

### INUNNGUINIQ: CARING FOR CHILDREN THE INUIT WAY



At the heart and soul of Inuit culture are our values, language, and spirit. These made up our identity and enabled us to survive and flourish in the harsh Arctic environment. In the past, we did not put a word to this; it was within us and we knew it instinctively. Then, we were alone in the Arctic but now, in two generations, we have become part of the greater Canadian and world society. We now call the values, language, and spirit of the past *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000)

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#### Defining Inunnguiniq

*Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)* describes Inuit worldview.<sup>1</sup> It is a holistic way of being interconnected in the world and is based in four big laws or *maligait*. These include working for the common good, maintaining balance and harmony, respecting all living things, and continually planning and preparing for the future (Government of Nunavut, 2007). Contained within the conceptual philosophy of *IQ* are several processes which have sustained the Inuit culture over generations. *Inunnguiniq* is, perhaps, the most important of these as it is the process of socialization and education described within the cultural context that supports

it. *Inunnguiniq* is literally translated as “the making of a human being.” The cultural expectation is that every child will become able/enabled/capable so that they can be assured of living a good life. A good life is considered one where you have sufficient proper attitude and ability to be able to contribute to working for the common good—helping others and making improvements for those to come. As such, it describes culturally situated ethical and social/behavioural expectations, specific competencies and skill sets, and an adherence to a well defined set of values, beliefs and principles which are foundational to the Inuit life view.

It is understood that every child needs to be made able. This is a holistic child development approach that ensures strength in attitude, skill development,

thinking, and behaviour. The specific process for ensuring this result—*inunnguiniq*—is a shared responsibility within the group. *Inunnguiniq* is the Inuit equivalent of “it takes a village to raise a child.” Inherent in the process are a set of role expectations for those connected with a child to nurture, protect, observe, and create a path in life that is uniquely fitted to that child. These roles are also situated in a complex network of relationships which may be kin affiliations, but may also bring non-blood kin into kin-like relationship with the child (Briggs, 1970; Brody, 2000; Bennett & Rowley, 2004; Tagalik & Joyce, 2005). Inuit highly value *tuq&urauisig*<sup>2</sup> or naming practices which “link the child to a deceased relative or family friend” (Bennett & Rowley, 2004). Through the name, the child literally takes on the relationships of his/her namesake. So, for example, a child

<sup>1</sup> *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* cultural knowledge reflected in this report has been documented by Inuit Elders from across Nunavut. The cultural knowledge and terminology of other Inuit cultural areas may vary, but at present there is no similar process of documentation available.

<sup>2</sup> When Inuktitut is written in Roman orthography, the use of the ampersand is to denote a sound series which is not made in English—the ksl sound. This is also sometimes described as the hl, qsl or dsl sound.



named for someone's mother would be called "mother" by the family members of the namesake and they would give the child the respect they would give to their mother. The result of this and other *tug&uraisiq* practices is that children are supported by the broadest possible network of relationships (Bennett & Rowley, 2004). The role of these significant people in the life of a child is primarily to notice and nurture. In noticing, careful observation of a child's attitudes, interests, aptitudes and character is ongoing and frequently commented on so that everyone, including the child, is aware of the positive and unique attributes of that child's life. These things are nurtured and enhanced through purposeful instruction. As well, the negatives are noticed and discouraged, especially after age three. Children are given specific instructions as to how to correct these areas of life and to rise above them. However, it is also recognized that a child is an individual who carries the name-soul of the person s/he name-shares with and thus should be respected as such (Brody, 2000; Bennett & Rowley, 2005). This belief creates a situation where a child is given much indulgence and independence "so as not to affront the deceased person for whom the child is named" (Stefansson, 1951 & Thalbitzer 1941 as cited in Briggs, 1970). Behaviours which were characteristic of the name-soul may be excused or attributed to that person being present again and may be accepted as such (Bennett & Rowley, 2005).

Based on this view of the child as already having characteristics and some abilities passed along through name-sharing, the teaching/learning relationship is viewed as a partnership between the child and the adults involved in making the child into a human being. These adults are generally those in close relationship to the child because the strength of relationship is believed to be central to the effectiveness of the learning outcomes (Briggs, 1998; Nunavut Arctic College, 2000). This process also ensures that a network of



experts in a variety of areas is available to nurture the child (Bennett & Rowley, 2005). If a child shows aptitude or interest in a specific area, effort is made to connect that child with others who can build on that interest and help the child develop it to the highest possible level. There are special names for this relationship which literally mean *sanaji*, "the one who is making me" or *sanajaujuq*, "the one being made." Since the point of becoming skilled is always to be able to contribute to the common good, it is in everyone's best interests to ensure all children become human beings and help to secure the future for their families and community (Nunavut Tungaavik Incorporated, 2000).

Other relationships are important as well. For example, a person who attends the birth of a child will give him/her a specific blessing or wish for life. Often this was accompanied by an amulet or small token that was sewn into the child's various parkas throughout life and retained as a special keepsake. A prophesy or blessing given at birth is believed to make a path or provide a direction for the child throughout life (Nunavut Arctic College, 2000, Tagalik & Joyce, 2005). This is referred to as *kipliitaujuq*, or a path or future for a child is being made according to the prediction. In this way, each child has a definite direction from the earliest

days of life. A child is shaped by both the namesake and the path/blessing s/he is given. As well, parents might seek out a blessing from a person regarded as an expert in a particular area. In exchange for the blessing the person would be given a gift. The relationship established with the child is regarded as special as well (Tagalik & Joyce, 2005).

In traditional Inuit childrearing, grandparents have a key role in child nurturing. When parents felt overwhelmed with day-to-day tasks necessary for survival, grandparents or camp Elders were available to provide the ongoing social and cultural teachings that were required. For Inuit, this learning is a lifelong process and there is no expectation that there is an end or "graduation" point. Even when recognized as having expertise or having gained *isuma* or wisdom in one area, an individual's learning would continue in other areas. "The belief is that the more *ibuma* the child acquires, the more he will want to use it" (Briggs, 1970). Continual progress is an expectation, with the values of perseverance and resilience highly regarded. As well, there are various transition points in the socialization process when a child is recognized as "no longer being a baby" (Briggs, 1998) or as "becoming skilled" (Briggs, 1998; Bennett & Rowley, 2004).

## The Inunnguiniq Process

From the *inunnguiniq* perspective, a capable person can be identified through the life habits s/he demonstrates. Habits predict the way one lives and lead one to being able to “live a long life” (Bennett & Rowley 2004). This is regarded as the main purpose in life. Some teachings may not be understood at first, but Inuit say “so that our words will come back to us,” meaning that when we need to understand a teaching it will be there. Many teachings are described in stories. Inuit know that stories will be understood at different levels throughout life and that an individual will take the teaching from a story as s/he needs it and when s/he needs it most. For this reason, stories are never explained. The individual is expected to develop reflective and critical thinking in order to be competent in life. There is a requirement to follow the teachings of faithfulness and respect to the parents/ancestors, even though you disagree with or are not yet aware of the significance of a teaching.

A key focus within *inunnguiniq* is the need to teach what Inuit refer to as deep thinking skills. Inuit often refer to the

main difference between pedagogies; while mainstream education focuses on instructing the brain and thinking on paper, Inuit believe that thoughts actually originate in the ‘heart’ (or are generated by emotion) and that real learning only develops through doing and experiencing.<sup>3</sup> In describing how a parent may react to something a child says, one will often hear the response “in order to cause thought.” “A central idea of Inuit education is to cause (or cause to increase) thought: *isummaksaiyuq*” (Briggs, 1998). In order to prepare children to become solid thinkers, equipped to handle all the rigours and challenges of the world, a pedagogy where ethical and moral questioning is continually being used and where direct answers are seldom supplied is the basis for *inunnguiniq*. It is thought that in this way children will develop the areas of *qanuqtuurunnarniq* (being resourceful to seek solutions) and *iqqaqqaukkaringniq* (being innovative and creative in solution seeking).<sup>4</sup> It also helps the child to learn how to keep emotion and feelings “under the control of reason” (Briggs, 1970). Briggs reports that “this mode of socialization and the questions themselves were highly uniform across Inuit time and

space ...among groups that had not been in contact for generations or centuries ...The durability of the behaviour clearly indicates its emotional power and its importance to Inuit ways of being” (1998).

The ability to be resourceful, seek solutions, use resources innovatively and creatively, to demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in response to a rapidly changing world, are strengths required to be effective in planning for the future. Resourcefulness should always be demonstrated in that it also shows respect and stewardship. Thinking that seeks to improve the context in innovative ways is referred to as deep thinking or *isumaksaqsiuttiarniq*. This kind of thinking requires skilled perseverance or *upalurniq* and eventually contributes to a state when one demonstrates *silaturniq* or a collective level of wisdom. Achieving this level of wisdom is a lifelong process, but certain evidence of wisdom is recognized in individuals at any age and is nurtured and developed by the group. Those who show an ability for deep thinking and for wisdom in certain areas are considered as leaders in their fields and their counsel is sought out. (Tagalik, 2008)



<sup>3</sup> More on this philosophy is found in the Nunavut Department of Education curriculum document, Aulajaaqtut, Rights and Justice, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Inuktitut terms ending in niq imply a process is associated with the verb root.

In the *inunnguiniq* process, children are always given encouragement so that they will persevere and not give up. This is an expectation. Each child receives an informal kind of encouragement through a great deal of verbal encouragement and special attention. This is also very important to having good relationships with others. Although young children are seldom scolded,<sup>5</sup> if they are not able to do something they have the ability to do, or do not follow rules or expectations, they are spoken to firmly. It is understood that every child should not be treated the same because teaching must be designed around each child's specific interests and capabilities. It is also recognized that children learn at different levels and at different paces: "Inuit considered each child unique; as an individual who developed, learned and matured at his own speed. Rather than speaking of their age in years—people did not keep track of ages—they spoke of children in terms of physical development and capabilities" (Bennett & Rowley, 2004). Consequently, each child is taught in a different way. Children who

may need to develop more focus in their thinking require more specific instruction. The children recognized as having potential and the interest to specialize in a specific area receive serious thinking instruction and so are being groomed for leadership in that area<sup>6</sup> (Nunavut Arctic College, 2000). Some children need an intentional approach with clear instructions and structures, while others need a more flexible, less stringent approach. *Inunnguiniq* is an individualized approach to teaching/learning based both on where the learner is at in his/her development and learning, as well as in his/her life (Briggs, 1970). Traditionally, since the end goal of *inunnguiniq* was to produce a group of individuals with as much variety of skill and expertise as possible in order to ensure the survival and success of the group, a one size fits all approach would have put the society at risk. Based on the circumstances, the needs of the group and the interests and abilities of the child, training might not be gender-specific; whatever best served the common good was reinforced. For example:

*"Sometimes if a girl had often gone hunting with her father at an early age, she would be as capable a hunter as any man. She would also be respected as such ... Some men also were good at sewing and could do housework themselves. They would reach the same level of skill as any women. So, a woman could catch a seal, and a man could do housework as well as a woman. This was not considered bad at all. As a matter of fact, it was considered all for the good"* (Bennett & Rowley, 2005).

The pedagogy that supports *inunnguiniq* is grounded in a worldview focus on knowing and experiencing. These dual elements are *tukisiumaniq*, which means building understanding or making meaning in life; and *silatuniq*, which means experiencing in the world. Together, knowledge is developed through these elements. However, Inuit see all knowledge as being mediated by the character, good habits and behaviours of a person (Briggs, 1970; Bennett & Rowley, 2004). If one has a good character, then knowledge will be used with wisdom. If one does not have



<sup>5</sup> The word *suaq*, used by Elders in this context, does not have a direct translation in English. "Scolding" has been used, but Elders have expressed that it would be more accurate to describe it as speaking purposefully with intention and expectation (personal communication, 2010). For more on this consult Briggs (1970).

<sup>6</sup> For Inuit, leadership is associated both with becoming highly skilled in an area that can contribute to supporting the common good, and in using good thinking or wisdom in the application of those skills (Briggs, 1970). More information on this approach can be found in the Nunavut Department of Education curriculum document *Aulajaaqtut, Inusiliriniq*, 2004.

good character, knowledge has limited application and loses its power to help others or improve society. In contrast to a utilitarian view of knowledge as a driving force to produce wealth and power, for Inuit, knowledge is a spiritual force that articulates a place in the world based on respectful relationship and stewardship for all living things.

### The Need for Understanding the Relevance of Inunnguiniq for Healthy Child Development

Elders express an urgent need to revitalize *inunnguiniq*. This concern is closely associated with the view that Inuit society has gone awry since forced relocation created permanent settlements built on social dependency (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000). Traditionally, becoming self-reliant was a core purpose of becoming a human being, yet self-reliance is not easily accomplished in a world where there is limited access to the tools and materials you need. It is almost impossible in a world where systems assume that you are not able to become self-reliant without intervention. Jaypeetee Arnakak describes this system as a “moral hazard” because the social safety net provided for Inuit by the government was based on a number of false assumptions, mainly stemming from the view that Inuit were “unable” to be self-reliant and basically required “rescuing” (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2002). Working from these assumptions resulted in social policies that have created what he describes as “the unvoiced power dynamics of dependency” which is “unhealthy and unsustainable.” He goes on to point out that traditional Inuit society was based on a practice of interdependency which provided an “organic economic framework.” By ignoring this reality and systematically devaluing and dismantling it, the strengths of interdependency and interconnectedness within Inuit society have been replaced by increasing numbers of Inuit who are *inunnguingittuq*, or have

not been made to become able (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2002).

During the residential school system years and after forced relocations, when Inuit were ‘asked’ to give up their children to the school system, parents reported that they assumed these schools had expectations, approaches, and pedagogies similar to those held by Inuit. In fact, this proved not to be the case and Elders carry a great deal of guilt about the impacts mainstream education have had on their children. Elders today are concerned that the high incidence of youth suicide, for example, is due to the sudden loss of *inunnguiniq* as a stabilizing factor in Inuit society. There is a concerted effort underway by Elders in Nunavut to bring back the strengths of *inunnguiniq* in order to re-instill strength in Inuit youth today.

Elders and Inuit leaders are asking for a realignment of the education system, starting with early childhood education, so that both *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* and underlying supportive processes such as *inunnguiniq* are driving the system and not driven out of it. However, there are some very essential opposing understandings between mainstream educational systems and an educational system built on *IQ* (Berger, 2007). The Nunavut

Inuit have long felt that the educational system disrupted their traditional family structure, robbing parents of their authority, replacing Inuktitut, the mother-tongue, with English, and leaving young people aimlessly stranded between English and Inuit cultures. ...Inuit ... see the problem not simply as one of education but of something more fundamental. ...What is not so well developed is a holistic approach to education that will integrate [*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*] with other aspects of community life in serving its overall purpose of preparing people for the future. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000)

The values taught by the schools were found to conflict with traditional values the children learned at home. For example, Inuit children are taught at home to be non-competitive and not to ask people direct questions. The modern school system however, emphasized competition and encouraged children to question their teachers and each other. ... many Inuit have expressed the need to have more influence on what is taught to their children and how this material is taught. They feel more emphasis should be placed upon Inuit culture and language throughout the educational system from day care to post-secondary institutions. (Pauktuutit, 2006)



Department of Education is challenged with finding ways of integrating the two opposing understandings of mainstream educational systems and *IQ* into a Nunavut-specific educational system. The Government of Nunavut document, *Pinasuaqtavut*, includes the mandate to build an education system within the context of *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit* and to write new curriculum for schools from K-12 (Government of Nunavut, 1999). Although this work is underway, there are many key systemic differences still to be addressed.

*Inunnguiniq* is directed at building character, and instilling essential beliefs and values about how to operate respectfully in the world. This begins with equipping the individual with essential teachings. The reliance on values, beliefs and principles as foundational to thinking stems from the Inuit belief that all cognition, and ultimately understanding/knowledge, comes first from the heart and one's emotional response to the world and not the head and the intellectual response.<sup>7</sup> For Inuit, much of the importance of *inunnguiniq* is the grounding of the individual in the values, beliefs and principles that sustain them within the Inuit life view. This is viewed as more important than the teaching of skills or content.

There is also an expectation that in order to become a human being, one needs

to become self-reliant. Self-reliance is culturally defined by Inuit in terms of the collective as individuals becoming highly skilled in at least one area so that they can contribute to the common good and improve the lives of others. Skills and knowledge without this application have no value to the collective. If a child is not properly developed from within (with the proper attitudes, values and beliefs), his/her thoughts will never be sound and s/he will never become wise (Briggs, 1998; Bennett & Rowley, 2004).

The expectation for each individual is to achieve mastery in a specific area so that one has a skill that will benefit others. This involves continually striving to achieve, being innovative and solution-seeking, and being adaptive and resourceful, as each are critical to Inuit survival. Inuit Elders describe great confusion about mainstream educational expectations where achieving 50% is considered a pass yet results in a child knowing a little about everything and not much about anything (Government of Nunavut, 2008). There is also great concern about the loss of thinking skills amongst Inuit today (Nunavut Arctic College, 2000). The concept of thinking is multidimensional for Inuit. Traditionally, being able to 'think on your feet' is also developed from very early in life. Even young children are expected to reason, solution-see, and try to be adaptive in their experiences in the world. A child with a dilemma, even a baby frustrated

with learning to grasp something, will be encouraged verbally, but not accommodated (Briggs, 1970).

Inuit believe that a healthy self-concept and a sense of belonging are required for a healthy individual. As well, mental wellbeing resides in positive thinking that comes with an environment of love, support and active encouragement, grounded in meaningful relationships and supported with high expectations.

### The Impact of Using Inunnguiniq as a Foundation for Child Development Policy and Programs

Some might think that Inuit never plan for the future. They sometimes think that we lived from day to day with no plan. We are here today because our ancestors were the ones who made sure that we could survive. They did not live one day at a time. We were made to become human beings right from birth. They taught us how to live a good life and what to do in difficult situations. (Tagalik & Joyce, 2005)

Clearly, there is great strength in the process of *inunnguiniq* since Inuit have long been recognized as being a highly adaptive and successful culture with the ability to innovatively thrive in the harshest of environments. Inuit Elders believe that many of the social challenges facing them today can be reduced in



<sup>7</sup> For details please see the Nunavut Department of Education curriculum document, *Aulajaaqtut, Rights and Justice*, 2005.



severity, and life can be improved by focusing on improving childrearing practices (Nunavut Arctic College, 2000; Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000). They identify improvement as a return to the Inuit cultural values and beliefs which sustained Inuit in all areas of life. They advocate a return to *inunnguiniq*: caring for children in ways that will build their cultural strengths and sense of belonging and personal direction.

*Inunnguiniq* is the socialization process of Inuit. If government and Inuit organizations are committed to the preservation of Inuit culture, it becomes imperative that they make meaningful room for *inunnguiniq* teachings as content and the *inunnguiniq* process as a program delivery model. Since *inunnguiniq* is a lifelong process, it requires embedding in policy across departments and educational levels. Serious recognition of *inunnguiniq* will result in deep systemic changes at many levels—a complete retooling of governmental approaches. From this perspective, *inunnguiniq* provides both the greatest opportunity for ensuring the

survival and implementation of *IQ* in Inuit jurisdictions and the greatest barrier. It becomes a barrier because the change required for successful implementation is deep and significant, and is dependent on a shift in worldview by educators and bureaucrats across the system. Recognizing the resistance they have encountered and are likely to continue to encounter in changing systems, Inuit Elders in Nunavut are focusing on rebuilding strength in childrearing practices within their extended families, concentrating on making one grandchild at a time into a human being. Their belief is that by ensuring their family is well cared for, they can create a groundswell that will eventually lead to the changes required to support Inuit cultural practices in their homelands.

Elders are discussing these issues in very strategic ways. First and foremost, conscious of the time limitations which they may face, a concerted effort is being made to document all aspects of *inunnguiniq*. A process for sharing this knowledge with parents today is in

development, materials to support this are in production, and Elders are advocating with each other through territorial radio programs and in community discussions. Although there have not been significant impacts on actual policy at the territorial level, Elders continue to provide information and recommend changes to early childcare and education programs. There is a definite sense that they know what must be done and they are ready to do it, even in the face of great challenges. Depending on how these approaches are received, this could be a very exciting time for Inuit child development.

Elders express hope that Inuit worldview will drive changes in the way child development is addressed within institutions. The strength of the *inunnguiniq* process that resides within Elders today has created a momentum for social change in educational programs and in parenting. One would hope that the passion Elders express about *inunnguiniq* is a predictor of success.

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