

## Article

---

"The influence of family history on learning opportunities of Inuvialuit youth"

Raila Salokangas et Brenda Parlee

*Études/Inuit/Studies*, vol. 33, n°1-2, 2009, p. 191-207.

Pour citer cet article, utiliser l'information suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044967ar>

DOI: 10.7202/044967ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

---

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : [info@erudit.org](mailto:info@erudit.org)

# The influence of family history on learning opportunities of Inuvialuit youth

---

Raila Salokangas\* and Brenda Parlee\*\*

**Résumé:** L'influence de l'histoire familiale sur les opportunités d'apprentissage des jeunes Inuvialuit

Dans cet article nous soutenons que les histoires familiales sont des éléments clés pour comprendre les différentes capacités des jeunes Inuvialuit dans l'apprentissage du savoir traditionnel et du programme scolaire. Des entrevues thématiques semi-dirigées ont été faites entre 2007 et 2009 avec quatre familles intergénérationnelles de Tuktoyaktuk (Territoires du Nord-Ouest). Des résumés de leur histoire familiale sont présentés afin de pouvoir répondre à deux questions: 1) Comment les individus négocient-ils entre les différentes manières d'apprendre? et 2) Pourquoi les opportunités d'apprentissage diffèrent entre les familles? Nous discutons de l'inégalité des opportunités d'apprentissage comme étant le résultat de choix et d'aptitude individuels, de l'influence de la famille, la parenté et la communauté, ainsi que d'une société en pleine globalisation.

**Abstract:** The influence of family history on learning opportunities of Inuvialuit youth

In this article we argue that family histories are key to understanding the differential capacities of Inuvialuit youth to learn traditional knowledge and school curricula. Thematic semi-directed interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2009 with three generations of four Inuvialuit families in Tuktoyaktuk (Northwest Territories). Summaries of each family history are presented to help answer two questions: 1) How do individuals negotiate between different ways of learning? and 2) Why do learning opportunities differ across family groups? We discuss the unevenness of learning opportunities as a result of individual choice and aptitude, family, kinship and community influences, and an increasingly globalised society.

---

\* Department of Rural Economy, Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences, 507 General Services Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H1, Canada. raila.salokangas@ualberta.ca

\*\* Department of Rural Economy, Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences, 507 General Services Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H1, Canada. brenda.parlee@ualberta.ca

## Introduction

According to one theory, Aboriginal youth have problems in the education system because of a discontinuity between traditional and formal approaches to learning (Deyhle 1992; Government of Canada 1996; Hornett 1990; Ogbu 1982; Williamson 1987; Wilson 1992). Many Aboriginal communities have thus sought to build more holistic and community-based approaches to learning that reflect traditional ways of knowing, as well as skills for survival in an increasingly global culture and economy (Battiste 1998; Stiffarm 1998). Nonetheless, there still is no regional education system that meaningfully integrates traditional ways of knowing among the Inuvialuit of the Canadian western Arctic. In most communities, teaching “the Inuvialuit way”<sup>1</sup> is up to the family, with the formal education system offering basic skills (e.g., reading, writing, arithmetic, and science). Both ways are valued. High school diplomas are needed for wage employment, and traditional knowledge for a land-based economy.

The two ways involve two knowledge systems. Learning the Inuvialuit way means learning the values, knowledge, and skills of a land-based lifestyle, which includes hunting, fishing, and travelling (ICC et al. 2006; NWT Education 1991; Pokiak 2006). It is described by the Inuvialuit as being largely experiential (watching and doing), but is also drawn from oral traditions passed on from generation to generation through legends, stories, and songs (ICC et al. 2006). This traditional knowledge is thus passed on when families connect with youth and provide them with learning opportunities. School learning draws on mainstream frameworks of knowledge, often described as “Western science,” which differs from traditional knowledge in being based on Cartesianism, positivism, realism, and mechanistic thinking and practices. In addition to reflecting Eurocentric values, Western science in education and elsewhere has tended to marginalise Indigenous peoples, including the Inuvialuit (Aylward 2007; Berger 2008; Smith 1991; Stairs 1995; Williamson 1987).

Some scholars perceive these two systems of learning as being philosophically at odds with one another (Aikenhead 2006). A study in Tuktoyaktuk pointed out the obvious contradictions: “If youth stay in school they spend less time on the land. If youth spend extended periods of time on the land required to learn traditional knowledge and skills, they are unlikely to be able to continue to succeed in the formal school system” (Schlag 2004: 39). Conversely, other scholars consider it more useful to understand the dynamics and relationships between different ways of life (Agrawal 1995; Henze and Vanett 1993; Lipka et al. 1998) than to focus exclusively on knowledge systems as divorced from life’s complexities.

Inuvialuit communities are socio-economically and culturally heterogeneous. Consequently there is no one formula for integrated learning. Yet Inuvialuit youth have to negotiate between the different ways of learning in their own lives. While some are able to gain the “best of both worlds” or “become strong like two people” (Martin

---

<sup>1</sup> The Inuvialuit interviewees used English expressions like “the Inuvialuit way,” or “our way” to describe their traditional knowledge and way of life.

1991), others are confronted with uneven learning opportunities. With these concerns in mind, we explore two questions in this article: 1) How do individuals negotiate between different ways of learning? and 2) Why do learning opportunities differ across family groups?

Our intent here stems from an interest in learning opportunities and challenges in Tuktoyaktuk, as well as in the continuity and sustainability of Inuvialuit culture. There is an equal interest in understanding the role of education in social positioning, as it plays a fundamental role in social mobility and socio-economic status (Wotherspoon 2004). On the one hand, it may have a buffering effect and serve to reduce social inequities that otherwise would be reproduced from one generation to another. On the other, education can serve to reproduce the inequities and privileges that already exist (Andres et al. 1999; Andres and Krahn 1999; Krahn 2004; Wotherspoon 2004). This case study may shed light on the ways in which learning opportunities shape educational outcomes as well as livelihood opportunities and choices. We also hope to draw attention to the reasons why some individuals and families benefit from both traditional and formal ways of learning, while others do not.

### **Learning in Inuvialuit communities and Tuktoyaktuk**

Until the 1950s, the Inuvialuit were tied to the land through a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Thus, the most valuable learning environment was to live and travel with one's parents. However, some Inuvialuit parents wanted their children to attend schools for a couple of years to learn basic reading and writing (Salokangas 2009). In 1895, an Anglican day school, mainly for adult Inuvialuit, was operated for a few years on Herschel Island (Morrison 2003: 97). A Catholic residential school was opened in Aklavik in 1925, followed by an Anglican one that started at Shingle Point in 1929 and then moved to Aklavik in 1936 (Anglican Church of Canada 2009; Macpherson 1991). Inuvik became the new administrative centre of the Western Arctic in 1958 and the Sir Alexander Mackenzie School in Inuvik was opened a year later with two residential hostels run by the Catholic and Anglican churches (Hepburn 1963).

Tuktoyaktuk has been a traditional Inuvialuit settlement since at least the 19th century (Morrison and Kolausok 2003: 119). In 1934, it became an important harbour in the Western Arctic when the Hudson's Bay Company relocated its trading post there (*ibid.*: 120) and thereby attracted more families to the area. The Tuktoyaktuk Federal Day School opened in 1947 and was renamed Mangilaluk School in 1964 (Abrahamson 1963). As in other Inuvialuit communities, throughout the 1960s more people moved from land camps to towns and villages, and by the 1970s most Inuvialuit families were sending their children to school (Salokangas 2009). Although schooling increased the Inuvialuit's chances for wage employment, the unpredictable boom and bust cycles of industry and appreciation for their culture persuaded many families to stay in touch with the Inuvialuit traditional way of life.

In 1984, the Inuvialuit gained more self-government with the signing of a land claim agreement (DIAND 1984), which provided for more local involvement in the planning and delivery of schooling. There has nonetheless been no improvement in high school graduation rates in Tuktoyaktuk (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2009) or in community satisfaction with schooling (Cliff 2008). At present, Inuvialuit schools still use the Alberta curriculum with adjustments to make it more relevant to northern students. For example, Mangilaluk School offers Inuvialuktun language classes and a northern studies curriculum, with teachers being encouraged to integrate Inuuqatigiit (curriculum from the Inuit perspective) and Dene Kede (curriculum from the Dene perspective). On-the-land courses are offered twice a year by either Mangilaluk School or the Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation.

## **Premises and methods**

This article presents data from the main author's graduate fieldwork for her master's thesis, *The Meaning of Education for Inuvialuit in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT* (Salokangas 2009). Three premises guided the research: 1) traditionally, Inuvialuit families had a well developed system of teaching and learning that ensured the survival and well-being of their communities; 2) the development of the formal education system (including missionary- and government-run schools and related social policies) diminished the value of traditional education; and 3) greater local control of education, through the settlement of the Inuvialuit land claim, has been fundamental to the sustainability of Inuvialuit culture and society. The data was gathered by participating in community life and by carrying out thematic semi-directed interviews over three months between 2007 and 2009. Interviews were conducted in English with Inuvialuit families who had at least three living generations (grandparents, parents, and youth) to gain insight into how different ways of learning have changed over a century. The family was the best unit of analysis because kinship is fundamental to learning experiences in small northern communities. The interviews focused on how participants' learning options and choices related to those of their families.<sup>2</sup>

With the help of the Tuktoyaktuk Youth Centre, 27 families were identified. We selected six families with youth aged 16 to 19 who 1) had graduated from high school, 2) were still attending high school, or 3) had dropped out of high school. Efforts were also made to balance the gender of students, parents, and grandparents involved. There were eight youth (four males and four females), seven parents (five mothers and two fathers), and seven grandparents (five grandmothers and two grandfathers). Based on the interviews, summaries of four family histories were developed to portray the diverse intergenerational learning experiences.

---

<sup>2</sup> After transcribing and doing preliminary analysis of the interviews, verification and follow-up interviews took place in 2008. In 2009, further verification took place during the writing of this article. Validation of the results is based on the main author's previous experience (Salokangas 2005) and continuing relationship with the community and region.

## **Family histories**

To protect the participants' identity, some information (e.g., names, years, places, number of children, and gender) was altered. In addition, many details about learning experiences were left out. Hence the summaries are not centred on school as a learning environment (including the teachers' role). Nor is there extensive discussion of the impact of some significant life events (e.g., starting a family).

### ***The Nanuk family***

Lisa Nanuk was born in the 1920s to an Inuvialuit/German family. At home the family spoke Inuvialuktun and English. For three years, Lisa enjoyed school, where she learned reading, writing, and a little arithmetic. After a few years of schooling, her parents wanted her to learn the Inuvialuk way, so Lisa travelled on the Beaufort Sea coast with them. From her parents, Lisa learned to hunt, to sew, to prepare food, and to clean. Her parents taught her to accept the risk of making mistakes since good learning is based on trial and error. From elders' stories, she learned what the future could bring. In the 1950s, she married Bob, an Inuvialuk hunter and trapper. Because Bob did not go to school and could not read or write, the skills Lisa learned at school helped the family cope in several ways. For example, Lisa could read the instructions on how to fix a boat engine while her husband was repairing it.

Lisa did not get a wage-earning job. Instead she raised 15 children and took care of the household. When the children were still young, the Nanuk family had a schooner and used to travel to Banks Island to trap and live on the coast. At that time, schooners were a sign of wealth as they facilitated Inuvialuit trapping. For Lisa, living on the land is where "one learns everything." Lisa taught her daughters the skills she had learned from her parents. The sons learned from their father to hunt seal and caribou, to cut them up and bring them home, to gather and cut wood, and to get ice. Girls learned hunting too, and all the boys were taught to sew. Lisa also taught her children how to live "the right way," i.e., listening and obeying one's parents, telling the truth, minding one's business, helping people, being nice to elders, and sharing food. Lisa's children went to school in Aklavik, Inuvik, Yellowknife and, finally, when the family settled in Tuktoyaktuk in the 1960s, the Tuktoyaktuk Federal Day School.

Lisa's son, Derek, was born in the 1950s. He found school easy in Tuktoyaktuk. Whenever his father went out on the land trapping and hunting, he would go with him and miss a lot of school. Derek went to high school in Inuvik for one year. However, he missed home and his parents' support, and he started skipping school. Soon he quit and came back to Tuktoyaktuk. At home, he continued trapping and hunting as his father had taught him. Some years later he married Nicole, who had come home after graduating from a residential high school. Now, Nicole works for the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk as a manager. Derek is respected for his traditional knowledge (e.g., hunting and trapping) and having some schooling (particularly his ability to deal with bureaucracy). He is involved in local and regional politics, representing Tuktoyaktuk

and the Inuvialuit both regionally and nationally. His success in local and regional politics has granted him one of the sought-after “travelling jobs.”

Derek and Nicole have four children, whom Derek has taught to fish, hunt, and survive on the land. Derek says that his parents did not emphasize school to him and his siblings. He has tried not to take his children out of school too much, even during the hunting season as he feels that formal education is needed to get a steady job and to make money, as nowadays hunting is expensive. He has been encouraging his children to continue their education even after high school, in order to become self-sufficient. Derek is concerned about the quality of education at Mangilaluk School, as the learning standards in Tuktoyaktuk are not as high as in Inuvik, Yellowknife, and down south.

Derek’s middle child, James, is a high school graduate. He enjoyed school when younger, but during high school he would skip classes quite a bit and spend time just “hanging out” with his friends. For a while he thought school was boring and not challenging enough. James nonetheless enjoys learning on the land with his father and listening to stories told by him and his grandmother. Some of his father’s stories are about survival on the land, others about his trips to the south. Lisa’s stories have to do with living on the land and the right way. James feels close to his grandmother because she keeps him on the right track and watches out for him. He ended up graduating and now is in the fortunate position of having a high school diploma, land skills learned from his father, and financial help from his parents to continue with his studies and on-the-land activities. James is now working in Tuktoyaktuk and involved in local politics, just like his father.

### *The Ookpik family*

Tracy Ookpik was born in the 1940s to an Inuvialuk/Inupiat family. Her father was a distinguished hunter and trapper and her mother a housewife. In her family, girls learned from the mother and boys from the father. Tracy learned to sew by watching and listening to her mother. If she made a mistake, she had to take the stitches all apart and start from scratch. Tracy went to residential school in Aklavik when she was 6 years old. It was hard for her because she did not speak English before going to school and was physically abused. School became easier once she learned English. In 1960, Tracy wanted to quit and her mother let her stay in Tuktoyaktuk to look after her younger siblings. The same year Tracy married Archie and they moved to a DEW Line site where he worked. They had 12 children.

Tracy has never had wage employment but is a good seamstress. Although Archie never went to school, he was gainfully employed his whole life, first at the DEW Line site and then by driving a sewage disposal truck in Tuktoyaktuk. Tracy and Archie spoke to their children in English because Tracy did not want them to have a hard time learning it at school, as she had. Tracy’s oldest children went to residential school in Inuvik. When her family moved back to Tuktoyaktuk, the children continued at Mangilaluk School. All of Tracy and Archie’s children dropped out before Grade 9.

Tracy would have preferred to see her children graduate from high school, but they had a tough time because of abusive teachers, bullying, loss of interest, or pregnancy. Tracy thinks that school is important because otherwise it is impossible to get a job, but it is ultimately up to the student to decide when to leave. Most importantly she has taught her children and grandchildren to live the right way: to be obedient and to listen, and to be good and helpful to one another.

Molly is Tracy's middle child. She learned the Inuvialuit way from her grandparents and parents. She found Mangiluk School to be hard because of the harsh physical discipline and bullying. She ended up quitting in Grade 7. After a few years, she got married and had five children. Molly taught her children the importance of making one's own choices. For example, if her children did not want to go to school, they had to do chores in the house. Molly believes in all kinds of education "whether it be on land, in school, or on a job," because they open doors to new possibilities. She has encouraged her daughters to go south for post-secondary education and to come home to "help our people." Molly herself became a skilled sewer, just like her mother. After her children were in their early teens she went to Aurora College in Inuvik. She wanted to become a community counsellor but did not finish the course and ended up working for the oil companies that operate in the area.

Thea is Molly's oldest daughter. She is the first one to have a high school diploma in their family. Thea used to go out on the land with her grandparents, although cultural teachings have not been central to her or her siblings. Thea thinks that jobs nowadays require a high school diploma and a post-secondary degree. Her philosophy is that her grandparents got their Grade 12 diploma by living on the land, but for her to get one she must go through the school system. For Thea, formal education is the "one-way ticket out" of a little community like Tuktoyaktuk. She wants to go to college, and possibly work on the rigs. Both Tracy and Molly are proud of Thea. However, Tracy wonders how far youth need to go in schooling, since many are unemployed in town with high school diplomas. For Harriet, Thea's younger sister, school used to be fun, but then she got into fights with other girls in her class. Eight of her cousins dropped out even before junior high, some because of bullying. She quit after finishing Grade 9 because she had no family members left at school to protect her from bullies. Despite her dream of going into modelling or attending a dance school in Edmonton, she instead started working at the Northern Store and dating Toby. Though young, he is known for being a curious and patient hunter. He dropped out before high school. Because he was never able to learn how to read, school became too strenuous for him. Now the young couple has two little girls. Harriet is happy being a mother, so schooling has to wait for a while. She is also proud of her partner, since he is an active hunter.



### *The Piangnaq family*

Andrea Piangnaq was born in the 1940s to an Inuvialuit family with 10 siblings. For several years she went to residential school in Aklavik. She had learned some English before school, so she easily adapted to life in residence. In 1960, Andrea returned home to live with her family because she was not concentrating on her schooling and wanted to quit. The same year she married Henry. As Andrea had spent several years in residential school instead of learning from her parents, she ended up learning most of the traditional skills from Henry and her sister-in-law, who came from a land-based family. For many years, the couple raised their 10 children on the land. While on the land, the children had homework from Mangilaluk School and older children acted as teachers. Andrea explains that her children had the school system and “our way.” When they were old enough to start high school, one of them was sent to Inuvik because of his eagerness to learn. Even though the others might have done well in high school too, Henry did not want to send more children to residence, and so the other children stayed with their parents on the land. From Andrea most of the children learned sewing, cooking, making bread, and cleaning. Both boys and girls learned hunting, trapping, skinning, and travelling from Henry.

Andrea’s daughter Kendra was born in 1970 and grew up mostly on the land. Kendra completed Grade 9, the highest grade in Tuktoyaktuk until 1987. Andrea had noticed that Inuvialuit life was changing and she thought that people in the 1980s needed a high school diploma to succeed. For this reason, she suggested that Kendra should go to residential school; however, Kendra was not willing to go to Inuvik. Instead, she got pregnant and married the child’s father. Once Tuktoyaktuk acquired a high school, Andrea moved to town so that the younger children could attend. Town life did not come easy for the family and, in spite of Andrea’s good intentions, her younger children did not graduate. Andrea herself went back to school in 1990 to upgrade her skills and then to go on to college.

Kendra has six children. She wants her children to pursue a formal education so that they can leave Tuktoyaktuk, find a job, and provide for themselves. She feels that Tuktoyaktuk has too many social problems and that her children should move to a healthier community. Kendra’s oldest son and daughter have graduated from high school. Her son is studying at Aurora College in Yellowknife and her daughter is at home taking care of her baby. Kendra would like to continue with her own education, but her first priority is her children’s schooling. She tries to help her children with schoolwork, but if the assignment is too hard her younger sister steps in. Kendra is a gifted seamstress with many sewing projects on the go. Both she and her husband do not have regular wage-earning jobs. Her husband works seasonally and goes out on the land with the children. Kendra has had financial difficulties at times; this has impacted her children’s schooling. For example, Kendra’s son, Matt, wished to attend school in a bigger community where there are more courses to choose from, but Kendra did not have the financial means to support his wish.

Matt used to do well in school, but in high school he has found it tough to concentrate and has been skipping classes a lot. By now, all of his friends have graduated and gone on to college or dropped out. Matt hopes to graduate too and move away from Tuktoyaktuk, at least for a while. He might go to college and work on the oil rigs. His grandmother has been a big support, mostly by exchanging life experiences. Although his grandmother is from a different generation, Matt finds her stories resonate well with his own life experiences. Matt has learned some land skills from his father and grandfather, but according to Kendra he has not proven to be “an outdoors person.” His mother thinks he will do better at an office job. At times, Matt has tried to demonstrate interest in land activities, for example, by wanting to stay on the land with his grandparents. But Kendra does not want him to miss any school, so for the time being he has been unable to convince his mother that he is serious about learning on the land. For now, Matt works at the Northern Store and is trying to finish the few courses that are preventing him from graduating and getting on with his life.

### *The Kingmingya family*

Barry Kingmingya was born in the 1940s to an Inuvialuit/Inupiat family where both father and mother were hunters and trappers. His family lived most of the year on the land, where they taught him traditional life-ways and a strong work ethic. His mother did not want the eight children to go to residential school; however, when the family was heading out to live on the land, the only way for the parents to receive their family allowances was to send the older children to school in Aklavik. Barry did not know English before school, and at first he found it difficult to learn a new language and attend classes. He was able to manage though, and after Grade 8 he was accepted for a mechanical course in Yellowknife. Learning to use tools and a trade felt meaningful for Barry, but drinking got out of hand for him and he was sent home. In Tuktoyaktuk, Barry started learning from his parents out on the land. At first, it was hard to speak his mother tongue and live like an Inuvialuk. At the same time he was happy to be home and felt free when travelling on the land. After a while, he started working seasonally for the oil and gas industry.

In the 1960s, Barry married Patricia, whose roots are Inuvialuk, Inupiat, and Swedish. Her father worked on the DEW Line and her mother was a seamstress. Patricia and her siblings went to school in Tuktoyaktuk. Living at home while attending school gave the children an opportunity to learn from their parents. As soon as the girls were old enough, they helped their mother to make extra money by sewing. She also learned how to prepare country foods that her father had caught. In Grade 5, a teacher physically abused her and she quit school. She helped her mother with sewing for a while, before getting pregnant and marrying Barry. The couple began to raise a family on the land. Their eight children attended Mangilaluk School while in town and did homework while on the land. Barry’s philosophy was that children could miss school all they want without being punished. Although both Barry and Patricia wanted their children to graduate from high school, there was no compulsion and life choices were up to the children.

Tara, the couple's firstborn, was first raised by her grandparents, in keeping with Inuvialuit tradition. She spoke Inuvialuktun with her grandparents and learned English later on while living with her birth parents. From her grandparents, Tara learned to live on the land by preparing food, sewing, and making fish nets. At times, Tara found it hard to learn from her grandparents. She became scared to make mistakes because she would have to undo her sewing and start over. As an adult, she realised that her grandparents' methods made her the good sewer she is now. Tara did well in school, despite being teased at times by other students. Some teachers also treated her rough and she started to lose interest in school. After finishing Grade 8, Tara got pregnant and started raising a family with her husband who had also gone to Mangilaluk School until Grade 9. Because his parents had not wanted him to go on to residential school, he started working at E. Gruben's Transportation and hunting for his family.

Both Tara and her husband regretted not having support to finish schooling. They therefore made a point of encouraging their children to go to school. Things changed, however, first when a teacher abused their son, and second when Tara's husband died in an accident. Tara now felt her family was at a disadvantage. She hoped her children would pursue higher education, this being the only way to become qualified for the jobs available. She believed that many local companies give preference to family and close friends when hiring. Thus, the best way for her children to get jobs would be for them to be better educated than the other applicants. Tara was especially concerned as she had been having health problems and was afraid that her children might not have enough social support to provide for themselves if she passed away.

After the father's accident, the oldest son graduated from high school, but the younger children found it hard to adjust. Lucas could not concentrate in school and Sophie got pregnant. Both eventually quit school and have since found it hard to "get back into things." The siblings spent some time with their grandparents on the land, but since Tara's death a few years ago they have not gone out on the land. Lucas and Sophie now live with their grandmother and have had trouble finding employment with Grade 10 schooling. They would like to find work and leave Tuktoyaktuk, but without a high school diploma or job training this might be difficult. Still, both of them remain optimistic that something will come up. Lucas would like to become a mechanic. He learned to fix engines from his father and is good at this line of work. Sophie would like to become a flight attendant and to "go places."

## **Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, two questions guided our research: 1) How do individuals negotiate between different ways of learning? and 2) Why do learning opportunities differ across family groups? In the following section, these questions are addressed at two levels. First, we will examine the family histories over time by discussing some of the differences and similarities between the grandparents, the parents, and the youth. Second, we will consider more deeply how youth negotiate between different and uneven learning opportunities across family lines. Specifically, we will describe the

ways in which learning is influenced by personal attitudes, aptitudes, and experiences, by parental and grandparental experiences and preferences, by extended family networks and community, and by the opportunities and expectations brought to Tuktoyaktuk via an increasingly globalised society.

At a basic level, the family histories reveal that going to school or learning the Inuvialuk way is a matter of individual choice. On the surface, students appear to have much autonomy in their decisions, as in Jane Ookpik's story. Since Jane believes schooling is needed to get ahead, she has graduated from high school and plans to pursue post-secondary education. For some, the choices are somewhat predetermined by individual aptitude, as shown by Toby, the boyfriend of Harriet Ookpik. Due to his reading difficulties, school became too stressful and eventually he dropped out. For some students, neither school nor land-based learning comes easy. The converse is true for James Nanuk, who has successfully graduated from high school and is continuing to learn the Inuvialuk way.

Choices are not, of course, made in a vacuum. The most significant influence is that of the family, particularly the parents. Their influence is evident to some degree in all family histories and across all generations. Examples extend from Henry Piangnaq preferring most of his children to learn on the land, instead of being sent to residential school, to his daughter, Kendra Piangnaq, not wanting her children to miss any school in order to spend time on the land. In some cases, family influences are deep and explicit, with youth reproducing attitudes and behaviours of close family members, as with Harriet Ookpik. Other youth are trailblazers, like Harriet's sister, Thea. She is the first person in the Ookpik family to graduate from school. Significantly, some succeeded in learning the Inuvialuk way or the school curriculum despite influences to the contrary. Grandparents, such as Andrea Piangnaq and Lisa Nanuk, talked about their limited choice to stay with parents or to go to school. Although Lisa Nanuk enjoyed school, she had to stop after three years because her parents wanted her to learn the Inuvialuit way. In contrast, Andrea Piangnaq learned Inuvialuit traditional knowledge from her husband and sister-in-law, as she had no opportunity to do so in childhood. In addition, family tragedies, such as the death of a family member, can greatly reduce the willingness and ability to continue in school or to go out on the land, as seen in the story of Sophie and Lucas Kingmingya.

A significant element is the extended family. In some cases, youth are more influenced by key members of their extended family, particularly grandparents. For example, James Nanuk, Matt Piangnaq, and Harriet Ookpik talked about the influence of a grandparent or cousins. Such strong kinship networks can also explain choices by youth not to learn, despite the best efforts of parents or family members. The push-pull of peer pressure also draws youth to things that are "more fun." For example, some youth do not want to miss out on activities in town or are peer-pressured to avoid on-the-land courses offered by Mangilaluk School (Salokangas 2009). Similarly, other peer-pressure issues, such as bullying, can limit the security of learning environments, as with many members of the Ookpik and Kingmingya families.

In addition, globalisation is influencing learning preferences. The world appears imminently accessible to many youth due to air travel, iPods, the Web, and satellite television. Such technologies have arguably influenced how and what youth want to learn, as with Harriet Ookpik. Similarly, global socio-economic changes in the region, including oil and gas exploration and development, are shaping the kinds of livelihood and learning that youth perceive to be important. Tuktoyaktuk continues to experience a resource boom, which favours truck drivers, rig workers, and employees in related services. In addition to the socio-economic challenges, the global oil and gas industry impacts the local environments that provide traditional foods. Although industrial development and land activities often seem to be at odds, the land claim settlement has ensured that in some instances growth in oil and gas development helps both the local economy and recognition and integration of Inuvialuit traditional knowledge. Hunters, for example, are being elected to co-management boards on behalf of their region or community to protect the environment and Inuvialuk traditions. Because the oil and gas companies must consult with the co-management boards, hunters can directly contribute to planning, while in some cases being rewarded with the prestige and benefits of “a travelling job.”

One key strength of the family histories is their multi-generational perspective. The older generation of grandparents had little opportunity to learn in school. Arguably, grandparents and parents, who spent several years in residential schools, suffered the greatest challenges in negotiating between life on the land and life in the community. For example, Barry Kingmingya found it challenging to learn the Inuvialuk way after being in residential school for several years. Parents, whose livelihoods still depended to a great extent living on the land, had to leave their children in residential schools in uncertain situations for months or sometimes years. Physical and mental abuse at some residential schools and Mangilaluk School weakened enthusiasm to learn in a formal setting and affected attitudes to formal education when these former students themselves became parents and had children in school. For youth today, there may be fewer risks and insecurities; however, the legacy of previous trauma remains very present in many families. Part of the challenge is to address the past, while at the same time imagining the future.

The Inuvialuit family histories help reveal the differential educational outcomes of individual youth. At the same time, they demonstrate how education can perpetuate or even worsen socio-economic inequities across family groups. If a family is strongly anchored in the political, traditional, and wage economies, it will envision more schooling and lucrative options for its young people and encourage them to seek higher education in order to come back and find wage employment. If a family struggles to be self-sufficient, it will see formal education as a means to “get out of the community” or to become better able to fight for the scarce jobs. Apparently, youth from secure economic backgrounds do leave small communities, simply because they have the educational qualifications and financial means to do so. This is in line with research elsewhere in Canada. People with higher education leave rural areas (Butler Flora et al. 2003), Aboriginal communities (Henson et al. 2005), and smaller Inuvialuit communities (Cliff 2008; Vodden 2001). As noted by Lehman (2007), educational

inequities tend to be self-reproducing; with more education, people are more likely to benefit from socio-economic opportunities and reinforce existing inequities within communities or regions. Such a trend may already be occurring in Tuktoyaktuk, as noted in statistics on income distribution from the Northwest Territories (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2009). If unresolved, the widening gap between “the haves and the have-nots” within the relatively small Inuvialuit population may lead to future social and political conflicts in the region.

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored the unevenness of learning opportunities among the Inuvialuit youth of Tuktoyaktuk and how they are influenced by individual choice and aptitudes, by parental and grandparental experiences and preferences, by extended family and community networks, and by an increasingly globalised society. These factors guide individuals as they negotiate between learning opportunities. For some, learning the “Inuvialuit way” has benefited them in their careers; for others, it has secured their role in the community when the schooling system has failed them. For others still, it has brought meaningful learning experiences with their kin, connection to their culture, food for the family and community, and income to the household (e.g., through the sale of sewn products). School learning is emphasised more nowadays than in the time of previous generations, and most youth dream of graduating from high school. Some of these dreams, however, will prove to be unrealistic if the education system continues to fail more students than it passes and if structural barriers to education remain in place. Although many youth want to move away and realise their dreams outside of Tuktoyaktuk, their educational and occupational paths continue to be bound to life, family, and economic opportunities in their home community. Many will end up following their parents and grandparents footsteps by learning traditional teachings from Inuvialuit family members, while being employed for local resource industries and related services. As children in Tuktoyaktuk continue to learn basic skills at school and Inuvialuit teachings at home, both places will need a safe and encouraging learning environment.

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our deepest thanks to the people who participated in the study and the support and guidance from community agencies: Tuktoyaktuk Community Corporation, Tuktoyaktuk Elders Committee, Tuktoyaktuk District Education Authority, Mangilaluk School, and Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk. The study was funded by the Aurora Research Institute and the Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada. We would like to thank Christopher Fletcher for some of the questions that contributed to this article, and two anonymous reviewers and the editor for their constructive comments. Any remaining weaknesses are our own.

## References

- ABRAHAMSON, G.  
1963 *Tuktoyaktuk - Cape Parry: an area economic survey, 1962*, Ottawa, Government of Canada, Northern Administration Branch, Industrial Division.
- AGRAWAL, Arun  
1995 Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge: Some Critical Comments, *Development and Change*, 26(3): 413-439.
- AIKENHEAD, Glen S.  
2006 Towards decolonizing the pan-Canadian science framework, *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education*, 6(4): 387-399
- ANDRES, Leslie, Paul ANISEF, Harvey KRAHN, Dianne LOOKER and Victor THIESSEN  
1999 The Persistence of Social Structure: Cohort, Class and Gender Effects on the Occupational Aspirations and Expectations of Canadian Youth, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2(3): 261-282.
- ANDRES, Lesley and Harvey KRAHN  
1999 Youth Pathways in Articulated Post-secondary Systems: Enrolment and Completion Patterns of Urban Young Women and Men, *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 29(1): 47-82.
- ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA  
2009 All Saints School – Aklavik, NWT (online at: <http://www.anglican.ca/rs/history/schools/all-saints-aklavik.htm>).
- AYLWARD, M. Lynn  
2007 Discourses of cultural relevance in Nunavut schooling, *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 22(7): 1-9.
- BATTISTE, Marie  
1998 Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a Decolonizing Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language and Education, *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 22(1): 16-27.
- BERGER, Paul  
2008 *Inuit visions for schooling in one Nunavut community*, PhD dissertation, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay.
- BUTLER FLORA, Cornelia, Jan L. FLORA and Susan FEY  
2003 *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, third edition, Boulder, Westview Press.
- 204/R. SALOKANGAS AND B. PARLEE**

- CLIFF, Amanda  
2008 *Planning for Community Health: A study of the Inuvialuit Region, NWT*, MA thesis, Waterloo, University of Waterloo.
- DEYHLE, Donna  
1992 Constructing failure and maintaining cultural identity: Navajo and Ute school leavers, *Journal of American Indian Education*, 31(2): 24-46.
- DIAND (DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT)  
1984 *Western Arctic Claim; the Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, Ottawa, Government of Canada.
- ICC, TCC and ACC (INUUVIK COMMUNITY CORPORATION, TUKTUUYAQTUUQ COMMUNITY CORPORATION and AKLARVIK COMMUNITY CORPORATION)  
2006 *Inuvialuit Settlement Region Traditional Knowledge Report*, submitted to the Mackenzie Project Environmental Group, Calgary.
- GOVERNMENT OF CANADA  
1996 *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Ottawa, Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- HENSON, Eric, Anna LEE and Luxman NATHAN  
2005 *Rural Wealth Building: Native Americans*, St. Louis, Washington University, Wealth Building in Rural America Project, CSD Working Paper (online at: <http://csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/WP05-42.pdf>).
- HENZE, Rosemary C. and Lauren VANETT  
1993 To Walk in Two Worlds: Or More? Challenging a Common Metaphor of Native Education, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24(2): 116-134.
- HORNETT, Danielle M.  
1990 Elementary-age tasks, cultural identity, and the academic performance of young American Indian children, *Action in Teacher Education*, 12(3): 43-49.
- HEPBURN, D. W.  
1963 Northern education: facade for failure, *The Journal of the Sociology Club*, University of Alberta, 2(1): 16-21.
- KRAHN, Harvey  
2004 Social class, post-secondary education, and occupational outcomes: Choose your parents well, in James E. Curtis, Edward E. Grabb, and Neil Guppy (eds.), *Social Inequality in Canada: Patterns, Problems, Policies*, fourth edition, Scarborough, Pearson and Prentice-Hall: 187-203.



LEHMAN, Wolfgang

2007 *Choosing to Labour? School-Work Transitions and Social Class*, Montréal, McGill-Queens University Press.

LIPKA, Jerry, Gerald V. MOHATT and the CIULISTET GROUP

1998 *Transforming the culture of schools: Yup'ik Eskimo examples*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

MACPHERSON, Norman John

1991 *Dreams & visions: Education in the Northwest Territories from early days to 1984*, Yellowknife, GNWT, Department of Education.

MARTIN, Jim

1991 *Strong Like Two People: The Development of a Mission Statement for the Dogrib Schools*, Rae-Edzo, Dogrib Divisional Board of Education.

MORRISON, David

2003 The Winds of Change Blow Hard: The Whaling Era, 1890-1910, in Ishamel Alunik, Eddie D. Kolausok and David Morrison, *Across Time and Tundra. The Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic*, Vancouver, Raincoast Books, Seattle, University of Washington Press, Gatineau, Canadian Museum of Civilization: 79-111.

MORRISON, David and Eddie D. KOLAUSOK

2003 Trappers, Traders and Herders, 1906-, in Ishamel Alunik, Eddie D. Kolausok and David Morrison, *Across Time and Tundra. The Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic*, Vancouver, Raincoast Books, Seattle, University of Washington Press, Gatineau, Canadian Museum of Civilization: 113-137.

NWT BUREAU OF STATISTICS

2009 *Tuktoyaktuk - Statistical Profile* (online at :<http://www.stats.gov.nt.ca/Profile/Profile%20PDF/Tuktoyaktuk.pdf>).

NWT EDUCATION

1991 *Inuvialuit Pitqusiit: The Culture of the Inuvialuit*, Yellowknife, GNWT, Department of Education.

OGBU, John U.

1982 Cultural Discontinuities and Schooling, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 13(4): 290-307.

POKIAK, Randal Boogie

2006 *Intervener Submission to the JRP*, written submission to the Joint Review Panel for the Mackenzie Gas Project, Tuktoyaktuk, September 15, 2006,

206/R. SALOKANGAS AND B. PARLEE

(online at: [http://www.ngps.nt.ca/Upload/Intervenors/Pokiak%20-%20Randal%20-%20citizen/060906\\_PokiakR\\_wrsup\\_Tuk\\_Sept15GH.pdf](http://www.ngps.nt.ca/Upload/Intervenors/Pokiak%20-%20Randal%20-%20citizen/060906_PokiakR_wrsup_Tuk_Sept15GH.pdf)).

SALOKANGAS, Raila

2005 *Views of the Inuvialuit on Sustainable Development in the Mackenzie Gas Project in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Northwest Territories, Canada*, BE thesis, Tampere Polytechnic, Tampere.

2009 *The Meaning of Education for Inuvialuit in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, Canada*, MSc thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

SCHLAG, Michelle

2004 *Engaging Inuvialuit Youth in Oceans Stewardship: A Proposed Strategy*, MSc thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

SMITH, Graham Hingangaroa

1991 *Reform & Kaupapa Maori Crisis: A Grand Illusion*, keynote speech presented at Post Primary Teachers Association Curriculum Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, May 1991.

STAIRS, Arlene

1995 *Learning Processes and Teaching Roles in Native Education: Cultural Base and Cultural Brokerage*, in Marie Battiste and Jean Barman (ed.), *First nations education in Canada: the circle unfolds*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press: 139-153.

STIFFARM, Lenore

1998 *As We See It... Aboriginal Pedagogy*, Saskatoon, University of Saskatoon, Extension Press.

VODDEN, Keith

2001 *Inuvialuit Final Agreement Economic Measures: Evaluation Report*, prepared for Evaluation Working Group, DIAND, IRC, GNWT, in fulfillment of Project #99/10.

WILLIAMSON, Karla Jessen

1987 *Consequences of Schooling: Cultural Discontinuity Amongst the Inuit*, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 14(2): 60-69.

WILSON, Peggy

1992 *Trauma in transition*, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 19(1): 46-56.

WOTHERSPOON, Terry

2004 *The Sociology of Education in Canada: Critical Perspectives*, second edition, Don Mills, Oxford University Press.