the case of southern schools, we see parallel challenges with curricular revision that leads to reduced emphasis on music, art and other creative pursuits in favour of didactic approaches to support literacy and mathematics achievement as a measure and predictor of students' success. The response in Inuit Nunangat is different. *IQ*, be it integrated in the curriculum or a standalone subject, is not likely to disappear from the curriculum. Inuit believe that learning begins with teaching to the heart and building strength in the inner person rather than primarily concentrating on the head or cognitive development (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007). For that reason, the *IQ* framework serves as a guide and record of the values, goals and expectations for learning across a continuum of development. One of the fundamental concepts of *IQ* is *Pilimmaksarniq*. *Pilimmaksarniq* is defined by the Government of Nunavut as the development of skills through observation, mentoring practice and effort and is one of the eight Inuit societal values (Government of Nunavut, nd). *Pilimmaksarniq* and values such as *inuuaqatigiitsiarniq* (respect and caring for others), *tunnarniq* (being inclusive and welcoming), *piliriqatigiingniq* (collaborating), *avatimik kamattiariniq* (environmental stewardship), *qanuqtuurnariq* (being resourceful), *aajiqatigiingniq* (consensus decision-making) and *pijitirniq* (serving others) form the foundations of *IQ*. *Pilimmaksarniq* embedded in development means that students can begin to analyze their own work and procedures to demonstrate mastery and skilled independence in a collaborative environment. Embedded throughout the Government of Nunavut *IQ* Framework, as well as other references to

Inuit pedagogy, is holistic intergenerational learning through relationships for the improvement of the collective wellbeing (Tester & Irniq, 2008). The challenge that remains for schools is to find the will to fully implement it.

Impact of traditional making and skills development from informal education

Community groups and elders are working across Inuit Nunangat to support traditional knowledge (re)development alongside academic and personal support. For example, Kusugak (2013), outlines a community based project to support literacy for adult learners while learning sewing in which participants developed a greater sense of identity and pride in their accomplishments. In an older example from Alaska Meade (1990, p.230) the cultural importance of each aspect of parka is reiterated, stating that “the parka is like a book. It tells a story”, and that it is through this creation she is able to hold on to her identity and the ties that bind her to her past and future. Cowan (2004) outlines another project, which started as a community college course in arts, that developed into a full community engaged collective remembering of the tradition of basket making in Sanikiluaq, which again resulted in community healing through the strengthening of Inuit identity for those involved in the project. Tulloch *et al.* (2012) in a review of participant outcomes in non-formal culturally based programs outlined four consistent themes across all participant experiences which included: *Pilimmaksariq* (targeted skills development through practice), *Pijunnautitaaqpaalliqsimaliqtut* (confidence from skills), *ilippallianguinnarniq* (engagement with lifelong learning), and *innuuqatigiitsiarniq* (interconnectedness). The purpose in the Tulloch *et al.* (2012) student which was driven by the Nunavut Literacy Council was to examine how such programs were building life skills and to what degree they supported re-engagement in formal learning. Though no quantitative measure of success was available, these programs appeared to produce tangible results (products individuals and families were proud of) (Tulloch *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, examinations by Archibald and Dewar (2010) highlight the importance of creative arts and culturally based programs on personal healing, which is critical to well-being and engagement in all learning. Canada is behind when compared to England, the US and Australia with regard to official recognition of the role of traditional creative arts in supporting holistic personal development (Archibald *et al.*, 2012; Coxa *et al.*, 2010). Inuit Elders, as well as the aforementioned researchers, have identified the need for teaching traditional IQ through schools as a way to restore pride and self-esteem for Inuit youth but implementation is riddled with challenges (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007; Obed, 2017). Additionally, traditional crafts and “making” have been evidenced to give students a sense of self and satisfaction that cannot be achieved through other means, particularly when the crafts have cultural relevance (Stairs, 2010).

In summary, from current literature we observed that schools are failing children by focusing on teaching content, rather than Inuit ways of being. We see that great strides have been made in Inuit curricular design through the development of IQ and the outline of the values associated with learning, but that implementation in schools has been and continues to be challenging. And finally, we see hints from the informal education sector that making, and traditional skills development

can potentially have impacts on self-efficacy, motivation and academic performance. Therefore, we reviewed our interview transcripts to see if these observations could be confirmed by teachers and community members.

Methods

Between 2016-2018, the research team conducted five exploratory case studies (Yin, 2013), with at least one representative community in each of the regions of Inuit Nunangat (Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut, Inuvialuit) spanning the Canadian borders from east to west. The purpose of the case studies was to examine the factors impacting student success and persistence. Data was collected by conducting approximately 20 to 40 face-to-face interviews in each selected community with youth, elders, teachers, school administrators and any other self-identified community stakeholder. The communities selected for the case studies were determined through triangulating recommendations by members of Inuit *Taparit Kanatami* (the national Inuit advocacy agency which works in collaboration with communities), regional leaders in education and accessibility of the community in response to the question: which community most illustrates success and persistence in your region? Participants within each community were contacted through snowball sampling techniques and given the size of some communities, in some cases more than 10% of the adults living in the community were interviewed. During the interviews which were structured as kitchen table talks (Tootoo in Walton and O'Leary, 2015) our team asked 8 to 10 broad open-ended questions intended as conversation starters as a means to discover the systemic challenges and supports to student success. The open structure provided space for a rich dialogue around a large number of emergent factors. The insights we gained from the interviews have been interpreted using the conversational method as outlined by Kovach (2010), as an Indigenous methodology that is reflective of Indigenous approaches to knowledge sharing through story (Kovach 2005). The themes, or conversations related to curriculum development and creative expression have been collated from across all community locations for this paper to allow us to look at this promising practice specifically. The semi-formal nature of the kitchen table talks meant that interview length was variable, with youth interviews tending to be approximately 20 minutes while interviews with adults fell in the range of 60-90 minutes. Using the conversational frame of Kovach (2010), the stories heard and our reflections on them became intertwined in the meaning-making process. As a consequence, the results of this paper are presented with themes and discussion together. Participants stories remain their own, and ethical approval for the project was obtained through both the universities' research ethics boards, the regional licensing offices and related school authorities.

Key Themes Emerging from Conversations

Four critical themes supporting the ongoing development of making and traditional learning/creative problem solving in schools emerged from conversations with youth, parents, elders and teachers across Inuit Nunangat. Primarily participants reiterated needs as previously observed in the literature: (a) making supported identity development, (b) making supported pride

in identity and (c) knowledge of making/traditional skills was observed as critical to life skills and success, but beyond this, participants identified the reverse, traditional making as supporting academic skills and resilience in the face of academic challenges. Additionally, participants highlighted a modern approach to traditional activities identifying that (d) teaching traditional making does not need to fall into historic gender divisions of labour. Each of these themes are discussed in detail below.

Traditional Making skills support identity development

Directly and indirectly participants spoke of the ability to create solutions and to develop skills for creating as important to cultural identity development. For example, one recent graduate from high school in Nunatsiavut reflected on learning to build a *qamutik*, and the importance of this to his Inuit heritage stating:

“They [teachers] showed us a bit about electrical and how to make traditional qamutik and that was really important because there is not a lot of people that can make these traditional items anymore.”

And continuing, the young man outlined how the school experience of learning traditional craft allowed him to develop the hands on experience he needed to continue his own development outside of school stating:

“When I finished school and I actually needed to be able to make more of own qamatik and certain things I need to be able to do in my life I actually have a little hands on experience with it from in school.”

He went on, as we probed about the relevance of creating, culture and the school, to say:

“Actually I found when I did some of the math, people said you’ll never need to know these formulas and stuff, but when I built my shed I knew there was a certain formula I could use to ah, to really do my rafters the real technical way to get my pitch. And I used my formula and I actually called up my teacher and asked for the formula. And she helped me out with it and I went and built my shed with the right formula. And I was proud to say it came out all right.”

Illustrating not only his own acknowledgement of the interconnections of traditional learning and academic skills, but the pride in both upon completion of the building project. As did Seth Tuglavina, another High School student Hopedale, who was very quiet for most of our conversation, answering simple yes or no, until we asked him about traditional skills, at which point he outlined his pride in building the same qamutik with an elder in school, and his accomplishments hunting, which he did every day outside of school. It is important to note, that although this young man did not speak a great deal, he was identified by

elders and teachers as a successful Inuit role-model and had achieved in High School where many of his peer group had not. He attributed this to his life outside of school and connection to traditional skills. An elder in this same community mourned the loss of traditional skills development for youth, and cited that it was the absence of these skills being taught at home or school that contributed to her grandson's departure from school, and general sense of disorientation at the young age of 12. Beyond the knowledge acquired, the skills applied to life outside of school were observed as critical to identity development and recognition of success in adult life. As stated by an elder in Nunavut, when asked about his observations of the impact of traditional learning on youth:

“To not only look at one direction but to try to integrate everything. Everything around you, if I can't do this what do I do? It really helped a lot for me and it taught me so much about who I am. Who I am, and it's hard to explain but it's a lot more than what I can say about tradition knowledge and now I see it at school that there is being more and more use of the tradition knowledge. There's students that are going out on land, hunting, caribou hunting, seal hunting. There's cultural days where they go out there and learn about maybe a fish or a seal or whatever. How to cut animals, prepare them, what they used to use back then and all of that. so, it is really good to see, and I know that it's going to help so many students to become thinkers.”

Working and living on the land, is the ultimate maker space, where youth's ability to survive is tied to their ability to locate and manipulate the resources found in the environment. There was a pride in the voices of the youth and elders when they explained the making skills they had developed either in school or from elders in the community and how they were applied in life beyond the classroom. Further illustrations of this pride can be found in a discussion of sewing from Kusugak in Tulloch et al (2012). According to Kusugak “sewing is not a hobby...it's a way of life” (p.7). In learning to sew young people develop patience, practice, ingenuity, creativity and resourcefulness and persistence. In the past, and indeed still today a technically well-constructed pair of *kamiks* (traditional waterproof footwear) can mean the difference between frozen feet or not. Sewing particular items was also seen as a rite of passage, like in the example of *amuti* (traditional woman's coat) creation shared by a Nunavut educator in the following section, as we shift the discussion from identity to self-esteem, two inherently interconnected threads supporting self-actualization.

Traditional Making skills are critical to self esteem

In conversations in community it was observed that a lack of opportunity to develop traditional making skills, was associated with shame and embarrassment. In speaking about her ability to make clothing for her family a teacher from Nunatsiavut stated:

“My mother felt that children should learn to sew by the time they were six, so that by the time they were young adults they would be able to sew clothes for the family. But for me I was in residential school and I got married and had kids and I didn’t know how to sew and I remember what that did to my self esteem. Every time I needed to sew I went to a closet to sew by myself because I was so ashamed.”

In a second story shared by a teacher from, Nunavut, the creation of *amauti* to be worn at the high school graduation ceremony by young women in their final years of high school was a project used to instill self-esteem and motivate young women to graduate. As the girls worked together both during school hours, as well as hours outside of school to create their *amauti*, the informal making space allowed them to learn and talk with the teacher. Youth discussed the meaning and significance of the coat design with their teacher but they also shared stories of what is going on in their lives. Their teacher observed the students were absolutely overwhelmed with pride when they cross the graduation stage in their own *amauti*. Cowan (2004) also highlights that the pride felt by participants in learning to create adds to the collaborative creation process, participants working together on different and shared challenges is an important aspect of the traditional learning process. Several parents and grandparents highlighted the importance of “hands on learning” (meaning traditional making) for self-esteem and motivation for children they identified as “slow learners” or those that were not as successful academically. As one grandmother in Nunavut stated:

“Learning something else, uh my grandson does go to one of these [traditional craft workshop] and he really, really enjoyed it because he’s a slow learner and hands-on activities really do help him to further his education by doing something he learns. What this means and how to calculate and how to measure things like that.”

Outside of school, the opportunity to participate in the Junior Rangers program (a youth program with paramilitary roots that aims to support culturally relevant outdoor skills development for both boys and girls aged 12-18 through service to the community) was frequently cited with pride. Youth in the Junior Rangers learn to build traditional structures, live on the land and support community initiatives in diverse ways. Across Inuit Nunangat the Junior Rangers were observed as leaders, role models and held in high esteem by community members. In describing the Rangers, parent Jolyn Pijogge from Hopedale stated:

“Junior Rangers, like they get to go out on the land and learn skills. There is a sense of pride when they know that they are learning things, like they are a part of a group, they are recognized by other people even outside the school.”

Informal structured programs, like the Rangers, have been cited by Kral (2010) as highly effective in meeting personal development needs of youth, in particular where colonial disruption may have

damaged the fabric of family and identity. In an examination of informal programs specifically, Tulloch *et al.* (2012) highlight parallel findings as those reported here, with regard to self-esteem, identity development and confidence in skills which we have referred to as resilience.

Traditional Making skills support resilience and life skills

Continuing to describe the Rangers, and the importance of this opportunity for learning to be resourceful Pijogge stated:

“There’s skills that they pick up from the land [activities] that they don’t pick up in school, and it might not necessarily have to do with just surviving on land, but it’s like communication skills, sharing, like they can learn stuff on the land that they can also apply in the classroom.”

Learning to make and perform traditional activities in school was, as mentioned earlier motivating for students, but also recognized by the youth themselves as meaningful learning:

“I thought it was awesome because you can go and learn a little bit about everything in, in life. Like related to working with your hands, and... just gives you hands on experience with just, everything, really.” – Nunatsiavut student

Additionally, learning to make and survive on the land through parental teachings was also observed to contribute to academic success:

“When I was in school I went hunting with my dad a lot. All the time, go hunting, everywhere. They would take me out and it’s very, very valuable knowledge. Something that you won’t learn in school but it’s a way that, you all learn a lot about the environment about the animals about how the animals move, lift their whole bodies, biologically. Everything about that [science] you learn out there, about the weather, how cold it is. Uh, how cold it can be out there you know in the winter how windy it can go, how the weather can change from a very beautiful nice day to a very bad day in the matter of minutes. So, those are, uh, they’re very good things to learn, to know, to keep in your mind and it helped me to expand my mind. To think outside the box, it’s helped me in life. Not only in life but in school as well”. (Recent graduate Nunavut)

The Nunavut Literacy Council has led pilot programming that placed literacy development in the context of cultural learning, rather than the reverse, which is the more common approach in formal education, and they have done so with good success. As reported in Tulloch *et al.* (2012) participants of these “implicit” literacy development programs improved language and literacy skills without formalized instruction that we have come to think of as language instruction. As one participant from this study stated “we were too busy sewing to think about literacy” (Tulloch *et al.*

p. 83). And the reverse also occurs with learning from culturally relevant examples in “academic” disciplines assisting students in developing problem solving and essential life skills, as in the earlier example of mathematics and shed building.

The learning that was observed through traditional making was also cited as critical to success in life by elders in the community. It was observed by many elders that youth needed traditional making skills to be able to negotiate the bridge between traditional and modern Inuit life:

“I had grown up on the land. I'm not saying it was not my choice or anything, it's just was natural for us to live on the land. It was not a camp or any kind of thing that the government tells us to do, it's just that, we were following the seasons. My parents and my other family and other people were surviving off the land. ...But for these guys [youth], I don't think they can move onto a seasonal hunting place right now and be there until October, November or even Christmas time and then go back you start living again until spring time or summer time. I don't think they can do”. (Nunavut Elder)

and

“It's fine for the people that graduated to grade 12. That's fine they can further their education and find good paying jobs but for the people that drop out of school and for the ones that didn't want to go back to school for some reason or the other, this means they have no education at all in both cultures, English and Inuktitut because back in 40's until early maybe mid 60's, he [the elder] lived in an igloo or a tent and that's where he got his education from his parents. He knows how to survive out on the land, even on his own. Uh, but a young person today who had quit school because he's stayed in a house all his life, and he hasn't gone out there because of circumstances that are beyond our control, his control, he cannot survive he knows that and because he has no English education, his survival skills are very limited because he has no cultural experience at all. Culturally he's lost...So, the because of that he will sometimes ponder and wonder if he should try opening a building to teach traditional skills where he can teach traditional skills uh, so that person will know how to survive even in today society and uh, maybe that way, just maybe that way that person can get education on one side because the way he sees it, that person is lost today. No education in the school system, no education at all, culturally, traditionally. Uh, concerning uh, the rangers he was saying about he knows how to completely survive out on the land. Even if he's by himself because he was taught traditionally by his father until mid-60's uh, he has no, he has no, uh school education, he hardly has any school education but as long as he has a 5 gallon, 10 gallon gas he knows where to go hunt and he knows how to catch and animal and he knows how to clean it and sell it for a profit”. (translation for Nunavut Elder)

Traditional knowledge survival was observed as a form of resistance to western cultural impacts, the freedom from reliance on southern stores for food and clothing and the absence of this ability, in particular for youth who were not successful in schools was observed as a critical loss of resilience. Obed (2017), in her Masters' thesis which examined land-based learning as a model for education, highlights the concept of traditional learning and approaches to learning as a critical form of resistance and empowerment for Inuit youth. Obed continues to state that "cultural learning means being able to experience and learn the land" (2017, p.83) and that it is through this process that youth develop and understanding of the connectedness of both values and knowledge needed to be balanced.

Traditional Making skills can be gender neutral

In schools and communities where formal structures were in place within the school to support traditional making and learning, the division of labour that has been historically seen to exist in Inuit culture was deconstructed. Young men were taught sewing skills while young women were taught building and hunting skills. This was observed as a very positive change to traditional creation:

"When I went to school we had, we wouldn't do it now, there was a boys group and a girls group and the boys went to learn how to work with wood and power tools and the girls went to the girls' room and cooked and sewed and I know people are working hard to get away from that, we don't want to be teaching people that they can only do girl stuff or only do boy stuff but bringing some of that back so that students learn more practical things, to develop the whole person". (Parent, Nunatsiavut)

And although not explicitly stated in relation to gender in showing the researcher gifts given to him by both boys and girls Dean Combs, Principal of Amos Comenius Memorial School in Hopedale, Nunatsiavut stated:

"Like most of the little things you see in around my office most of those are things that the students have done with their instructors and say, sir, this is for you. And they take pride in that".

In describing the school's approach to land-based learning the same leader outlined intentionally girls and boys were taught the same skills of hunting, and sewing because traditional life moves forward as well. Prior to colonial contact, Inuit education was to some degree associated with gender role in society (McGregor, 2013). The disruption to society and traditional community structures has impacted students in community, in particular young men, who find traditional male role/teachings being undermined. Though a full discussion of gender roles and the way they have been impacted by colonial structures is beyond the scope of this paper it is important to note that in education, it was oft cited by the participants in this study that the young men are struggling more than the women. These anecdotal comments are supported by statistics reported by ITK

(2007) which see women outpacing men in high school completion and post-secondary education, with exception of the trades where men dominate. The adoption of gender neutral skills based programming offered an outlet for young men to thrive and opened possibilities to non-traditional employment or entrepreneurship for young women. Across Inuit Nunangat, where formal traditional programming was in place, be it through life skills courses in school where traditional sewing, skin preparation, cooking or building skills were developed, or on the land where hunting, fishing and traditional living skills were developed, every effort was made to ensure all youth had the opportunity to participate regardless of gender identification.

Conclusions

Continuing to teach in an industrial manner for an industrial world does not allow students to survive and thrive in the new economy where creativity and innovation leads. Learning about community service, developing leadership and problem solving skills and nurturing one's own identity and creativity is critical for all student resilience and self-efficacy in, as many elders stated, both worlds, that of the modern south and the traditional Inuit way of life. What is missing from education are ideas and innovations that students have in their own minds, teaching them to turn their minds toward the community and making the world a better place. Establishing a permanent creation space in a school, like a crafts guild for various traditional crafts, provides students with a connection to elders and traditional language - it serves to root the students in their identity and provides a safe space to talk and do something productive. As an elder once said to me - you can't bead when you are mad, you need a calm hand and a quiet mind - these craft spaces provide a safe place to quiet the mind, but also to reconnect, and to reflect *IQ* as well as to learn how to learn in a way that will help navigation through the two worlds that young people must face. Furthermore, it provides students skills to develop a viable source of income – a well-made parka can sell for thousands of dollars, kamiks for hundreds. For more than three decades governments have provided Inuit with education that has been designed around cultural and socio-economic values from the south. Perhaps it is time to reflect the other way, when Inuit knowledge and pedagogy are the starting point in education the definition of formal and informal loses meaning and the objectives change fundamentally.

We conclude with five suggestions that may foster the development of more innovative curricula in public education that not only respect but include Inuit knowledge in a meaningful manner and respond to the call from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to indigenize the curriculum:

- 1) Principals and boards share the power of deciding what needs to be taught with local communities through a flexible negotiation.
- 2) Engaging local educators to lead culturally based learning, who can act as connectors, sharers, and facilitating collaboration.

- 3) Creating space in formal education for crafts and skills that have been predominantly relegated to informal learning spaces to engage the community in learning which means also changing policy to support non-traditional mentors.
- 4) Protecting the crafts and skills development currently in schools, by respecting these teachings as important to student development as mathematics and literacy.
- 5) Ensuring that funding exists to support programs and their teachers.

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