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Jane P. Preston

University of Prince Edward Island, jpreston@upei.ca

Tim R. Claypool

University of Saskatchewan

William Rowluck

University of Saskatchewan

Brenda Green

Saskatoon Public School Division

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Exploring the Concepts of Traditional Inuit Leadership and Effective School Leadership in Nunavut (Canada)

Explorer les concepts de leadership Inuit traditionnel et le leadership éducatif efficace, à Nunavut (Canada)

Jane Preston, University of Prince Edward Island
Tim R. Claypool, University of Saskatchewan
William Rowluck, University of Saskatchewan
Brenda Green, Saskatoon Public School Division

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to document how educators living in Nunavut communities describe traditional Inuit leadership and effective school leadership. The data for this qualitative study were 24 semi-structured interviews, representing 14 teachers, vice-principals, and principals from Nunavut. Findings revealed that traditional Inuit leadership was about promoting the personal leadership skills, interests, and/or abilities of each community member, and it often involved Elders who fostered the linguistic, social, cultural, and spiritual wellness of students and school staff. Participants depicted an effective school leader to be someone who promoted teamwork. Also, participants indicated that effective school leaders were community and people-focused. The findings of this study align the *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ)* principles, which incorporate important features of the Inuit worldview.

Résumé

Le but de cet article est de documenter la manière dont un groupe d'éducateurs vivant dans des communautés Inuites à travers le Nunavut (Canada) décrit à la fois le leadership traditionnel des Inuits et le leadership scolaire efficace. Les données de cette étude qualitative comprenaient 24 entretiens semi-structurés, impliquant 14 enseignants, directeurs-adjoints et directeurs d'école de Nunavut. Les résultats ont révélé que le leadership traditionnel Inuit concernait la promotion des compétences personnelles de leadership, des intérêts, et/ou des capacités de chaque membre de la communauté, et souvent cela impliquait les Aînés qui favorisaient le bien-être linguistique, social, culturel et spirituel des élèves et du personnel scolaire. Les participants ont décrit le leader scolaire efficace comme étant quelqu'un qui promeut le travail d'équipe. Le leadership scolaire efficace était axé sur la communauté et sur les personnes. Les résultats de cette étude s'alignent avec une vision du monde des Inuits qui accorde une grande valeur sur les relations et le concept de l'holisme.

Keywords: Inuit tradition, Inuit leadership, school leadership; *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ)* principles

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Introduction

About 10,000 years ago, bands of Siberian nomadic hunters crossed the Bering Strait; then, approximately 5,000 years later, these hunters traveled to what is now Northern Canada to become the first Inuit people of Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC], 2005). Fast-forward several millennia, Statistics Canada (2013) documented that 59,445 people in Canada self-identify as Inuit. This amount represents 0.2% of Canada's overall population. About half of total Inuit populace of Canada (i.e., 27,070 people) lives in Nunavut, which, in 1999, became Canada's third territory (Statistics Canada, 2013). Nunavut is located in the Eastern Canadian Arctic and represents almost one-fifth of Canada's entire land mass (INAC, 2005). In Inuktitut (the Inuit language), the word *Inuit* means "the people." Herein, the term *Aboriginal* refers to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada. The Canadian *Constitution Act, 1982* recognizes these three groups as the First Peoples of Canada who, for millennia, inhabited geographical regions across the nation.¹

The purpose of this article is to document how a group of educators living in Nunavut communities described traditional Inuit leadership and effective school leadership. This research is important for many reasons. Across Canada, the high school completion rate is approximately 52% for First Nations students (Richards, 2008) and 46% for Nunavut students (Nunatsiaq News, 2012), compared to 82% for non-Aboriginal students (Richards, 2008). These low Aboriginal graduation rates reflect the need for change. Achieving equitable levels of educational success will increase the wellbeing and economic welfare of Aboriginal peoples. Past research supports the concept that a principal's leadership skills and acumen are key mechanisms to improve student performance (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004); however, there is a stark absence of research about effective school leadership practices imbued with an Inuit worldview. Herein, we addressed that void and describe effective leadership practices via an Inuit worldview. In promulgating our results, we hope to inform and influence school leaders about a type of leadership that focuses on relationships and the concept of holism. We believe leaders who embody at least some aspects of an Inuit style of leadership support the academic success and wellbeing of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Background: Inuit Culture and Leadership

The Inuit culture is reliant upon the ever-giving bounty of the land. To Inuit, the land infers all of nature—the earth, water, ice, wind, sky, plants, and animals (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007). Kuniliusie (2015) stated that the Inuit respect for the land is "immeasurable" (p. 58). Pirjuaq (as cited by Putulik, 2015) explained that the traditional Inuit lifestyle was reflective of the four seasons. In the winter, the Inuit traveled by dog teams and tradition boats (*umiaq*); in the summer, the kayak (*qajaq*) was used (Kuniliusie, 2015; Ittusardjuat, 2015). In the fall, caribou offered food, clothing, and tools, and seals provided oil (i.e., rendered seal fat) to cook food and heat the living space (Ittusardjuat, 2015). In general, the spring to fall were times to hunt and travel, and "winter was a time to spend with the family, tell stories, play games, and learn about Inuit oral history and Inuit legends" (Alberta Education, 2006, ¶2). Also associated with the land-reverent lifestyle, gender roles or "gender balance" (Kuniliuse, 2015, p. 59) were stark, important features. The men hunted caribou, seal, migratory birds, and other regional animals; the women cooked, sewed, and cared for the children (Ittusardjuat, 2015; Pitsiulak, 2015). Inuit values involved sharing food, sharing possessions, caring for family, and cooperating with each other

¹ A term often associated with Aboriginal is Indigenous. Indigenous is a phrase commonly found within international discourse, discussions, and protocol agreements (McMillan & Yellowhorn, 2004).

(Ittusardjuat, 2015; Kuniliusie, 2015). Owljoot (2008) indicated, for the most part, the Inuit continue to live according to traditional values. They cherish the time spent on the land, enjoy eating natural foods, and appreciate time spent with family, friends, and relatives.

With regard to Inuit culture, Elders played and continue to play an important role. Arnaquq (2015) stated that traditional Inuit camp leaders were reliable, hospitable, and fair in their daily dealings and treatment of other people. Kuniluisie (2015) explained that these decision-makers commonly represented males, who demonstrated leadership via their wisdom and knowledge. Because many people within the camp lived in such an honorable fashion, there was more than just one leader or Elder in the camp. Leon (2012) described Elders as leaders, consultants, and teachers. They are historians, philosophers, professors, and knowledge keepers of tradition and heritage (Owljoot, 2008).

It is important to note that conversations pertaining to the definition or roles of an Elder are neither simplistic nor uniform. As Battiste (2002) explained:

Within any Indigenous nation or community, people vary greatly in what they know. There are not only differences between ordinary folks and experts, such as experienced knowledge keepers, healers, hunters, or ceremonialists, there are also major differences of experiences and professional opinion among the knowledge holders and workers, as we should expect of any living, dynamic knowledge system that is continually responding to new phenomena and fresh insight. (p. 12)

When describing referring to the role of Elders, Arnaquq (2015) reminded readers, “It is easy to paint a picture with one broad stroke and assume that all Inuit have experienced things the same way” (p. 12). In turn, it is important to highlight the roles and responsibilities of Inuit Elders vary among Aboriginal communities and its people.

Although each Aboriginal group in Canada (e.g., First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) expresses its culture in unique ways, simultaneously, a similar worldview is held by many Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada and North America. A worldview is lens or filter through which one perceives and interprets the world. With regard to an Aboriginal worldview, most Aboriginal peoples view themselves via a relation with the natural environment. In two simple words, the Aboriginal worldview is one of *interconnected wholeness*, or, as succinctly stated by Atleo (2004), “Everything is one” (p. xi). Relationships, spirituality, and the expression of traditional values are at the heart of an Aboriginal view of life. The notion of holism is also reflected in an Aboriginal perspective of learning and education. For example, the *Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* depicts the journey of life as being a circular linkage of formal and informal learning through self, the stages of life, one’s culture, and a connection with *sila* (the spirit of nature) (Canadian Council on Learning, n.d.).

Specifically, with regard to an Inuit worldview, in 2007 a document entitled, “Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ): Educational Framework for Nunavut Curriculum” was published by the Nunavut Department of Education, (2007). Within the document, Inuit Elders articulated the beliefs, values, skills, and knowledge that are components of a traditional and modern Inuit way of life. Elders advised that these IQ principles be incorporated into every school, classroom, and subject lesson. These eight concepts include: showing respect for others, developing collaborative relationships, promoting environmental stewardship, developing knowledge and skill acquisition, being resourceful, promoting consensus decision-making, and serving others. These principles, in turn, are important features when contemplating unique components of Inuit leadership.

Many authors reveal that there are also fundamental features imbued within an Aboriginal style of leadership. For example, Deloria (1994) indicated that, among American Indian² tribes, leadership was based on relationships and kinship responsibilities; leaders were chosen via their service to the community. Leon (2012) believed that strong Aboriginal leadership is dependent on four key points—interaction with the land, promotion of language and culture, promotion of family, and community service. Other authors describe how Aboriginal leadership is akin to transformative leadership, which is rooted in collective values and co-determined outcomes aimed at social equality and change, when needed (Benham & Murakami, 2013; Leon, 2012). Somewhat similar to the concept of servant leadership (Sergiovanni, 2013), Aboriginal leadership is about attending to the community's needs, above individual needs (Julien, Wright, & Zinni, 2010). Other authors expound that solid Aboriginal leadership is about incorporating consensus as a form of decision-making (Bennett & Rowley, 2004), promoting harmonious relationships (McKinley, Brayboy, & Maughan, 2009; King, 2008), and incorporating spirituality into one's beliefs and actions (Felicity, 1999). Gardner (2012) and Pidgeon (2012) epitomized Aboriginal leadership through four words: relevance, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity. An overarching feature of Aboriginal leadership is that it is related to the concept of holism—the belief that all things are related, and one's actions are connected to living and non-living things everywhere.

Styles of Aboriginal leadership are also documented many international documents. The Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council (APAPDC), primarily through a project entitled, *Dare to Lead* (Purdie & Wilkinson, 2008), offered a list of strategies for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal principals to use to support Aboriginal student success. This guide list focuses on engagement with Aboriginal students, families, and communities. It draws attention to the fact that school leaders need to direct effort and attention to student attendance, literacy, completion, transition. It also stipulates that this leadership must promote appropriate curricula, school structure, and pedagogy aligned with the needs of Aboriginal learners. Additional Australian research has spotlighted that school leaders need to promote partnerships between the school and Aboriginal peoples/communities and promote professional development about Aboriginal culture and ways of knowing for staff (Lovett, Dempster, & Fluckinger, 2013). Within New Zealand, research indicates that a combination of effective, open, and responsive school leadership, alongside well designed and planned family engagement has great potential to change educational outcomes for Māori student in mainstream settings (Education Review Office, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Research Methodology, Participants, and Data Analysis

Our qualitative research is grounded in the belief that people construct meaning from individualized life experiences (Patton, 2015). To gain an understanding of the perspectives, beliefs, and realities of participants in a way that honours the unique lived experiences, we conducted this qualitative research under a constructivist framework. The constructivist framework assumes a pluralist ontology, which endorses that multiple realities of an experience simultaneously exist among people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015). With regard to epistemology, the constructivist standpoint supports that knowledge is subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015) and socially constructed (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In turn, the results of this study do not represent a set of objective results; instead, they are the co-creation of

² Although the word “Indian” is not a term that is politically correct within Canada, within the United States, it is a phrase that is sometimes used to describe the Indigenous peoples of that country.

the subjective views of the participants combined with the researcher team’s understandings of participant views.

Our research involved conducting 24 semi-structured individual interviews with 14 educators living in Nunavut, Canada. Participants represented teachers, vice-principals, and principals and, at the time of data collection, possessed from five years to a lifetime of experience living and/or teaching in Nunavut. To find participants for our study, we used purposeful sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015). First, we sent invitations to principals of all schools located in Nunavut. One of the researchers also sent additional invitations to Nunavut vice-principals she personally knew. She also sent invitations to Nunavut teachers whom she knew aspired to assume educational leadership positions, a point reflected by the fact that these teachers were enrolled in a Masters of Education in Leadership program. In turn, 14 participants volunteered for the study. Of this group, eight were principals, two were vice-principals, and four were teachers. Four participants were Inuit and 10 were non-Inuit. Originally, we planned to interview each participant two times; however, due to time and geographical restraints, some participants were interviewed once. In the end, nine participants were interviewed two times, and five participants were interviewed one time. Eight of these participants were female, and six participants were male. Nine interviews were conducted in person, 13 interviews were conducted over the phone, and the equivalent of two interviews were completed via written answers to the interview questions. Please see Table 1 for an overview of participant details.

Table 1: *Participant Description*

Pseudonym	Position	Gender	# of Interviews	Inuit / Non-Inuit
Becky	Principal	F	2	Inuit
Lucas	Principal	M	2	Inuit
Isabel	Principal	M	2	Non-Inuit
Evelyn	Principal	M	2	Non-Inuit
Jack	Principal	F	2	Non-Inuit
Neil	Principal	M	2	Non-Inuit
Chloe	Principal	F	1	Non-Inuit
Anna	Principal	F	1	Non-Inuit
Henry	Vice-Principal	M	1	Non-Inuit
Owen	Vice-Principal	M	1	Non-Inuit
Amelia	Teacher	F	1	Inuit
Kylie	Teacher	F	2	Inuit
Grace	Teacher	F	2	Non-Inuit
Steve	Teacher	M	2	Non-Inuit

Griffiee (2005) reminds researchers that raw data, such as interview transcripts, do not by themselves reveal meaning; rather, transcripts must be interpreted. In an effort to create meaning, the researchers read each participant’s interview in its entirety, gaining familiarity with its overall content. Then each interview was reread, but more systematically, to create categories of key ideas, phrases, commonalities, differences, and patterns that were embedded in the transcripts (Stake 2005). At this point, we read and reread the information and converged the multiple

categorical themes into larger theme(s) in response to the research purpose (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). As applied to our research, first, we read the 24 transcripts, equating to approximately 400 pages (single-spaced, Time New Roman, font 12) of data. With our research question (i.e., to document how educators living in Inuit communities describe traditional Inuit leadership and effective school leadership) driving our analysis, we reread the transcripts again in an attempt to answer that question. As we read the words of participants, ideas about community, Elder spirit, Elder knowledge, culture, teamwork, and people-focus were overarching concepts threaded throughout the majority of participant comments. We then divided the collection of comments that emerged under each of these emerged themes to traditional Inuit leadership and school leadership.

Researcher Identity

Smith (2012) explained that, for many Aboriginal peoples, universities are elite institutions, which “reproduce themselves” (p. 132) through tiers of group privilege. Upon entering this intimidating system, many Aboriginal students discover no space or place for their culture or perspectives. In turn, some Aboriginal students find this environment “toxic” (Smith, 2012, p. 134). Moreover, Battiste (2008) argued that an additional contention of this institutionalized structure is non-Aboriginal scholars conducting research on Aboriginal issues. Battiste and Henderson Youngblood (2000) believed that Aboriginal people should control their own knowledge, do their own research, and, if Aboriginal people enter a research with non-Aboriginal researchers, the research project should benefit Aboriginal communities and cultures, not just the researchers and their institutions. In organizing and conducting this study, we were mindful of these Aboriginal research ethics.

To promote the transparency of this research, we present our identity. Two of the four authors were not Aboriginal (i.e., Jane Preston [Prince Edward Island] and Tim Claypool [Saskatchewan]); however, Preston experienced in-depth Medicine Wheel teachings, participated in many Aboriginal sacred ceremonies (e.g., sweats, smudging, etc.), and had taught a postsecondary course in Nunavut prior to conducting this research. Brenda Green (Wahpeton Dakota First Nation, Saskatchewan) was the research collaborator for the study. She offered the research team the knowledge, experience, and personal connections with Aboriginal principals and communities, increasing the trustworthiness and dissemination of the study. William Rowluck (Lytton First Nation, British Columbia) was an Aboriginal graduate student who provided their Aboriginal knowledge and academic skills during most stages of the research and who helped during the face-to-face interviewing of participants. Moreover, aligned with Aboriginal methodologies, for data analysis, we consulted an Aboriginal Elder who helped the researchers understand fundamental aspects of an Aboriginal worldview. This consultancy lasted for the duration of one day (about 6 hours). The researchers discussed the research findings with the Elder who listened and provided suggestions about the importance of specific findings.

Thematic Findings

In addressing the purpose of this study, herein, we describe both traditional forms of Inuit leadership and effective aspects of school leadership. As indicated below, both descriptions of leadership were grounded in and/or by rich relationships and communal wellness.

Traditional Inuit Leadership

With regard to traditional Inuit leadership, at its core, participants believed this concept was about fostering healthy communities by promoting the personal leadership skills, interests, and/or abilities of individual community members. Participants explained that traditional Inuit leadership was embodied through Elders and the way they fostered the linguistic, social, and spiritual wellness of student and school staff. Elder leadership was also the oral and physical dissemination of knowledge and culture. It embodied patience and promoted skill development of others. Below, these findings are explicated.

A sense of community. When asking participants to describe Inuit leadership, most responses were imbued with the concept of community or a sense of collectiveness. Simply, Kylie described this Inuit leadership as “communal.” Isabel indicated, “When it comes to Inuit leadership, it’s not one person. It’s people.” She explained that Inuit people tend to recognize the strengths of each individual person and call upon that person to lead when his/her specific skill is in need:

You want to encourage people to take leadership roles, but you have to do it in a respectful way and in a manner that you offer a safe accepting environment. You really have to work in that relationship and that avenue to really open it up, so somebody wants to come forward.

Evelyn had a similar depiction of Inuit leadership. She said, “Inuit leadership is about having the person who has the skill in a certain area step forward . . . So it’s a more fluid type of leadership. It depends on the need at the moment.” Steve believed that traditional Inuit leadership was about recognizing that “everyone in the community has an obligation to be a leader,” and the sum of these individual forms of leadership created a well-led community.

Becky added to the discussion by explaining that each member of a community has a responsibility to recognize the leadership potential and skills of fellow community members. She explained that the same holds true in a school context, where teachers are responsible for spotting the leadership potential of students. She provided an example:

I listen to these Grade 12s talking about, for example . . . why it is important for our seals to be sold and what it means for the community. Then I watch them do the presentations. I see such great leaders not just in education, but in the areas of wildlife, in different areas. You know who is going to be a mother. You can almost see them what their future will be.

Becky continued by saying that not only do educators need to recognize leadership potential in their students, the youth need to recognize leadership within each other. On the topic of student leadership, Becky said, “It’s very important that the older students see the younger children and that the younger children see the older ones.” In turn, promoting the leadership potential within a community is about observing and calling upon the gifts that are housed within every member of the community, and this process starts early in life.

Elder leadership: Social and spiritual. When referring to traditional Inuit leadership, many participants referred to Elders. Steve identified Elders as leaders who provided direction for families and direction for the community. However, he specified:

[Elder leadership is] not a mayor, it’s not a president, or anything like that. It is more of a collective group of Elders who have that respect of the youth, and it is not about ruling with an iron fist. It’s just the way they go about living their daily lives. It’s more about how to conduct themselves and what their expectations are for the community.

Participants believed that Elders fostered the social and spiritual wellness of youth. Evelyn spoke about the calming, peaceful presence of Elders. She explained, in her school, Elders helped students who were aggressive, fighting, and/or bickering with other students. She explained how the leadership of Elders often brought peace to such a situation:

Then the children who were involved came. It would be sort of like a restitution circle led by the Elder. I always found those kinds of things beautiful. The Elder would know the families, and you could see the dispute dissolve. The Elder would say, “You know, I think you guys are related. You shouldn’t be fighting. You shouldn’t ostracize this person.”

Becky also referred to how Elder leadership addressed the social and spiritual needs of some students. She said often teachers cannot spend quality time with students who have specialized social needs; however, when these students “spend an hour with the Elder making little carvings or making little mitts, and they talk to the children about social issues,” many of the spiritual needs of these students are met. Becky believed that time spent with the Elders is a great resource for students. In Grace’s school, “The kids go up to the Elder’s room . . . and they have been beading, sewing, and doing traditional stuff.” Grace believed time students spending time with Elder was a way of teaching and retaining Inuit culture. In all these examples, Elder leadership addressed the linguistic, social, cultural, and/or spiritual domains of the student. Kylie believed that such school leadership is in great need. She also said that she was empathetic to the workload of some of the Elders, because “a lot of these Elders are supporting a lot of children.”

Elder leadership: Dissemination of knowledge, language, and culture. Another feature of Elder leadership is the oral dissemination of knowledge and the Inuktitut language. Anna recognized the important role that Elders play in her school when she said, “We invite in the Elders, and we do all sorts of activities in Inuktitut.” She also said, “[Elders] come and teach us drumming.” Jack viewed Elders as knowledge holders: “There were no written things, nothing, no library. Since every Elder was the library, everything was orally transmitted to the generations. So it is like if an Elder dies in Nunavut that means a library is burned.” Neil talked about cultural days at his school, which involved Elders disseminating their knowledge and wisdom. Neil said the Elders help supervise students and only speak to students in Inuktitut. Elders explain how the Inuit survived throughout the seasons, how to make an igloo, and other culture aspects of existence with the land.

The knowledge and wisdom embodied within Elders was not just available to students. Many participants explained that their own teacher, vice-principal, or principal professional development sometimes involved spending time with Elders. For example, Henry said, “We go on day trips as a staff and have an Elder teach us.” Owen said that, with the help of Elders, he went out on the land, learned to build traditional igloos, and learned about skinning animals. Lucas believed the leadership offered by Elders is invaluable and said, “I would like an Elder in each school as a resource person, advisor, and instructor to assist teachers. Elders are walking encyclopedias.”

Elder leadership: Patience and skill development. A final feature of Elder leadership was about being a patient teacher, who promotes the development of skills within students. Becky indicated that Elders stress the virtue of “*pilimmaksarniq*—it’s the development of skills through effort, practice, and action. There’s a huge stress in this for Inuit. That’s why we are very keen on observation and most of the things we do is through observation.” Isabel explained this concept further:

Around here there is a lot of this attitude when you are younger, you don't do everything right away. You watch, you observe, and, when you are ready, then you do it. So, there is a timespan or progression of "I've seen it. I've seen it. I've seen it." Now I am going to try to do it. Now, I am good at it. So, it depends on where you grew up. It depends on if you are male or female. It depends on a lot of things.

Evelyn described the common features of Inuit learning and skill-building and said:

It's not the traditional way of learning. You watch, and you watch, and you watch, and then once you know how to do it, then you do it. So that's why I think it's important to be patient and let the learning unfold as it will or as it should and just encourage, that's the core of me I think.

Participants explained that Elders model such patience and provide safe opportunities for students to observe, observe, practice, and perfect.

Effective School Leadership

With regard to effective school leadership, at its core, participants depicted an effective school leader as someone who promoted collaborative efforts of staff and students. Like traditional Inuit leadership, school leadership was community- and people-focused. Details about these findings follow.

Teamwork: When asking Nunavut educators to describe features of strong school leadership within a Nunavut context, the topic of cooperation and teamwork surfaced. Amelia said, "In the institutional sense, I would stay it [effective leadership] is someone who makes an effort with the team to complete a task ... Good educational leadership, it's teamwork [and] collaboration." As a school principal, Evelyn valued the importance of collaboration among staff. She explained that early in the year, she would organize professional development sessions aimed at establishing and supporting relationship among staff members. She referred to this professional development as "team building." Becky explained how she tried to promote a team spirit among her staff. She said, "So I try to include the whole staff to help each other. I will just say, 'Who has good material on flowers, because our theme is flowers. Who would like to share it? Thank you so much.'" Lucas promoted teamwork and a sense of community among the staff by bringing food to the staff room, therein promote socializing among staff. On this point he said, "I would bring in country food anytime I could to encourage staff so they are happy at the workplace."

Chloe described effective leadership as a type of shared leadership or teamwork where she, as the principal, invited staff to experience leadership by encouraging them to lead various projects associated with the school. Henry's description of effective school leadership was similar. He said that an effective school leader empowers his/her staff members by being their advocate and support. Henry said, "If someone wants to run with something, we really support that and say go for it."

People- and community-focused. The participants' perceptions about effective school leadership aligned with similar comments they relayed about traditional Inuit leadership. For example, as indicated above, Inuit leadership was about recognizing and calling upon the specialized leadership skills of individual people. With regard to school leadership, Isabel said, "Everyone plays a part in the leadership of the school." Isabel also explained that effective school leadership was knowing when to call on which person. On this point, she said,

It's [effective school leadership] about knowing your staff and knowing the level to which they might be comfortable doing something they have to lead. You had to set it up in a way that is inviting and so that people want to take that leadership role. But it's something you have work at with your staff. It is not something that can develop overnight. It goes back to the whole relationship thing again.

Isabel explained that calling upon the leadership skills of others simultaneously had potential to enrich relationships with these people.

Other participants believed that, as the school leader, effective school leadership was about being a positive role model through one's acts and attitude. Evelyn said, "I tried to work alongside them, and I wouldn't ask them to do anything that I wasn't ready to do myself. Leading by example is important." Lucas said, "The most effective tool that I have is to model my positive attitude throughout the day to all who come through the school doors. Positive attitude is contagious." For Neil, it was important that he was a friendly person, so that teachers felt comfortable approaching him if something was upsetting them.

The responses of many participants addressed the idea that effective school leadership is about establishing effective relationships within the entire school community. For example, Jack described his style of leadership as "democratic," whereby he invited the staff in the decision-making process. Other teacher participants explained how his/her leadership in the classroom was associated to the concept of community. Owen stated, "We're all in the community together, and when someone has success, we all have it together. When someone is hurting, we all hurt together." Kylie explained, if a teacher wants to be an effective leader in the school, he/she needs to foster a sense of community. To do so, the teacher has "to know the kids—all the kids [in the school]—not just your classroom kids" (Kylie). For Grace, part of being an effective teacher leader was helping to ensure that everyone in the school is working together. She added, "There is not society on the face of the earth that would ever survive if we didn't work together." For Steve, strong teacher leadership was about building relationships and trust among students and parents. He said, "If you are unable to build a strong relationship with the student and parent ... it is going to be very difficult for an educator to get concepts and educate them in a meaningful way."

Discussion

Theoretical features of this research are promoted through a discussion about how the Inuit worldview aligns with aspects of effective leadership as described above. An Inuit worldview incorporates the idea that life revolves around the outdoors (*sila*) or the spirit of nature (National Committee on Inuit Education, 2011). Every living thing, including animals and the land, has spirit; everything is alive, everything is equal, and the land is sacred (Simpson, 2000). A prosperous, fulfilled life involves fostering strong relationships with all things, with all spirits. For the Inuit, these relationships are maintained by observing four core laws: working for the common good, being respectful of all living things, maintaining harmony, and continually preparing for a better future (Nunavut Department of Education, 2007).

Inuit Elders have provided details about the four fundamental laws of relationships. As mentioned previously the eight Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) principles articulate the essence of Inuit values. These core values (see Table 2 below) are to be incorporated into all Nunavut school settings and within every Nunavut classroom.

Table 2 *Eight Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit (IQ) Principles*

Principle	Meaning
Inuuqatigiitsiarniq	• showing respect and caring for others
Tunnganarniq	• being welcoming, open, and inclusive
Piliriqatigiigni	• developing collaborative relationships to work together for a common purpose
Avatimik	• promoting environmental stewardship
Kamattiarniq	
Pilimmaksarniq	• knowledge and skill acquisition
Qanuqtuurunarniq	• being resourceful to solve problems
Aajiqatigiiniq	• consensus decision-making
Pijitsirniq	• serving

Source: Nunavut Department of Education, 2007.

With regard to the findings of this research, both the Inuit laws of relationships reflected through the IQ principles align, for the most part, with how participants described traditional Inuit leadership and effective school leadership. Participants explained that traditional Inuit leadership was about welcoming, inviting, respecting, and using the skills of community members to address the needs of the community. This finding, in itself overlaps with essence of all eight IQ, especially Tunnganarniq (welcoming), Piliriqatigiigni (collaborative relationships), Pilimmaksarniq (knowledge and skill acquisition) and Pijitsirniq (serving). Traditional Elder leadership embodied social and spiritual relationships with youth. In other words, traditional leadership is about embodying a mutual caring, respectful attitude (Inuuqatigiitsiarniq—respect) between Elders and youth (Piliriqatigiigni—collaborative relationships). Elder leadership was also about disseminating knowledge, language, and culture and promoting patience and skill development in others (Pilimmaksarniq—skill and knowledge acquisition). As well, the aspects that participants perceived as traditional Inuit leadership align with how the Inuit worldview values relationships, maintaining harmony, and continually preparing for a better future.

With regard to identifying traits of effective school leadership, participants explained that teamwork, a focus on promoting and using the dominant skills of people, and a focus on promoting community wellbeing were important. This finding relates to the Inuit/Aboriginal idea that everything is connected. This interconnectedness is, essentially, the Aboriginal concept of holism. Holism is a notion that whole of anything is greater than the sum of its parts. This point infers that the individual pieces of any system or organization (or, in the case of this study, a school community), neither can exist nor be fully understood unless each piece is related to the functioning of the entire structure. This living environment remains healthy via its web of relations, a concept that aligns with the Inuit culture and its laws of relationships. Participants also believed that effective school leadership was about promoting the forté of each individual in the school, whether it be principal, teacher, or students. Participants believed effective leadership was about working as a team, where the leader was a role model for the team. The findings indicates that an effective school leader is a servant leader, which essentially is the Pijitsirniq IQ principle. As well, an effective school leader promotes rich relationships among all members of the school community. This idea mirrors, the concept of Piliriqatigiigni—developing collaborative relationships for a common purpose. In sum, the participant descriptions of traditional Inuit leadership and effective school leadership align with an Inuit worldview and the IQ principles.

Consistent with other Aboriginal holistic models, the Inuit traditionally view education as a lifespan occurrence. While taking many forms, the cyclical nature of the Inuit people's learning

journey draws on a combination of informal and formal settings. The former refers to home and the land, while the latter refers to the classroom as well as the community (Canadian Council on Learning, n.d.). As a result, the range of learning opportunities is as vast as the arctic landscape. A savvy leader would be mindful of the significant role that family members and Elders play in their students' education. Creating climates of collaboration and community within the formal structures of a school setting mimics the interconnectedness and interdependencies inherent in the somewhat harsh, yet always bountiful, Arctic terrain.

Conclusion

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) indicated that, within the next generation, educational stakeholders need to identify and alleviate the educational achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. An answer to this call is key to enriching the wellness of school communities. Any society is enriched and enhanced when attention is paid to the exploited and less privileged within the community. Investing in change is not only a call for increased funding or more equitable allocation of existing funds, but it involves an improvement to leadership and/or leadership focus so that social justice is seen, felt, and heard across every school community across Canada. In order to do so, in particular, there is a need for non-Aboriginal school leaders to cultivate a professional intercultural identity, which incorporates the values, languages, and worldview of Aboriginal perspectives (Fredericks, Maynor, White, English, & Ehrich, 2014). Rhea (2014) addressed the topic of effective school leadership for Aboriginal students by explaining that educational policymakers, principals, teachers, parents, and community members cooperatively need to promote Aboriginal education within a postcolonial world. This point is supported by Berger, Epp, and Møller (2006)'s research where they stated that the clash between contemporary Inuit culture and a colonized school culture contribute to poor student performance and attendance among some Inuit students. In contrast, our research highlights success stories and the need to create a positive template for future leaders who have the courage to make a difference in line with aspects of an Inuit worldview. However, we recognize that much more progress needs to be made in this area. For example, how can consensus decision-making (aajiqatigiiniq) be aligned with modern bureaucratic organization such as Ministries of Education and within a colonial school system that distinguishes the school principal as an ultimate decision-making person for the entire school? This question is extremely important and needs to be addressed in future studies.

As a closing remark, education for Inuit children was traditionally provided by parents, grandparents, and Elders. When Europeans forcefully brought this method of education to an end through implementing the residential school system, the Inuit forms of knowledge transfer was sacrificed. Education entered into a no-man's land with little direction, inadequate resources, and a fractured family support network. What is promising is that our research is demonstrating that educational leaders who formerly held an office to separate children from their community are intentionally trying to reverse that pattern. Leaders from Inuit communities are working with many non-Inuit school leaders in spite of the negative effects of past colonization efforts. The strongest indicators of a mutually beneficial educational relationship is emerging from many non-Inuit principals who are engaging and adopting Inuit values in an effort to provide education to Inuit children.

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Jane P. Preston is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. In addition to Aboriginal issues, she conducts research in the areas of educational leadership, rural education, parent involvement in school, and mentorship in education.

Timothy R. Claypool is an Associate Professor and Department Head in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. As a registered psychologist, his professional and research interests extend into the areas of health and wellness while maintaining a primary focus on promoting positive outcomes for Indigenous students.

William Rowluck is a member of the Nlaka'Pamux Nation and his home community is Lytton First Nation, British Columbia. William currently lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan with his wife, Michelle, and three children Emma, Jude, and Caleb.

Brenda Green is a member of the Wahpeton Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan. She works as a Superintendent of Education for the Saskatoon Public School Division.