



A FIRST PEOPLES POST-SECONDARY STORYTELLING EXCHANGE
Intersecting College and Community Circles

INUIT RESEARCH FINDINGS



2016-2021
www.fppse.net

Prepared for
Inuit Participants & Partners

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We extend much gratitude to the late Elders, Lizzie Irniq and Mary Kiatainaq, pictured here with Student researchers Jeannie Calvin and Anna Kristensen in Kangiqsujuaq in 2018. We honour and treasure the knowledge shared by these precious Elders and we dedicate this booklet to them.

In addition, we thank Susan Briscoe, who was the original team leader on this project but, due to a terminal illness, stepped down as project lead nearly one year into the project. We are grateful for Susan's foresight and commitment to Indigenous education.

We hope that the information contained in this report will be useful for your community now and in the future.

Nakurmiimarialuk (thank you so much) to Vicky Boldo (Cree/Métis) and Elder Amelia McGregor (Kanien'kehá:ka) for facilitation and guidance at our project celebration and web launch, and to Tauni Sheldon (Inuit) and her son Alapi (Inuit) for lighting and tending the Qulliq as the stories were brought to light on February 16, 2021.



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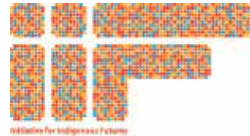
Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

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sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



Kahnawake Schools
Diabetes Prevention Project



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Kativik Iisarniliriniq



Welcome to the First Peoples' Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange (FPPSE) Project

We are pleased to share with Inuit participants and partners the research findings from the First Peoples' Postsecondary Storytelling Exchange (FPPSE) from 2016-2021.

At the heart of the FPPSE are the stories! Students, graduates and community members shared so many stories of resilience, transformation and solidarity; stories that speak to the urgent need for change in formal education, and the ways that Indigenous identity and culture remain an enormous source of pride, inspiration and motivation.

As part of the dissemination process of this project, we promised to return the findings to communities, our partners and funders. Booklets have been prepared for Inuit Storytellers who participated in the project. It is also for our research partners and funders, and to anyone from our communities with an interest in learning about a research project and findings aiming to increase access for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students around culturally responsive higher education.

Similar booklets have been prepared with research findings from Cree, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), and people from different nations living in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal). An extended report with detailed results across nations can be found at <https://fppse.net/project/what-we-learned/>

Many of the individual interviews, as well as the films, are on the project website fppse.net.

Grades do not determine and define your capabilities of doing well in school. I failed a lot. I've retaken courses, received terrible grades and it affected me for sure. But then I started realizing, you know what, this grade does not define how much I'm learning, how well I'm learning...If you really want to do it, push and push and try again, because life's not easy, school's not easy. It's literally it though, grades don't define life.

Inuit Storyteller, Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal), January 11, 2018



PROJECT SUMMARY

In response to Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action on improving the postsecondary experience for Indigenous students, a team of academic researchers came together in 2015/16, and successfully applied for research funding for the First Peoples' Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange (FPPSE) Project. During five years (2016-21), in a participatory way, stories of educational journeys were gathered from over 100 First Nations, Inuit and Métis people living in Quebec during that time. They represent more than twenty nations and communities. The project home base was at Dawson College in Montreal.

Our storytelling exchanges transpired during Talking Circles and individual and family conversations, and narrative films created in collaboration with a project filmmaking partner, Our World (<https://www.ourworldlanguage.ca/>). Many participants agreed to share their filmed stories on our website (fppse.net) to inspire, teach and engage others to envision a different future for Indigenous education in Quebec.



OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the transfer of knowledge of the stories shared in this project, and address the vast education gap, we call for action from post-secondary educators, administrators, community organizations and policy makers. The future vision expressed by over 100 First Nations, Inuit and Métis storytellers put forward concrete recommendations for change.

General Recommendations

1. Post-secondary in community so students have the option to study at home
2. More Indigenous institutions, programs & meeting spaces
3. More Indigenous teachers, staff, leadership
4. More Indigenous students
5. Stronger bridges between community & academic institutions
6. Increased traditional knowledge-based learning in all disciplines
7. Land-based pedagogy
8. Mother Tongue courses & accreditation
9. Make French language learning an option
10. Childcare and Family support
11. Better access to and support in Science and Math-based programs
12. Training for teachers to better understand Indigenous students' contexts and better address sensitive topics in class
13. More transition programs

Inuit Specific Recommendations

1. For southern schools:
 - More culturally relevant programs
 - Allow time for visits home/family/community
 - Increase Inuit postsecondary teachers
 - Increase Inuit postsecondary student population
 - Accredited courses for Inuktitut speakers
 - Accreditation for speaking mother tongue
 - Language bonus for Inuktitut speakers
 - Promote self-determination
 - Support for math and science
 - Make post-secondary more welcoming
2. Better preparedness:
 - Improve transition from high school
 - More promotion of postsecondary school
 - Prepare students for southern living
 - More support for math and science
3. Build postsecondary institute in the North:
 - With culturally relevant programs
 - Programs to enhance economic development
 - Environmentally related programs
 - Include sports/physical activity programs
4. More resources:
 - Better access to country food
 - Create spaces/places to communicate with home
 - Create spaces/places for peer sharing
 - More counselling and advising services
 - Inuit Elder support at post-secondary

FPPSE GOALS

The aim of FPPSE was to improve Indigenous students' access to post-secondary learning and contribute to decolonization and Indigenization of educational institutions within Quebec. The FPPSE Project shares stories from Indigenous students, families and community participants with the goal of improving the postsecondary experience for future generations.

Our goals were to:

1. Co-create new stories about postsecondary education to inspire and support Indigenous students to pursue their academic goals
2. Strengthen community-college/university ties
3. Advance the academic institutional decolonization processes
4. Provide recommendations and calls to action around:
 - ☉ Making the school environment more welcoming for Indigenous students
 - ☉ Making programs more relevant to both Indigenous students and the needs of their communities
 - ☉ Advocating for more student support centres at postsecondary institutions
 - ☉ Calling for more teacher training and striving to eradicate racism at school

Central to this approach has been relationship-building:

1. Across Nations
2. Between communities and educational institutions
3. Among students, researchers and families

Our process has led to the creation of a community of educators, students, emerging and established scholars committed to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners in Quebec. This includes sharing our stories with the world, in communities and classrooms, among students, families, teachers and educational leaders.



THE INUIT RESEARCH SETTING

Nunavik and Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal)

Nunavik is home to almost 14,000 people. It is one of four regions in Inuit Nunangat (homeland) and includes 14 communities on the Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay coasts in northern Quebec. For Nunavimmiut (Inuit in Nunavik) wanting to pursue higher education, the current situation is that students must relocate south causing a direct impact on students being away from their family and communities, often for extended periods of time. Most Nunavimmiut choose to attend post-secondary in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal) at college and college programs such as Nunavik Sivunitsavut, John Abbott College, or Dawson College in English or Cégep Marie Victorin in French and at universities including Concordia. Many students are supported in post-secondary education by Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (Nunavik School Board) and the student support programs at post-secondary institutions.

FPPSE interviews and one talking circle took place in two Nunavik communities: Kuujuaq, the largest village in Nunavik, and Kangiq-sujuaq on the Ungava coast. A number of storytelling exchanges also took place in Tiohtiá:ke while Nunavimmiut were here to study and with Inuit who grew up in part in the south.

All Inuit storytellers shared their ultimate hope of having a college or university in Nunavik with a curriculum centered on Inuit ways of knowing, learning and being.

Makivik Corporation <https://www.makivik.org/nunavik-maps/>



THE PROJECT (VISIT FPPSE.NET)

Between, 2016 and 2019, twenty-six (26) participants from, or with ties to the Nunavik communities of Kuujjuaq, Kangiqsujaq, Kuujjuarapik, Inukjuak and Salluit, shared their educational experiences by audio or video in talking circles, one on one interviews, and one interview with two people:

1. 1 Talking Circle
2. 20 Individual Interviews
3. 1 Pair Interview

Most storytelling exchanges took place in Kuujjuaq and Kangiqsujaq at personal homes, and places of work; some took place at Dawson College and Concordia University. Participants talked about culture shock, isolation, discrimination and trauma as challenges to their success. Their stories highlight how identity (language, values, connection to the land) provides a strong foundation and source of pride and confidence.

Additionally, three series of filmmaking workshops (11 days in 2018, and 8 days in 2019) were held in Kangiqsujaq at Nasivvik Student Residence, in Montreal at Dawson College and in Kahnawake at the Skawen:io Library. Participants were mentored by Indigenous filmmakers including Courtney Montour, Austin Lazare, Glen Gear and Jesse Bochner in scriptwriting, animation, filming and editing. Workshops culminated in community screenings at the Kangiqsujaq arena, Dawson College and Skawen:io Library. The filmmakers have gone on to present their films among renowned Indigenous creators at festivals such as ImagineNative, Asinakba, Présence Autochtone and Maōriland in Aotearoa (New Zealand).

During Talking Circles and Individual Interviews with participants, and one pair, the following guiding question was asked:

What are your stories or experiences about Post-Secondary education (past or current)?

We were also interested in:

- ✿ Views and perspectives on postsecondary education in general
- ✿ Challenges

- ✿ Successes
- ✿ Existing supports
- ✿ Future Outlook (recommendations)

METHODOLOGY

The project was youth-driven and participatory, ensuring that students and community members were involved in the planning, data collection, data analysis and knowledge sharing. We created Community Advisory Boards for guidance throughout the project and created opportunities for building capacity among emerging Indigenous scholars. We collaborated with filmmakers, schools and educational organizations in Nunavik, Kahnawake, and Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal).

The project used Indigenous research methods such as Talking Circles and the team took the utmost care to practice Indigenous protocols, processes and ways of knowing grounded in ethical research. The Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (KSDPP) Ethics Protocol was an essential guide for the team.

This project used a decolonizing research framework in the following ways:

1. Indigenous methods such as storytelling, is a legitimate way of sharing knowledge;
2. Flattening of hierarchies and collective decision-making throughout the project;
3. Emphasis on process, transparency, relationship building, care and support;
4. Incorporating culture, ceremony and spirituality;
5. Creating a culturally safe place for Indigenous research assistants.

During storytelling exchanges, each participant had the choice of telling their story on audio or video, individually or with a friend or family member. Some storytelling exchanges took place in personal homes, some at school. We made sure participants had food and drinks, and access to cultural and spiritual support. All stories were transcribed, and participants were asked if they preferred this be done by a non-community member. All participants of this project were gifted with an honorarium. What we learned is that taking the extra time to add these steps into the research process contributes to building trusting relationships with each other, which usually end up being long-lasting.

Research Team:

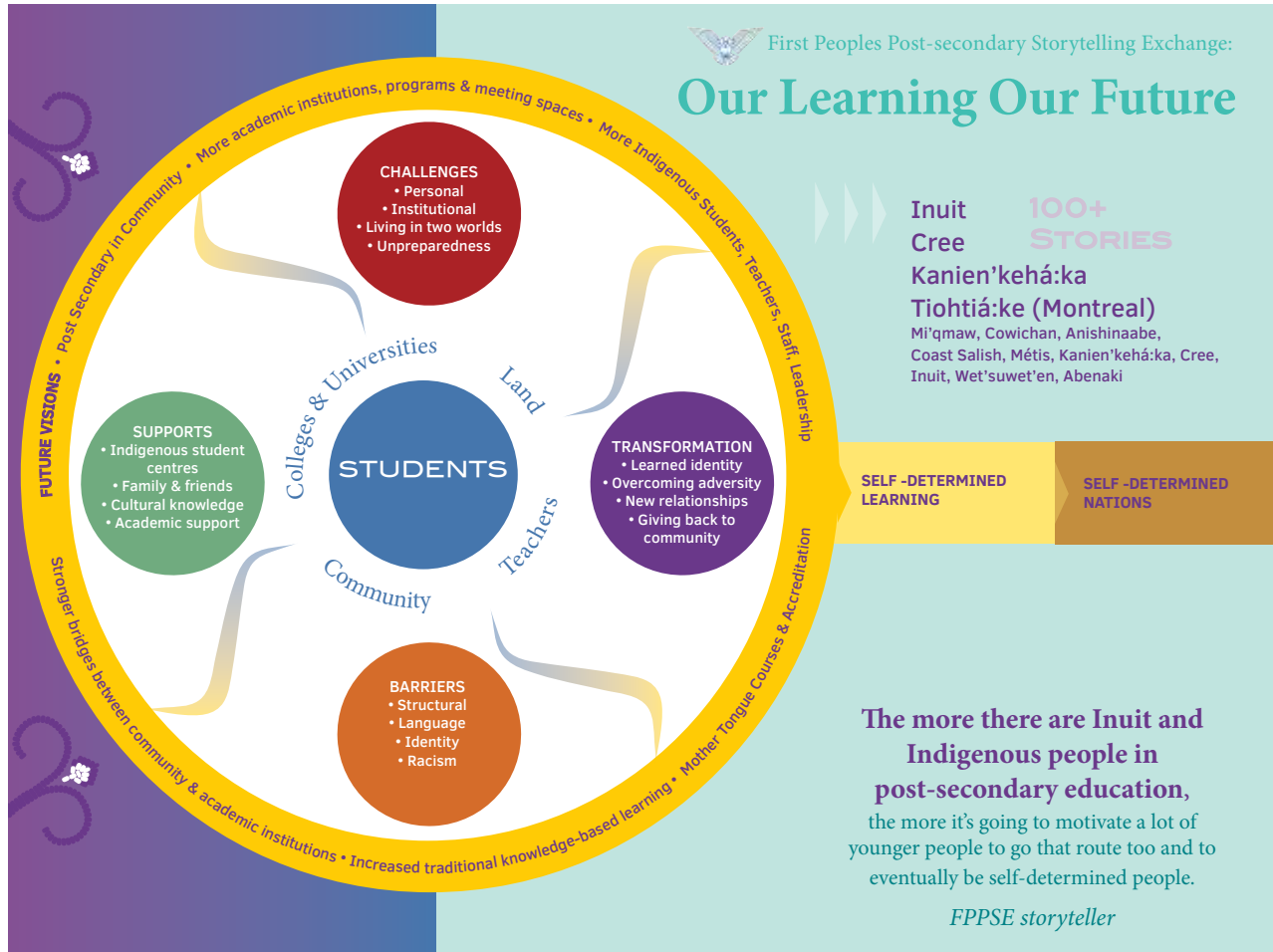
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- ☼ Michelle Smith (Dawson College), Principal Investigator
- ☼ Elizabeth Fast (Concordia University), Co-Investigator
- ☼ Nicole Ives (McGill University), Co-Investigator
- ☼ Jason Lewis (Concordia University & AbTec), Co-Investigator
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RESEARCH FINDINGS

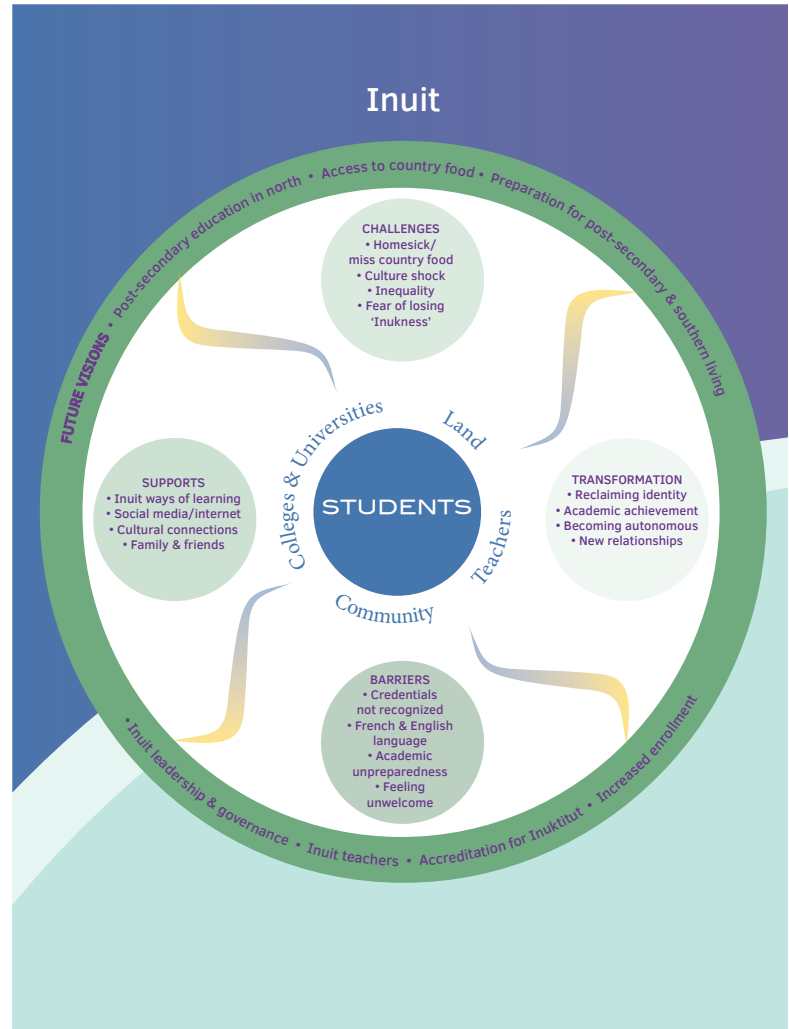
This infographic represents the overall findings of the project from many First Nations, Inuit and Métis living in and around the Montreal area during the project. Specific details about Cree, Kanien'kehá:ka and several other Nations from across Canada can be found in either Nation specific booklets similar to this one, in the overall Research Findings Report (2021), or on our fppse.net website.



INUIT RESEARCH FINDINGS

Throughout this journey of story gathering with Inuit participants, we learned not only about difficult post-secondary educational experiences such as having to adapt to life in a southern city, with very different languages and food, but also the incredible ways that students found support, supported each other, held on to their Inuit ways of learning, and built new relationships. We heard stories of self-determination in overcoming challenges and transformation such as becoming autonomous being so far away from home, and becoming stronger in one's identity. We also received many suggestions and recommendations that students and community members believe would help contribute to advancing academic institutional decolonizing plans. Recommendations included working towards a more welcoming environment for students, working towards having more higher educational programs in the north, developing more culturally appropriate programs similar to the Nunavik Arctic Guides Program, and hiring more Inuit teachers in the south.

This infographic depicts a visual representation of CHALLENGES and BARRIERS as well as a list of SUCCESSES and SUPPORTS which participants drew strength from during their educational journeys. We also highlight TRANSFORMATION taking place in academic institutions in response to Canada's Truth & Reconciliation education calls to action, as well as individual stories of transformation and growth. Finally, we list some of the FUTURE VISIONS common to the Inuit Storytellers in the hope of moving towards educational change for all Indigenous learners in higher education.



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Some of the challenges and barriers faced by Inuit Storytellers centred around feeling unprepared for living in the south and not being prepared enough academically. As one student from Kuujuaq explains:

“It was very difficult when I went to CEGEP. I could feel that I was really behind in the education system. So there was a lot of crying and emotional difficulties ‘cause I really wanted to catch up but it was really hard to understand almost everything for the first year of CEGEP.”

(Individual Interview, October 22, 2018)

Many students experienced feelings of homesickness and culture shock. As one student pointed out, *“I was alone with my daughter, without my parents, without my dad, without the love they give me.”*

(Individual Interview, June 18, 2018).

Below are some examples of challenges and barriers as described by Inuit Storytellers:

We were told stories of the desire to see more infrastructure, employment and services in the north so that when students return to their community to share their new knowledge, they can look forward to better community support and to find job positions that, as some mentioned, are often being given to non-Indigenous people.

“Back in the day when non-Inuit came to our land, they took over and made us feel small...this has to change...”

(Individual Interview, October 22, 2018)

One student thinking of pursuing education in the health field would like to return home to work in a community hospital:

“Let’s just say, if you want to become a doctor, like a real doctor, like a surgeon, and you go to school here, go through all of that, the schooling and stuff, and you become a surgeon, right? And you go back home, and you want to be a surgeon and there’s no hospital.”

(Individual Interview, June 18, 2018)

SUCSESSES AND SUPPORTS

A key element in successfully navigating the new educational experience in the south was support. Inuit participants of this study shared many stories of positive and successful experiences and described many types of supports that contributed to a positive educational journey. Successful experiences included being with family and friends in Montreal, receiving encouragement from home, building new relationships and hands-on learning at school:

“It was all just encouragement. Just them saying like don’t worry, just do the best you can, we’re always here to support you. They always told me that they’re there. And if I was having a bad day, I would call them up.”

(Individual Interview, January 11, 2018)

Students expressed their gratitude for Indigenous student centres in at the post-secondary level such as the First Peoples’ Centre at Dawson College, the Aboriginal Students Resource Centre at Concordia, the McGill First Peoples’ House, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq School Board and Nunavik Sivunitsavut. Nunavik Sivunitsavut offers a one-year post-secondary experience to gain knowledge, work and leadership skills rooted in culture and is located in downtown Montreal. One community member from Kuujuaq said:

“Nunavik Sivunitsavut came at the right time. It does not look at the students’ weaknesses but helps them work hard on what they are good at. If they feel overwhelmed, they are given tools to succeed. If they need a shoulder to cry on, that is there for them too. The group of Inuit become a small family and help each other get through. I am very proud of Nunavik Sivunitsavut and believe that it will help decrease the amount of people who end up leaving and going back home.”

(Individual Interview, October 22, 2018)

Students feel especially supported when connected to Inuit ways of learning (ie. hands-on learning, learning by observation, learning on the land), having country food and learning from role models. Inuit students who were able to access various post-secondary supports and services highlighted the need for more visibility, promotion, and communicating information about these services to both community and potential students. These resources need to be accessible in the community before students make their way down south to the city so that they are prepared and know where to go and who to ask for guidance.

“I think it’s the communication and promotion...The organization has to promote it more and communicate to other native communities and so when a student in a community wants to come to the city, he or she can rely on them or ask about what can I do this, what can I do that.”

(Individual Interview, June 18, 2018)

TRANSFORMATION

Past and present Inuit post-secondary students indicated several factors that contribute to success and the variety of shapes success can take. Fundamentally, it remains important for Inuit students to look to their ancestors and within themselves for the determination needed to thrive in these settler institutions:

“We are an amazing culture with many things to be proud of. Our ancestors survived one of the harshest climates and lands in the whole world. My grandmother was able to survive without electricity or houses and that amazes me. If my Grandfather’s Grandfather was the type to give up easily, I would not be here today. They survived by following animals to feed themselves as well as surviving starvation. They did not have guns, but they survived. Our ancestors were amazing. If only these little things were shared, we would be able to truly understand that we come from a great people. That is a little light of us that has been extinguished for too long. If we want to be ok with ourselves, that little light has to shine bright. We need to remember how hard our ancestors fought to stay alive.”

(Individual Interview, Oct 22, 2018)

A common attribute to many of the people we spoke to were stories of how students overcame challenges and barriers either through reclaiming their identity, becoming autonomous living in the south, building new relationships and working through feelings of loneliness and culture shock. Inuit participants not only spoke of personal transformation during their educational journey, they also spoke of positive changes occurring within college and universities including the McGill teacher training program in the north, and changing attitudes towards non-Indigenous peoples. For example, as one former student explains:

“I think we still had the complex of my father’s generation where the white man was the all-powerful. That anything that any white man said you had to do...and then we’re coming after. So when I went to school I didn’t really have that concept...”

(Individual Interview, October 2018)

The growth of Indigenous presence in college and university indicates for some that educational success is attainable when Inuit are represented in institutions, allowing students to feel welcome, a sense of belonging and more at ease in these spaces.

“For me, the number one thing is to try to get an education and eventually get those positions [in leadership in Nunavik]. That’s how we’re going to bypass this whole thing of being left on the outside.”

(Individual Interview, October 22, 2018)

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE VISION

Perhaps the most telling of the stories were students and community members providing advice, suggestions and recommendations in line with the overall vision of self-determined learning for self-determined people. The strongest thread running through all Inuit interviews was the desire for post-secondary institutions centered in northern communities, or collaborative programs where programs are attended partially in the north and partially in the south. Students, community members and former students would like to bring courses and degree programs closer to home to students and families can maintain connectedness:

“As Inuit, this is our land and our home. When our children have to travel very far for a higher education it is hard. When they are going through a hard time and are unsure, it is very hard for us as parents because it is not easy to go see them.”

(Individual Interview, October 22, 2018)

“...it is very important that we get higher education here in Nunavik and have the educators come to us instead.”

(Individual Interview, October 2018)

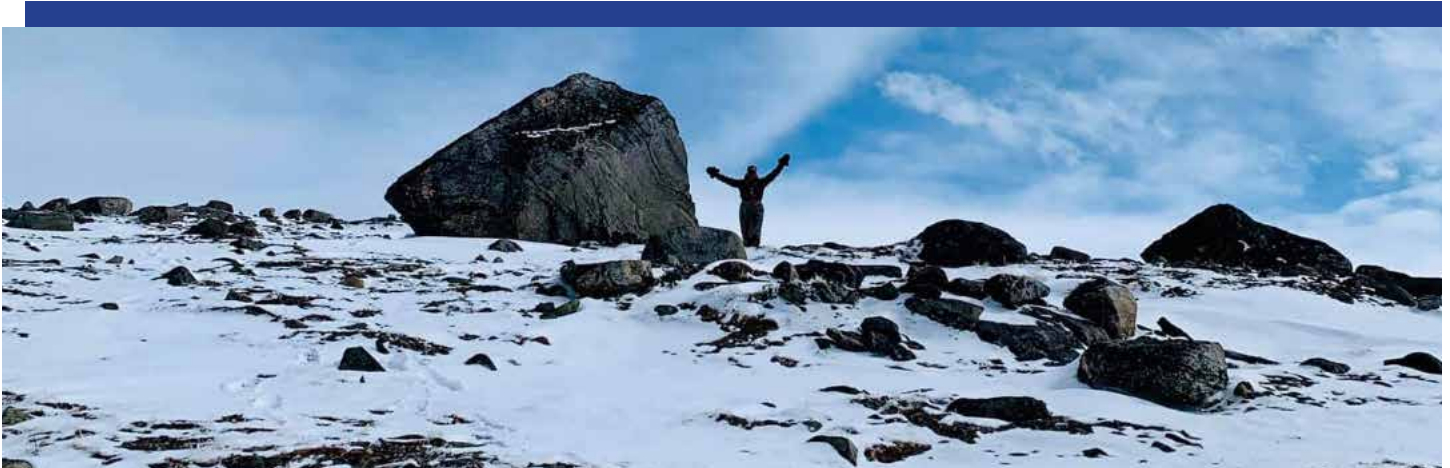
“Instead of going to a big city where the people don’t speak your language, you won’t feel so alienated, and so alone in the world, like a support system is really important to be able to pass school, so having an Indigenous education in Inuit communities, like having a post-secondary education in Inuit communities is uh, that would be amazing.”

(Individual Interview, January 31, 2018)

Students told us of their desire to be better prepared for post-secondary education and southern living prior to leaving the north, which could lead to increased enrollment and less students wanting to leave school. Students would like better access to country food, to make education relevant for Inuit communities and to be taught by more Inuit teachers.

“I would also like to have an Inuktitut teacher, so we can understand more, each other what we are going through, instead of trying to speak French when you don’t know how to speak French.”

(Talking Circle, October 22, 2018)



As part of our commitment for Knowledge Exchange and sharing our results with communities, in conclusion, we invite you to visit the fppse.net website where you will find the overall research report, links to resources for students, family and educators, and of course to view actual interviews. The website also includes the narrative films created in Kangiqsujuaq, Montreal and Kahnawake, and provides information about different Indigenous serving organizations in Montreal such as the Native Friendship Centre, school boards, and youth and LGBTQ2+ friendly community organizations.

A Research Manual (also found on the website) was created as a shared resource. It outlines the entire research process and provides templates for interview guides, information about participatory research, Indigenous research methods and more.

One of the goals of the project was to strengthen community-college/university ties and to help close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners in Quebec. It is also our hope that the sharing of this knowledge will help to accomplish that goal.

Nakurmiik

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Challenges & Barriers

Examples of Inuit Challenges & Barriers

Challenges

Academic experiences	Pregnancy
Acceptance/equality	Single parenting
Access to resources	Social/employment issues back home
Credentials not recognized	Substance use
Cultural safety	Travel/distance from home
Culture shock	Unpreparedness
Effects of trauma	Unsupportive family/community (judgement)
Heavy course content with no debrief/after care	Young students
Homesickness	
Lack of Indigenous content in courses/programs	
Learning disabilities	
Living in or stuck between 2 worlds	
Low student population	
Mental health issues	
Personal identity	
Personal life challenges	

Barriers

- Funding/finances
- Language
- Shy to ask for help
- Being away from home/family
- Social issues back home
- Personal identity
- Jobs taken by southerners
- Lack of traditional food
- Unpreparedness
- Racial discrimination



APPENDIX 2 - Successes and Supports

Examples of Inuit SUCCESSES AND SUPPORTS

Successes

Academic experiences
Being only person in family to attend postsecondary
Being with family in Montreal
Experiences away from home
Land-based learning
Hands-on learning
New relationships
Personal success
Pride
Reclaiming identity
Resilience
Role models
Support

Supports

Ancestors
Country food
Places
Programs
Role Models
School Events
Sports programs
Technology



APPENDIX 3 – Transformation and Future Vision

Examples of Inuit TRANSFORMATION AND FUTURE VISION

Transformation

Changing attitudes towards postsecondary schooling

Increase in graduation rates

Increase in student population

Increased respect for Indigenous people and issues

Knowledge acquired from land-based learning

More Inuit leaders

Perseverance

Resilience

Self-care

Future Vision

Access to country food

Accreditation for speaking mother tongue

Build postsecondary institute in the North

1. Culturally relevant programs
2. Economic development
3. Environmental
4. Sports

Family visits home

Improve transitioning from high school
Increase Inuit employment in the north
Increase Inuit postsecondary teachers
Increase postsecondary student population
Inuit Elder support at postsecondary
Inuit teachers
Inuit institutions
Language bonus for Inuktitut speakers
Postsecondary promotion in communities
Prepare students for living in the south

Programs

1. Art
2. Culturally relevant programs
3. Inuit history, identity
4. Math and science

Promote self-determination at postsecondary

Resources

1. Advising
2. Counseling

Place/space to communicate with home/family/community

Place/space for peer sharing



APPENDIX 4 – Meet The Rest Of The Team*

FPPSE Community

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- ☼ Louise Legault (John Abbott College)
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- ✿ Jackson Coyes
- ✿ Joy Katsi'stano:ron Deer
- ✿ Kanerahtens Bush
- ✿ Leena
- ✿ Mark Kadjulik
- ✿ Neekallak Annanack
- ✿ Nigel Adams
- ✿ Pasha Partridge
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- ✿ Michael Hemingway, Web design
- ✿ Valerie Bourdon, Web design
- ✿ Karonh'io Delaronde, Preface translation



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