

Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic

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Heather E. McGregor



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Figure 1 Map of Canada's northern territories, featuring Nunavut. Adapted from a map by Natural Resources Canada, 2009 and reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Atlas of Canada.

Preface

THIS HISTORY IS ABOUT how education unfolded in the Eastern Arctic during the twentieth century. In keeping with the view that history is a living process, it should be read not only as a collection of historical evidence but also as a contribution to the dialogue about where we have come from and what we have learned about Inuit education. It is intended not as a definitive narrative but as an invitation to examine more closely the factors that have influenced the purpose and practice of education in the Eastern Arctic.

What qualifies me to use the term “we” with regard to Inuit education? The debate as to the proper role for Euro-Canadian academics in Aboriginal or Inuit historiography is important, and cultural sensitivity is equally imperative. In her comments on Inuit historiography, historian Shelagh D. Grant argues that an Inuk would be best suited to capture and interpret the cultural nuances of his or her people’s history.¹ Those familiar with research in Aboriginal communities and cultures know that scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has also led the call for Aboriginal peoples to write their own histories: “Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes.”² I strongly concur with Grant and Smith, particularly because this history is relatively recent and focused on the experiences of people who are still living, the majority of whom are Inuit. The early chapters of the book have been informed by Elders and older Inuit who remember the traditional period of their youth, and the latter chapters refer to the experiences of nearly everyone in Nunavut – all those who had contact with the formal education system. However, a written history of Inuit education or schooling in the Eastern Arctic, authored by an Inuk, has not yet come about. In the meantime, Grant argues, non-Aboriginal historians, such as myself, “Must ask themselves whether they have a responsibility to help bridge the cultural divide by adding an Inuit voice to their writing.”³ To this question I respond with a resounding “yes.” One of my goals is to incorporate the perspectives of Inuit to the greatest extent possible. I hope to bridge the gap between the work of scholars who contribute to a body of knowledge about the past, and the experiences of Inuit who continue to be influenced by the legacy of their Elders.⁴

The relationship between research and social, economic, and political power, especially in cross-cultural and postcolonial societies, compels authors to be transparent about their own position and perspective.⁵ In writing a history that deals in large part with Inuit culture, I do not pretend to offer or to replace the insight of an Inuit perspective. My personal position in this history, however, is more complex and therefore due explanation. It is my first-hand experience and my own contact with the formal education system in the Eastern Arctic that have informed my conviction about this subject and the shape of this book.

I am the child of two “northerners,” a term which I define as Euro-Canadians who have chosen to live almost their entire adult lives in the Arctic rather than where they came from or elsewhere. My parents have spent their careers in the territories, and have become part of the communities in which they have lived, including Yellowknife, where I was born. My parents later chose to live and raise me in Iqaluit, partially because of the unique experience we could have by participating in the birth of Nunavut Territory. The children of long-term northerners – such as myself – are some of the only Euro-Canadian children in Canada who grow up as minorities to an Aboriginal population. This is a unique experience that has undoubtedly shaped my perspective on this history, a perspective of liminality.⁶

I use the term “liminality” because I am a Qallunaaq⁷ who speaks English as a first (and only fluent) language, who calls Iqaluit home, and who has had a deep respect for Inuit culture since the age of seven. This position of liminality results from a number of multifaceted particularities, which, taken together, illustrate the complexity of relationships in this cross-cultural context and cannot be simplified into two opposing categories such as insider versus outsider or powerful versus powerless.

Qallunaat have historically been a powerful and privileged minority in the Arctic who brought with them the inequities of colonialism. This legacy, not yet extinguished, is discussed in greater detail throughout this book. However, since 1993 the exercise of, and access to, social, economic, and cultural power has been shifting in the Eastern Arctic. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which led to the creation of Nunavut and formed the basis of the public territorial government, brought with it cultural and linguistic initiatives. More important, it brought about entitlements for the Inuit residing in Nunavut, now called “beneficiaries.” For example, beneficiaries receive preferable consideration for employment in the Government of Nunavut, whereas few provisions are made for Qallunaat, even if they were born and raised in the Arctic. The status of the Qallunaat minority has become much more nuanced since the creation of Nunavut, and what might be viewed as the privileges of my

Qallunaat identity are not as straightforward and powerful as might be assumed at first glance.

Broadly speaking, this complex situation demands that I define myself in relation to Inuit culture and the Arctic and, by extension, to this history. Even if I choose to label myself a “northerner” and wish to be viewed as an “insider,” I could easily be mistaken by both southerners and northerners as an “outsider.” In the eyes of most Inuit, and the provisions of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, I am a Qallunaaq, no matter how many years I live in the Arctic or how much I understand about Inuit culture. I am from the Arctic and call it my home on the basis of my experience there and my respect for the people and land. I feel very close to the traditions, values, priorities, and visions of Inuit as I have encountered them in my life. However, I cannot claim them as my own, and I am aware that my white face brings with it some remnants of the colonial past, my personal intentions, beliefs, and actions notwithstanding. Therefore, I occupy a position of liminality in the discussion of culture, ethnicity, and place herein.

My challenge, then, is to find ways to feature the Inuit perspective on the events represented in this history both as accurately as possible and as a means to balance out the many strong Qallunaat voices that are available through the historical record. Before undertaking this research, I anticipated difficulty writing about traditional Inuit education because of the limited documentary evidence from the Inuit perspective prior to the 1960s. On another level, I faced the difficulty of disentangling “education” as a Western idea from its more integrated role in Inuit society. Because Inuit education did not traditionally comprise a separate set of practices, supervised and documented by an administrative body, this topic necessitated input from Elders who were raised and educated by their parents on the land. I was further challenged by my intention to include evidence that spans a fairly long period (the entire twentieth century), that is also geographically representative (covering the entire Eastern Arctic and, in some cases, beyond), and that reflects some gender parity. Due to the breadth of my intended study, I felt that conducting interviews with Elders or other individuals might unduly limit the survey approach that I was hoping to employ in researching these issues of education through time and across the regions.

There are a number of other reasons why conducting interviews was not ideal in the context of this research. One reason was that I gained access to an important set of documents: the meeting minutes of the Elders’ Advisory Committee, maintained by the Nunavut Department of Education. These numerous verbatim meeting transcripts reflect discussion facilitated by the department but

structured as open-ended conversations between Elders. They talk about their experiences with education as children in a traditional context and about how those experiences may relate to the modern education system. This group of Elders is made up of men and women from throughout Nunavut who were asked to participate in such discussions because of their interest in education. Their discussions take place in Inuktitut and are later translated into English.⁸ I also opted to use these documents because the cost, time, and logistical challenges involved in conducting comparable interviews or discussion groups would have been beyond my means, particularly as the resulting information might inform only a portion of my research.

The use of excerpts from these meeting minutes did, however, present a logistical challenge, one that allowed me insight into the difficulties of conducting primary research in Nunavut. This experience is worth describing here for the benefit of future researchers and historians working in Nunavut. Conducting research in this context is highly demanding, particularly in terms of communication barriers, cost, cultural expectations, and the participant-driven research imperative.

It is the prerogative of anyone participating in research to establish the conditions of their involvement. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has commented, taking on the role of researcher, especially in small cross-cultural communities, involves an ongoing negotiation of relationships, especially because of the legacy of pain that inappropriate and invasive research methods have caused Aboriginal communities. Smith is unforgiving in her explanation of the role that research has played in the colonial experience: “The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity.”⁹ Her warning refers to scientific research, but that legacy equally applies to history and the humanities. Research must be participant-driven, and researchers must seriously investigate how to meet the expectations of participants and how to approach them appropriately.

However, meeting the above-mentioned expectations in Nunavut is not simple. A multiplicity of demands, which are sometimes contradictory, must be taken into consideration. In addition to meeting the criteria of the ethics review board at one’s home institution, researchers are required to obtain a Nunavut Research Institute (NRI) licence. NRI licences are issued only if the researcher has demonstrated consultation and gained permission from all local or interested organizations, such as Government of Nunavut departments, municipalities, and Inuit organizations. This stipulation means in practice that researchers usually have to gain ethics approval simply to conduct preliminary

consultations in order to determine whether the research is possible. While the NRI has a straightforward and effective protocol for research evaluation, most other organizations in Nunavut conduct reviews of research proposals on a more ad hoc basis. Gaining permission or co-operation may involve meeting inconsistent or unusual requirements, and much time can be taken up simply trying to determine what conditions should be met in order to proceed.

For example, the Department of Education required that I submit an application to the Nunavut Research Institute for a licence simply to access the Elders' Advisory Committee transcripts, which are undoubtedly part of the public record. For me to use excerpts from the transcripts, the department required that I approach each Elder individually and ask his or her permission to include a particular excerpt in this book. The NRI disagreed with this requirement and declined to grant me a formal licence, perceiving it to be unnecessary, but recorded my activity nonetheless. I did approach the Elders to request their permission in accordance with the department's wishes and to ensure full transparency on my part. I was obligated to use a number of proxy individuals located in the respective communities where the Elders live to deliver formal letters (in Inuktitut), to be signed by each Elder as an indication of his or her permission. It would have been nearly impossible for me to approach each individual myself for this purpose due to the extremely high cost of travel in Nunavut. I am lucky to have been able to leverage personal and professional contacts in order to meet this requirement. With regard to this process and any research in the Arctic, communication is commonly delayed, and attempting to conduct research from afar certainly results in a lack of the personal connections that are so important in gaining the assistance and trust of anyone involved in research.

In addition to the Elders' Advisory Committee transcripts, I searched a wide range of sources in an effort to draw out commentary by Inuit on education at its various stages throughout history. I collected Inuit voices from sources such as books, newspaper and magazine articles, and short stories as well as other reflections written by Inuit. I consulted transcripts of Inuit oral history that contain testimonies or memories regarding childhood and education. I used excerpts from interviews or research projects with Inuit, particularly those from which verbatim quotations could be extracted. I also accessed a few speeches by Inuit leaders. Much of this evidence offers a retrospective view of education, and many of the comments were made for other purposes or in other contexts, that may have had little to do with studying formal education. In terms of more recent history, Inuit have taken on leadership roles in the administration of formal education, and therefore some conclusions can be drawn about their

perspective on education by analyzing the changes they have made to the system. I hope that these Inuit voices – set in the context of the scholarly evidence, Qallunaat perspective, and analysis I have added – are a prominent feature of this investigation. Such sources are intended to support the middle-ground perspective strived for in this history and to inform respectful, careful, and useful conclusions.

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Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic

Introduction

NUNAVUT TERRITORY IS by all accounts a unique part of Canada and of the world. It is the first and only large geographic and political jurisdiction where the majority of voters in a public government are of Inuit or – using a term more broadly familiar – Aboriginal descent. The people of Nunavut have emerged from the experience of colonization to re-establish control over their own lands and to form and exercise their own political and bureaucratic machinery in an effort to capture the tools of self-government. In contrast to this accomplishment, only a minority (albeit a growing minority) of students graduate from high school in Nunavut – the number varies between 25 and 30 percent. Substantially fewer students continue their education at the post-secondary level. Indeed, Justice Thomas R. Berger characterized the state of Inuit education as a “crisis” in a 2006 report to the Government of Canada.¹ The label “crisis” and the apparent contradiction between Nunavut’s political achievements and its educational shortcomings beg the question: What does history tell us about the foundations on which education in the Eastern Arctic was built, the direction it has taken over time, and the meaning and importance of education to Inuit? What do we find by taking a close look at the role of curriculum, the role of teachers, the role of administration, and the involvement of parents in Eastern Arctic education?

This investigation is couched in a complex cross-cultural context that raises further questions: Can the colonial roots of this system, perhaps still perpetuated, be blamed for discouraging Inuit from pursuing academic accomplishment in the typical Western sense? Should we point to the cultural gap between Inuit students and parents, on the one hand, and Qallunaat, English-speaking teachers, on the other? What impact has come from the employment of Inuit as classroom teachers or from the increasing opportunity for Inuit parents to participate in educational decision making? How important is the recognition and integration, or lack thereof, of educational content, practices, and outcomes envisioned by Inuit to achieving a functional and relevant formal school system? What does this predicament of the modern school system say about the importance of education to Inuit as an ingredient of self-government, especially in the context of their preparation for the coming of Nunavut Territory?

Conversely, what important educational successes deserve distinct recognition, despite a low graduation rate? This book offers educators, administrators, and researchers a historical overview of educational change in the Eastern Arctic, focusing on the themes of cultural negotiation, decision-making power, and the role of tradition in education.

The modern context must first be put aside in order to examine historical questions about the profound changes in education that accompanied sustained contact between Inuit and Qallunaat in the twentieth century. Change was complex, varied, and non-linear, but for the sake of clarity in this brief history, it is examined with reference to four designated periods. The earliest, the traditional period, includes the history of the Inuit prior to colonization by Qallunaat, which began around 1945. Although studying the traditional period presents methodological challenges, the identification of educational practices in existence before contact allows for the development of a definition of “Inuit education” in Chapter 2. This definition includes an exploration of both educational content and methodology, as well as an understanding of the ways education was socially and culturally situated. Using research that draws on as many Inuit sources as are available, this book endeavours to identify the most important aspects of Inuit education and to explain why they were effective. It addresses what were believed to be the necessary ingredients of an education that was intended to produce a happy, self-confident, and self-sufficient person in accordance with Inuit values and worldview. It examines why Inuit education was well suited to the structure of this hunter-gatherer society, which was largely defined by its relationship to the environment, and why it remained in practice up until the time of the abandonment of subsistence hunting and nomadic or semi-nomadic rounds after 1945. This history then proceeds to examine the trajectory of educational change during the three subsequent periods of formal education, termed “colonial,” “territorial,” and “local,” respectively.

Three strands of investigation into each period tie this history together: (1) identification of aspects of Inuit education employed in the schools, what purpose those aspects were thought to serve, and to what extent that purpose was realized in practice; (2) characterization of the relationship between Inuit education and the Qallunaat, or formal, system of education; and (3) recognition of who initiated and controlled educational change. During the colonial period of 1945 to 1970, those with political power in the Eastern Arctic – the bureaucrats and administrators within the federal government – chose to introduce a formal school system characterized by an assimilationist policy agenda. However, just when the Qallunaat system of schools was being solidified, administration of education was transferred to the territorial government in

1970. The territorial period ushered in a new set of educational priorities that were better tailored for the Northwest Territories (NWT) but still primarily controlled by Qallunaat, an arrangement that characterized the schools across the territory until 1982. During the local period, which lasted from 1982 to 1999, most educational decision making occurred at the level of district education authorities and regional school boards, and it focused on the re-establishment of Inuit education through the school system. Local control of education through these mechanisms brought about a form of education widely contributed to, and supported by, Inuit. This had the best capacity to reflect Inuit culture, their relationship with the environment, and their vision of the future.

Chapter 3 explains how and why the Qallunaat formal school system was introduced in the Arctic during the colonial period and evaluates the impact of this change on the experience of young Inuit. The collapse of the subsistence hunter-gatherer economy occurred in response to a number of changes, resulting in the colonization of Inuit in the Eastern Arctic and their disempowerment. During the colonial period, education played a pivotal role in bringing Inuit into the settlements and keeping them there. What did formal schooling, in its various forms (i.e., religiously affiliated residential and day schools, practical programs for older students, or regional high schools) offer Inuit in terms of advantages in their transition to a new way of life? How did it facilitate or disrupt the acquisition of traditional Inuit education? I examine not only the goals of colonial educators but also how Inuit children and their parents responded to expectations that they learn and become like Qallunaat rather than according to their own heritage.

The subject of Chapter 4 is the educational change that occurred when responsibility for education was transferred from the federal government to the Government of the Northwest Territories in 1970. Using documentary evidence produced by the territorial government, such as educational reviews, curriculum guides, teaching materials, and official letters, this chapter explores the change that occurred when assimilation was no longer considered a reasonable goal for schooling in the Arctic. This exploration includes identification of the aspects of Inuit education that began to be employed in the Qallunaat system, the reasons behind this change, and the resulting effect on Inuit communities. Why and to what extent did Qallunaat support the recognition of Inuit culture during the territorial period? What role did Inuit themselves have in changing the education system?

Chapter 5 covers the local period, which lasted from 1982 to 1999 and describes the rise and fall of the regional boards of education in the Eastern Arctic. My case study of the Baffin Divisional Board of Education examines Inuit control

of education through local and regional authorities. It serves to highlight the vision of education established through these mechanisms and the extent to which this vision lines up with traditional Inuit education. Which aspects of education were prioritized by Inuit? How were they manifested within the confines of formal schools? There is more evidence during this period of efforts to incorporate aspects of Inuit education into the formal system; such aspects must have been viewed as effective, but was this really the case in practice? The chapter then investigates how these changes had an impact on the capacity of Inuit to be economically self-sufficient and to prepare for the coming of Nunavut. This period coincided with the pursuit of Inuit political self-determination in the Eastern Arctic through negotiation with the federal government for a land claim and a separate territory. Through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the Inuit voiced their desire not only to retain responsibility for their land, wildlife, and resources but also to be involved in social issues such as language use and adherence to Inuit values as the foundation for their children's economic and social future. What role was education seen to have both in the preparation for, and in the maintenance of, Inuit self-determination in the Eastern Arctic? Ultimately, this book works toward determining the point when responsibility for education was effectively returned to Inuit, and when the education system became one by which they could fulfill their vision of the past and the future, and support their children in becoming successful adults in Inuit terms.

Terms and Definitions

Terms like “colonial” and “local” and using them to designate time periods in this history imply greater absolutes than are intended. The four phases of educational history are labelled according to my understanding of the dominant experience of most people in the Eastern Arctic during each timeframe. In referring to the earliest phase as “traditional,” I am not arguing that traditional pursuits and values disappeared entirely from daily life during the subsequent periods. Rather, traditional pursuits were the dominant experience of most people and broadly characterized the education they practised. Likewise, I am not arguing that the limits I have imposed on the colonial period can (or should) encapsulate the entire process of colonization or assimilation of Inuit in the Eastern Arctic. Instead, it is labelled thus to draw out a characterization of schooling and of the relations between Inuit and Qallunaat. The territorial period is essentially straightforward, referring to the diminishing role of the federal government in direct administration of services. However, some may question my contention that it led to the local period of the late 1980s. I use the term “local” partly to draw attention to the local education authorities and

regional school boards, which took a very active role in education. In addition, the local period reveals that in the interim between the negotiations for an Inuit land claim in the late 1980s and the realization of Nunavut Territory in 1999, many Inuit turned their focus away from a territorial perspective and toward their communities, where they experienced greater self-determination. Although this book does not cover the post-1999 period, it is clear that by then education had shifted back to a territorial (i.e., Nunavut) emphasis. I use these terms to emphasize and organize the experiences and practices that dominated daily life. Further discussion and explanation of the periodization follows throughout the chapters, but it should be noted that each period exists in a fluid and overlapping relationship to the others and that the terms applied to them are primarily thematic.

Inuit, meaning “the people,” is the term used by the Aboriginal population of Canada who live in the Eastern Arctic to identify themselves. The language of most Inuit is Inuktitut, which includes various regional dialects and is written in both syllabics and Roman orthography.² The Aboriginal people of Nunavik or Northern Quebec, Labrador (Innu), and the Mackenzie Delta (Inuvialuit) are also sometimes referred to as Inuit, but for the most part this book refers specifically to those who reside in what is now Nunavut Territory. Nunavut consists of an 85 percent Inuit population and very few other Aboriginal peoples; culture and language are relatively homogenous across the territory. The term “Aboriginal” is also used where I refer to other northern Aboriginal groups, such as in the context of the former Northwest Territories. The terms “Indigenous” and “Eskimo,” which Inuit do not typically use, are included only if they appear in original sources being quoted.

Language can offer important insights into a culture and worldview, and throughout this book I use a number of Inuktitut terms for tools, ideas, or feelings, which will appear *italicized* and with translations provided within the text or footnotes. Indeed, many Inuktitut words are commonly part of English speech in Nunavut, perhaps the most significant of which is Qallunaat. *Qallunaaq* (singular) or *Qallunaat* (plural) (also spelled Qablunaat, Kablunait, and Kabloona) means “white man” or “European.”³ It bears the Inuktitut root word for eyebrow, which has brought speculation that the Inuit who first encountered Europeans were impressed by their bushy eyebrows. However, the word is generally used to refer to any outsiders to Nunavut or any non-Inuit; it is not necessarily ethnically specific to Euro-Canadians. Minnie Aodla Freeman offers a definition that speaks to another possible origin of the word: “Possibly an abbreviation of *qallunaaraaluit*: powerful, avaricious, of materialistic habit, people who tamper with nature.”⁴ I have not italicized the term throughout this book due to the frequency with which it is used.

Histories and discourses focused on Aboriginal people, tradition, and culture tend to use dichotomous language and, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce binaries such as white/Indian, authentic/inauthentic, formal/informal. In some cases, these dichotomies are very real, but nonetheless, they can be detrimental by solidifying differences, diminishing commonalities, and thus closing the dialogue between ways of knowing, being, and doing. In trying to represent the experience of education in the Eastern Arctic, I cannot avoid identifying differences between Inuit and Qallunaat practices and ways of living and thereby potentially reinforcing such damaging dichotomies. For example, I refer to Inuit education as “traditional” and “informal,” which will be viewed in opposition to Qallunaat education as “modern” and “formal.” By using these descriptions, I do not intend to suggest that Inuit education is not vital or does not have the potential to be relevant in today’s world. By calling it informal, I do not intend to convey that throughout history Inuit education has not been intentional or conducted with care. Indeed, the evidence presented here demonstrates quite the opposite. By the end of this book, the meanings of words like *tradition*, *culture*, and *education* will have taken on a new life through examination in this context. However, one cannot add depth and detail to our common understandings of concepts without starting from those common understandings. In Canadian society the word “education” implies formality because it happens according to agreed-on locations, schedules, standard grade levels, and rules of behaviour. These formalities do not necessarily apply to Inuit education, thereby rendering it (for these purposes), informal. Although I am aware of the problems created by language and the application of rigid concepts, I hope these problems will not unduly constrain the narrative of this history.

View of the Field

The history of education in the Eastern Arctic has been the subject of relatively little research or publication. A number of articles that appeared in the 1970s outlined the development of the northern education system, primarily summarizing official reports and statistics.⁵ Northern scholars such as R. Quinn Duffy, David Damas, and Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski have included chapters on, or references to, education in their general treatments of Arctic history.⁶ All have treated education as part and parcel of the experience of colonization, permanent settlement, or mistreatment by the federal government during the drastic changes to Inuit life in the twentieth century. Frank Darnell is perhaps the pre-eminent circumpolar educational historian. He has referred to the Eastern Arctic within the context of his circumpolar view, drawing comparisons between regions in which many of the issues are similar but manifest themselves differently according to national particularities.⁷ With Anton Hoem, Darnell

has spoken to the social and cultural dynamics of educating “minority” groups and their relationship to dominant governments in contexts of “ethnic pluralism.”⁸ Darnell’s discussion of creating education systems that both reinforce particular cultures and support multiculturalism is convincing and has done much to support this book. However, because his conclusions are drawn in a comparative format across a number of regions, they also warrant greater, more detailed examination in the context of the Eastern Arctic. Mary A. Van Meenan’s 1994 doctoral dissertation also uses circumpolar comparison to evaluate the relationship between government and the Inuit in the sector of education.⁹ Her study draws broad strokes in covering the history of educational administration from 1900 to 1990 in the Northwest Territories and Siberia, eventually arguing in favour of local control of education by Inuit. In particular, she details the shortcomings of, and levels a great deal of criticism against, the Canadian government for its approach to creating a system of education for Inuit. Education in the Eastern Arctic appears in these works as a subject subsumed by other comparisons and larger narratives, suggesting that a detailed examination of the influences on, and results of, educational change is not only still pending but may also have the potential to offer insight into a number of other historical themes.

Ann Vick-Westgate’s monograph *Nunavik: Inuit-Controlled Education in Arctic Quebec* represents a recent and comprehensive effort at recording the history of Inuit leadership in education in the nearby region of Northern Quebec.¹⁰ Vick-Westgate draws attention to the process of reclaiming the formal school system in a cross-cultural and postcolonial context through local control of education. She suggests that leadership in educational change largely came from outside of the Nunavik schools – from parents, community members, and leaders who were not formally affiliated with the formal school system. Vick-Westgate also relies on the testimony of Inuit, allowing her history to flow directly from their voices. She draws parallels and demonstrates shared themes between the history of education in Nunavik and the history of education in other First Nations and rural Canadian communities. More importantly, she effectively illuminates educational change in one previously under-researched rural region of Canada and offers the voices and experiences of Inuit to the historical dialogue on education. I hope this book can begin to accomplish the same for the Inuit of Nunavut.

This book draws on themes and issues in the history of rural Canada and rural education to explore and situate changes in Inuit education. Although circumstances, local particularities, and even time periods differ greatly, many comparable themes and experiences are shared by southern rural Canada and other parts of the North. J.D. Wilson’s examination of teaching in rural British

Columbia in the early twentieth century suggests that in comparison to urban schools, rural schools operated according to a different set of standards, including the highly demanding jack-of-all-trades role expected of teachers in rural communities.¹¹ Neil Sutherland has documented the demands on children of rural farming families in contributing to the economic viability of the family in addition to attending school.¹² These experiences in rural contexts clearly mirror those of the Eastern Arctic's early educators and of Inuit children who were commonly pulled out of school on a seasonal basis to participate in hunting trips. Mike Corbett provides an argument in support of rurality as a motivator and explanatory factor for resistance to education in Canadian communities.¹³ His suggestion that schooling was largely perceived as "disconnected from life" in rural areas based on their economic activities applies to this northern context as well, although there is an added element of cultural and ethnic relevance here that he does not examine closely. The field of rural history is particularly pertinent to this book because it demonstrates that relationships – between communities and educational institutions, for example – cannot necessarily be considered consistent within each province or territory; rather, they are significantly impacted by factors such as proximity to urban centres, population density, economic pursuits, and local culture.

Research significant to this book has also occurred in the fields of anthropology and education. Historians must distance themselves, to a certain extent, from the frameworks by which anthropologists approach their subjects.¹⁴ As well, the historic relationship between anthropologists and Aboriginal cultures has been subject to criticism, particularly when such studies result in essentialist or reductionist conclusions that operate to reinforce colonialism.¹⁵ Anthropologists have a long history of involvement with Inuit in the Eastern Arctic, the most famous of whom are Knud Rasmussen, Franz Boas, and Diamond Jenness.¹⁶ Indeed, whereas history is scant in supporting our understanding of Inuit culture and way of life through time, anthropology is substantial. More recent and useful anthropological studies operate less by way of contained and focused methodological application and more according to what we now call ethnography. John J. Honigmann and Irma Honigmann's 1965 report from Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit) provides insights into the adjustments and challenges experienced by Inuit at the time of, or just after, the transition to permanent community settlement.¹⁷ Jean Briggs's account of a year of study with the Utku Inuit, near Gjoa Haven, illuminates the "traditional" way of life (practised even as late as 1963), describes her observations of the inner, emotional patterning of Inuit in this context, and provides important conclusions about the nature of family and parenting in Inuit culture.¹⁸ Hugh Brody's *The People's Land* and *The Other*

Side of Eden are highly significant and candid analyses of the experience of a hunter-gatherer society merging with a Western capitalist society through the process of colonialism in the late twentieth century.¹⁹ Lastly, Arlene Stairs has done much to contribute to understanding Inuit identity and has drawn attention to linguistic nuances such as the different words used for traditional learning and formal learning.²⁰ These studies offer insight and reinforcement both to references made by Inuit informants and to my conclusions about the nature of Inuit culture and practices.

Fiona O'Donoghue,²¹ Joanne Tompkins, and Lynn Aylward provide the foundation of current research on the Eastern Arctic in the field of education.²² All three draw on themes of ethnicity or race, culture, and equality in schools, particularly in terms of educational leadership and professional development. Fiona O'Donoghue and her co-authors identify the paucity of sources that reflect Inuit perspectives on education, and indeed on the history of education in the Eastern Arctic in general, as a significant challenge to the work of developing best practices in education. They argue persuasively that the collection of this history could potentially bring great benefit to Inuit education in Nunavut:

The history of Inuit education in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) Region needs to be written and published for sharing with new educators in orientations and professional learning experiences. Best practices identified by Inuit can provide examples of transformational practice to guide education as it evolves in Nunavut. This research started to explore aspects of this history through the personal recollections shared during the intense discussions. Participants expressed a need to share the many stories of successful Inuit leadership in a variety of contextualized educational initiatives. They believe these stories reveal a particular and powerful form of Inuit leadership.²³

As this statement implies, the importance of the history of education is not only reflected in a record of graduation statistics but also lies in education's close relationship to cultural continuity and change. Darnell and Hoem offer insight into this relationship, first by defining culture and then by explaining how culture is sustained through education. Culture is shared knowledge and a common worldview that inform ways of living. Darnell and Hoem argue, "Simply stated, we see culture as the stored composite of knowledge a nation or a people has at its disposal. In keeping with this use, culture forms the basis for understanding and mastery, for a single individual, a society or a nation."²⁴ Education is linked to culture because it offers intergenerational knowledge

transfer: “It follows, therefore, that if social groups are to survive, and this is one of the basic dilemmas of all indigenous peoples in the Far North, their cultures must be transmitted from generation to generation. Education and systems of education, regardless of form and locus of control, are inextricably a part of this process.”²⁵ Education in the Eastern Arctic first served Inuit in their hunter-gatherer society as a means of cultural and economic continuity. It then came to represent the strongest agent of colonialism, language loss, and cultural change as they came in contact with Qallunaat. It is now expected to act as an agent of cultural reinforcement, preservation of Inuktitut, and Inuit self-determination. Inuit care deeply about their youth, and they have worked hard to develop and implement the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement as well as territorial legislation that better manifests the future they have envisioned for their children; but there is much work to be done. There must be alignment between the dominant form of education, which is formal schooling, and the cultural needs, desires, and future envisioned by Inuit.

Where does history fit into this equation? As argued by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who provides one of the most insightful commentaries on the relationship between academic research and Aboriginal peoples in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Aboriginal history has a sensitive relationship to the present and future. Smith argues that history has been detrimental to indigenous peoples because of its reflection of power:

In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of the relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and “Othered.” In this sense History is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the “truth” will not alter the “fact” that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.²⁶

Indeed, although the Inuit and the Arctic have never have been absent from the Canadian consciousness, they have been marginalized and rendered as stereotypes or, worse, associated with extremes such as the proverbial igloo-dweller and the primitiveness of early Inuit art or, more recently, an unparalleled suicide rate and the cruelty of the sealskin fashion industry. As is often the case, these hyperbolic perspectives reveal little about the historic and contemporary complexities.²⁷ Nonetheless, the discipline of history and the ways of thinking promoted by dominant societies cannot simply be ignored or dismissed by Aboriginal peoples; Smith concedes that the effort to decolonize research must be engaged by them:

A dilemma posed by such a thorough critical approach to history, writing and theory is that whilst we may reject or dismiss them, this does not make them go away, nor does the critique necessarily offer the alternatives ... This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful.²⁸

Scholars like Smith have made clear to historians that particularly for minorities who are asserting themselves within their nation-state, often on the basis of historical claims, the past has the potential to advance the development of a positive identity and access to rights based on that identity.²⁹ Mary-Ellen Kelm argues that belief in the objectivity of history – such as has been demonstrated by the legal system in the past – is based on a false perception of the discipline, but it is not an uncommon assumption.³⁰ Therefore, historians must be aware of the purposes for which their history may be used, including the influence of present political circumstances. Even in prioritizing Aboriginal perspectives, Kelm states, historians cannot decontextualize Aboriginal experiences from the colonialist framework in which they existed (and perhaps still do); equally, history cannot be decontextualized from the modern reality of Aboriginal relations with the dominant society.

Power is and has been, as outlined above, a preoccupation in research, particularly in Aboriginal history. My research looks closely at the power relationships between Inuit and Qallunaat within the education system and, to a lesser extent, at how the education system may operate to affect power relationships in the Eastern Arctic more generally. Put very simply, this work could be seen as the story of loss of power held by Inuit and the path toward re-empowerment with respect to education. Issues of power are featured in my discussion of the purpose of education, Inuit experiences of the early colonial education system, the ways that Qallunaat norms trumped Inuit values in the classroom in the territorial system, the role of Inuit as educators and educational decision makers in the local period, and the relationship between education and self-determination in the post-1999 period.

Despite the extent to which power is examined here, both subtly and explicitly, I have chosen not to impose a theoretical framework on it. Due to its history, the word “power” brings with it a great deal of baggage, in the form of language, discourse, and theory, as well as imbedded assumptions. Yet it is not a word that is commonly used by Inuit to describe or explain their experience of colonialism, the quest for a land claim, or their involvement in the education system. Words like “control” and “self-determination” or phrases like “having a say” are more often employed. Partly because my sources do not easily or specifically support a theoretical analysis of power in this context, and partly because of



Figure 2 A modern Nunavut classroom: Inuit students learning from Meeka Kakudluk. Inuktitut syllabics are featured on classroom walls. Iqaluit, Nunavut, 2008. *Source:* Photograph reproduction authorized by Curtis Jones (for the Department of Education), Nakasuk School, Iqaluit, Government of Nunavut, 2008.

my own position of liminality herein, I have avoided developing a definition of “power” or using a theory of power as a lens or organizing principle by which to view this history. Formulating such a theory would constitute important future work, which the evidence and conclusions from this history can inform.

Setting the Scene: Schools in Nunavut Today

For readers who have not experienced education in this context, the following general description is intended to offer insight into, and establish a greater familiarity with, schools as they operate now. Most communities in Nunavut are only big enough to support one K to 12 school or one elementary and one secondary school. Only in the past twelve years have all senior grades been offered in each community. Schools are usually the biggest buildings in the community, and apart from a nursing station or a detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, schools are the most evident institutional or government presence. For the most part, schools run on the same daily and annual schedule as

schools in southern Canada. Some let students out earlier in spring and start earlier in the fall to accommodate spring hunting or camping trips. School is inevitably interrupted by extreme weather, either storms or extreme cold, at various times throughout the year, and regular practice dictates that if the school shuts down for a storm, the entire community stays home. In the deep of winter, it is dark when students arrive at school and dark when they leave in the afternoon as well. However, everyone in the communities, including school children, gets a break to go home for lunch every day. Outdoor recess is still mandatory, and eagerly anticipated by students, except in temperatures of -50 degrees Celsius – in which case the school would probably close anyway! After school, hockey and indoor soccer are the most popular team sports offered, but volleyball, basketball, and speed skating are also common. Weekly games against other teams are impossible given the cost and time involved in getting to another community by airplane for competition. As a result, most athletes spend the entire winter practising and playing against their teammates, all in preparation for one big annual tournament in a central location.

The inside of these schools may give more clues to differences in the nature of education in the Arctic. The content of bulletin board displays, classroom walls, and school decorations certainly reflects the Arctic environment but also the use of Inuktitut. A majority of students in these classrooms are Inuit, with only one or two Qallunaat students per grade. Teachers, especially at the secondary level, are more likely to be Qallunaat, but Inuit teachers and staff have a strong presence in every school. Most communities offer Inuktitut-first-language education to students up to grade 4 and Inuktitut as a language arts period in grades 4 to 12. In Nunavut today, all curriculum materials under development are based on Inuit culture, but over the past twenty years opportunities to engage with Inuit culture in school were more varied. Some fairly consistent examples include a drum dancing component in music class, a traditional games component in gym class, a country foods component in health class, or a specifically labelled “cultural class.” Relationships between students and Elders might be formed through traditional activities inside the school, or at an Elders’ facility or community centre, or on the land. These are common examples of attempts to steep schooling in content and pedagogy that are culturally relevant and thereby to invoke Inuit education in the context of formal schooling. The frequency and success of such efforts differ according to local particularities but are part of an overall strategy that has been in development for decades.

My own experience of attending school in Iqaluit in the 1990s highlights the contradictions and negotiations still involved in the practice of Inuit education within the school context. I describe some of that experience here as an anecdote

from which to draw out some of the questions that have led to this research.³¹ I experienced the nuances of Elders in the classroom once a week in grade 5. Our class was separated by gender, with the girls being sent to learn sewing from local women Elders and the boys to learn carpentry from male Elders. For a time, this class took place in a *qarmaq*³² that had been erected outside of the school as an appropriate setting for the purpose of cultural programs. More often, I recall going to the library or an empty classroom. Here, the differences between a class with Elders and a class with a Qallunaat teacher quickly became apparent. The women would be seated on the floor in a corner. They always sat on the floor, legs stretched straight out in front of them, not leaning on any wall or support, for the entire time we would see them. I don't know many Qallunaat who can sit for longer than a few minutes in that position. They would most often be dressed in a brightly floral top, with leggings that did not necessarily match, and *kamiks*.³³ They usually had CBC Radio, broadcasting in Inuktitut or playing the much-loved accordion music, buzzing in the background.

I was a shy kid, one of two Qallunaat girls in the class, and the Elders did not speak English. The first moments of each class, when they might greet us or explain something, were excruciatingly embarrassing for me. I didn't know whether it was appropriate for me to make eye contact or ask a question or whether I should just pretend to understand. I tried not to speak, fearing that my English might be insulting to them, so I just waited for a cue or mimicked my classmates. At the end of one class when an Elder was marking our names on our sewing projects, she picked mine up and evidently asked one of my classmates what my name was. This girl looked at me with hesitation for a moment, and then said "Ha-ta." I recoiled for a moment, thinking a trick was being played on me, but the Elder nodded, wrote my name in Inuktitut syllabics, and showed it to me. My classmate said that "Ha-ta" was my Inuktitut name. I was pleased that she had found a name for me that could be written in syllabics, and I quickly memorized the word.

We did not sew with caribou skins or sinew in cultural class. We used felt material and embroidery thread to make pink or purple pincushions (in the shape of teapots) and Christmas decorations (in the shape of mittens). There were a few instructions and a model available to us at the beginning of class, but most of our time was spent in near silence. Or perhaps that's the way I remember it because I didn't understand the conversation. When I made a mistake or got stuck at a difficult stage, my project was plucked from my hands and corrected by the Elder. She would show me the proper method in slow, exaggerated motions, the rest of the girls looking on. I was careful to copy her demonstration, knowing her eyes remained on me until I improved. I was proud

of my sewing projects, and by the end of the year I was also proudly more comfortable with the Elders. I certainly thought that because I could sew and decorate a pink teapot pincushion while sitting on the floor and because my name could be written in syllabics, I had been initiated into Inuit culture.

The experience of sitting in a school sewing small decorative items, with materials and tools that were by no means traditional, offered us only an approximation of the experience of Inuit education. Yet, as my initial discomfort demonstrated, the experience of education with the Elders was foreign enough in relation to regular school activities and experiences that it left a significant impression on me. It must be noted that most of the rest of the school week was spent learning in a context more consistent with formal schooling in southern Canada. Our homeroom teacher was a male Qallunaaq who used a curriculum designed for schools in southern Canada in which “success” was measured mostly using Qallunaat marking schemes; I was more “successful” than my fellow students. The classes with the Elders were certainly more than our Qallunaat teachers could offer us but were still less than ideal.

My experience of cultural class very likely differed from that of my Inuit classmates. After all, efforts to create school experiences that reflect Inuit culture and education are clearly intended to meet the needs of the Inuit majority. Perhaps their conversations with the Elders, whom they knew or to whom they were related in some way, gave them comfort and a feeling of connection to their past, to their families, and to their culture. Perhaps more was communicated in those classes than I could begin to perceive. Perhaps it was a time during the week when they felt the school belonged to them, not the other way around. I also wonder whether the Elders felt rewarded as a result of their weekly classes with us.

Emerging from the scenario described above are questions such as: How did the school system in the Eastern Arctic, typically modelled on curriculum developed in southern Canada, determine that turning students over to Inuit Elders for cultural class on a weekly basis was an important component of the curriculum? What purpose is envisioned by teachers and administrators for classes such as this? What is deemed to be the importance of these experiences to Inuit, and how effectively do they engage Inuit students? How do these experiences relate to the process of completing an education intended to prepare people for employment and economic self-sufficiency? Do experiences like sewing with Elders capture the essence of Inuit culture and tradition? Do they serve a social function by “preserving” Inuit tradition and culture for the benefit of future generations? And finally, is the inclusion of Inuit educational experiences a result of more progressive views of education by Qallunaat, or a result

of greater ownership of the formal system by Inuit teachers, parents, and community members? In summary, how has the traditional Inuit approach to education been incorporated into the formal education system in Nunavut?

These questions suggest that an investigation of tradition must be undertaken. I have intentionally chosen not to start by offering a definition of “tradition” derived from the work of theorists and historians. Although this is a departure from common academic practice, I feel that it more appropriately fits the spirit of avoiding the imposition of Qallunaat perspectives and of giving space to the Inuit voice. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, theory has been oppressive to Aboriginal peoples, but it is also a tool that can be appropriated in “attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful.”³⁴ Consistent with this point, I have worked toward using theories of tradition as tools in better representing this context, once it has been fully described. The history begins with an exploration of what constitutes the traditional Inuit approach to education in this specific historical context. Having identified the important aspects of the tradition, we can then trace how it operated through time, the endeavour that constitutes the greatest share of this book. Finally, having built a definition of Inuit education that is supported by Inuit sources and evidence, we can reflect on the relationship between this particular tradition and the broader concept of “tradition” as it operates in Western or scholarly discourse. However, in recognition of what may be a common understanding of tradition, it is important at this juncture to clarify that the terms “tradition” and “traditional” as they are used here do not connote a single, unchanging, and “primitive” past that exists in opposition to modernism as imposed by colonizers.³⁵ We should maintain openness to the possibility that tradition is a living and changing process, in which both the bearers of the tradition (Inuit) and the bearers of alternative paradigms (Qallunaat) participate.

1

History of the Eastern Arctic: Foundations and Themes

Inuit and Their Environment

THE FOLLOWING BRIEF outline of the history of the Eastern Arctic prior to 1945 assists in setting the stage for a discussion of education and the relationship between Inuit and Qallunaat. It is important to note the dominant role of the environment in bringing people to or keeping people away from the Arctic, in addition to strongly shaping the lives of those who live there. Only sixty years ago, one would have been hard-pressed to find a regular southern Canadian who recognized the word “inuksuk”; indeed, it would have been difficult to find a southerner who recognized the word “Inuit.” Equally, one would have been unlikely to come across an Inuk who had used a telephone, heard of Adolf Hitler, or seen more than two hundred people in one place. Aboriginal peoples in southern Canada had been managed by the federal government for decades by the time the first generation of Inuit in the Eastern Arctic were subjected to full colonization after the Second World War. It is the environment that defined the time and the way that colonization occurred; the nature of the Arctic ecosystem protected Inuit from contact for a longer period of time than was the case for other Aboriginal groups in Canada. Indeed, in the early stages of northern exploration and resources exploitation, Inuit helped Qallunaat with travel and survival skills to a far greater extent than any knowledge or practical skill was transmitted in the other direction.¹ John Amagoalik, known as the “Father of Nunavut,” writes about this differing nature of colonialism based on the challenges of surviving in, let alone conquering, the Arctic: “The would-be colonizers had to arrive by dog teams and soon discovered that their fingers were so numb from the cold that they couldn’t even unzip their own pants. Many older Inuit smile and chuckle as they tell stories about having to unzip the pants of the ‘big boss policeman’ so he wouldn’t pee in his pants.”² The means of survival in this environment was so foreign to the Qallunaat that they were held at bay, and their first encounters with Inuit were often in search of help.

The Inuit were a hunter-gatherer society established in an environment with a relatively low level of resources in comparison to other areas of Canada. Although natural resources differ between the three major regions of the Eastern Arctic – Qikiqtani (Baffin Island), Kitikmeot (the western and High Arctic islands), and Kivalliq (the west side of Hudson Bay) – some generalities can be

observed. For example, arable soil is scarce and produces little; some 75 percent of the landscape is covered by bare rock or by ice.³ It is invariably cold in Nunavut; winter is a long season, with mean daily temperatures in Pond Inlet, for example, averaging -32.4°C in January, -34.1°C in February, -30.03°C in March, 1.8°C in June, 6°C in July, and 4.2°C in August.⁴ Environment Canada reports the low diversity of both animals and plants in this zone; indeed, fewer than 10 percent of Canada's mammal species occur here, although three of these are sizable: the muskox, caribou, and polar bear.⁵ Despite the very low number of plant species in the Arctic, there are several species of berries that were important to the Inuit diet. The plants that do exist in the Arctic ecozones are particularly adapted to the climate in their distribution, abundance, and size, and most were traditionally used for various purposes.⁶ Despite the low mammalian speciation, hunting for land and sea animals as well as fishing and gathering characterized life in the Arctic. Wildlife provided the basis for nearly all of the resources available to Inuit; clothing and footwear were made entirely from animal furs or skins to stand up to Arctic conditions. The tools were specialized and carefully formed using bone, horn, antler, or ivory.⁷ Richard Harrington, a photographer who travelled among Inuit in the late 1940s, offers a glimpse into their resourcefulness:

Seal fat was rendered into oil for the kudlik. Animal bones were used to make tools or weapons. The skins were stretched out to dry and then used for a multitude of purposes. Polar bear skins were usually used on the sleeping platforms of the igloos, and so were seal skins. Seal skins made particularly watertight boots. Caribou skins were used to form the summer tupiks, and were also the usual materials for clothing. The women would spend untold hours chewing pieces of skin to soften them. The chewed skin, from which the hair had been removed, would often be soaked in urine, and then the women would continue chewing on it until it was as soft and velvety as chamois. Then, using sinew, they would sew the skins into the artiggis, kulitaks, parkas, pants and boots that are so perfectly suited to Arctic weather.⁸

This thin range of resources indicates that Inuit have been remarkably adaptive to an unaccommodating environment. Survival was tenuous enough that taking chances with any resource could be risky. Renée Fossett explains that every generation of Inuit would inevitably experience at least a dozen periods of short-term scarcity, which were for the most part manageable with the application of traditional knowledge, but longer-term scarcity that was unpredictable or unusual could be extremely dangerous.⁹ As a result, the traditional semi-nomadic lifestyle included transience governed by seasonal hunting routes,

migrations in times of scarcity, and dependence on small but strong family groups. George Wenzel characterizes these groups as “Reciprocal relationships that include shared social responsibility as much as they do kilograms of meat, in which all community members contribute their knowledge of animals and the environment, energy in hunting and processing food, and equipment and/or money as they are able.”¹⁰

Like populations of other Aboriginal peoples, and other hunter-gatherer societies, Inuit populations were small, and their social structures and political organization appeared relatively simple. Decision making and leadership traditionally occurred on an informal basis involving the nuclear family or, at most, several families. Although the advice, opinions, and leadership of an individual such as a strong hunter or knowledgeable Elder may have stood out in small Inuit communities or families, deference to such a leader was often contingent on that individual taking into consideration the needs and wishes of everyone involved.¹¹ In addition to a lack of hierarchy in social organization, the economic system was limited to subsistence activities with little specialization. These characteristics, common to other hunter-gatherer societies, have left Inuit subject to prejudice in Western thought, including the disciplines of history and anthropology, because of the belief that societies that are less complex are also less productive and effective, thus creating the ultimate dichotomy between hunter-gatherer and industrial ways of living. However, as Marshall Sahlins argued in 1966,¹² and as Hugh Brody has echoed,¹³ these characteristics of Inuit society – low population density, less accumulation of material possessions, and more hours of leisure – more appropriately offer evidence that they actually secured a high level of affluence. Inuit enjoyed a life of challenges that they could most often accommodate, as their persistence in the Arctic over millennia attests.

Inuit maintain that they struck a balance with the Arctic environment, a balance that could have lasted in perpetuity. Jose Kusugak, a political leader and respected spokesperson for Inuit, claims: “We have lived in the Arctic for many thousands of years. The Arctic has sustained and defined us. We are a part of the Arctic landscape and seascape and the Arctic landscape and seascape are a part of us.”¹⁴ However, Inuit also often describe the environment in terms of its capacity to destroy them through reference to the concept of *sila*. Although the term is complex, the following definition offered by Alex Spalding, a specialist in Inuktitut, gives us a sense of *sila*:

Sila can be used in three principal ways: as an indicator of environment, an indicator of locality, and an indicator of intelligence or spirit ... In a world like *silajjuaq* [the all-encompassing sense of *sila*] ... we have synthesis, one might say, of all of

these: that which supports life and physical being, that which defines horizons and limits, and that which regulates and clarifies mind and spirit. In this concept, one feels a unity of microcosm and macrocosm, near and far, inner and outer, that is, one living physical and spiritual unity of being. These are the outlooks and values of all peoples who are wise from their contact with the air, earth and water.¹⁵

Sila is also commonly thought of by Inuit as the weather spirit of the earth, and it is revered. In times of hardship, it is feared for its power and for the instability it creates and against which they must fight for their food.¹⁶ The traditional knowledge necessary to interact with or respond to *sila* is characterized by an Inuit representative organization as: “An in-depth understanding of the distribution and behaviour of the northern environments we experience in different seasons of the year, and an understanding of the different living resources that need these environments for their own survival.”¹⁷ As a result of this worldview and collected knowledge, a culture and livelihood were established. In other words, many Inuit feel that the environment directly shaped their ways of being and doing. John Amagoalik explains, “The land shaped our mind and language, our culture, our legends, our philosophy and our view of life.”¹⁸ Scholars such as Peter Jull echo this Inuit self-image and the effects of that approach on their entire lifestyle:

The full relationship of these northern peoples to their renewable resource base is not completely understood, but it underlies every aspect of their being, from songs and family customs to political organization and the settlement of disputes. The relationship of a people to a territory was primarily based on resource use, and the style of managing that territory and allocating and sharing its yield, no less so.¹⁹

There is little doubt that the relationship between Inuit and their environment has been a significant determinant in the history of the Eastern Arctic.

Encounters with Qallunaat

Inuit encountered Qallunaat in their homeland as early as the sixteenth century, when sporadic Northwest Passage exploration expeditions arrived, surveyed, and left, usually without a great deal of interaction. Any contact that did occur between Inuit and Qallunaat brought with it disease; Robert McGhee argues that European diseases such as smallpox were first recorded as spreading through Inuit populations as early as the 1770s.²⁰ Eruptions of smallpox, polio, and tuberculosis persisted well into the twentieth century.²¹ Regular visits between

Inuit and Qallunaat began in the 1820s, particularly as a result of intensive commercial whaling by British and Dutch whalers, who were interested in highly valuable bowhead whale oil. The whaling period occurred between the 1850s and 1880s and exerted an enormous strain on numerous Arctic resources.²² Inuit traded with the whalers, mostly for souvenir goods rather than staples, and some were employed as ice pilots and hunters for the Europeans.²³ However, although British whalers and American explorers rapidly charted the Arctic throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their presence did not fundamentally alter the way of life of the majority of Inuit.

The establishment of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) posts and missionary efforts had a greater effect on Inuit. As opposed to the spontaneous trade with whalers and explorers who visited Inuit camps, significant changes to the repertoire of tools available occurred with regular access to HBC traders. Inuit who lived on the west side of Hudson Bay (southern Kiralliq), could travel to Churchill to trade at the HBC post, and Fossett reports that by 1830 every hunter in that area would have possessed a gun.²⁴ Robert Paine characterizes this relationship as "transactional" because "each side was able to derive benefit from the other, even though their respective bargaining powers were unequal."²⁵ Trapping of white fox became a viable economic pursuit for Inuit after the establishment of an HBC post at Chesterfield Inlet around 1911, Eskimo Point (now Arviat) in 1921,²⁶ and twenty-one other locations before 1940.²⁷ The HBC stocked its posts on an annual basis, by ship, and Inuit gained access to staples such as tea, flour, and sugar as well as to tools such as fabrics, firearms, and ammunition.

Closely aligned with the spread of the HBC was the coming of missionaries and the introduction of Christianity. Missionaries established themselves in some northern locations prior to the twentieth century. The earliest and most important mission begun in the Eastern Arctic was that of Edmund James Peck at Cumberland Sound (near Pangnirtung) in 1894.²⁸ Reverend Peck is known best for developing the syllabic representation of Aboriginal languages, first with Ojibway and Cree in Ontario and later with Inuktitut. Peck spent eight years in Cumberland Sound translating gospels into Inuktitut and teaching syllabic literacy to Inuit. Conversion to Christianity happened quickly, as in most Aboriginal communities approached by missionaries. Christianity's presence in the Eastern Arctic was prevalent by the late 1920s and early 1930s. Catholic and Anglican missionaries competed for souls in the communities of the Eastern Arctic, leaving a spotty pattern of affiliation. As a result of Peck's translations, Inuktitut hymnals, prayer books, and Bibles were an important resource in that endeavour.

A small amount of instruction by Qallunaat missionaries, particularly under the auspices of religious observance, resulted in the enthusiastic and widespread

appropriation of syllabic Inuktitut literacy. So completely did this system spread among Inuit that syllabics were in use on northern Baffin Island well before the first missionary arrived there.²⁹ Once settled, missionaries offered basic instruction in Inuktitut literacy, Western hygiene, and arithmetic. Donald Marsh, an Anglican minister who lived in Eskimo Point between 1926 and 1943, said the following about the “curriculum” at his mission school:

We didn't expect nor hope to train Eskimo children to speak English; to whom would they speak? The trader? He spoke pidgin Eskimo and always used someone to interpret for him if he couldn't manage himself. It's generally useless to learn a language unless you can constantly use it. Simple hygiene, how to add, subtract and do small sums in arithmetic, all of which would help in trading, were the basics given to every child. To read and write in their own language helped them to read their Bibles and prayer books as well as to communicate with people far off, and some history and general knowledge of the world gave the children and adults a bit of background of a life apart from their own.³⁰

Missionaries like Marsh would preach and teach from a central location, usually situated near a Hudson's Bay Company post. They would also teach on an itinerant basis, travelling by dogsled or boat with a guide to visit Inuit in their camps covering hundreds of miles of territory. In other words, these early educational efforts by missionaries catered, by necessity, to the way of life pursued by Inuit and therefore differed greatly from the approach of the later generation of residential schools.³¹ The influence of the missionaries certainly did put an end to some cultural traditions, such as taboos associated with shamanism, but by introducing Inuktitut literacy, they offered Inuit a highly significant tool for communication.³² Unfortunately, as will be discussed further, when responsibility for education was transferred to the federal government, this Inuktitut literacy was rejected by educators in favour of English.³³

The increasing dependency of Inuit trappers and traders on the HBC affected their relationship to some wildlife resources, and the cultural impact of the introduction of Christianity should not be diminished. However, the viability of a nomadic subsistence lifestyle remained intact for most Inuit until the collapse of the fox fur trade in 1930.³⁴ The presence of the military and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which started in 1903 with two posts,³⁵ grew steadily as sovereignty became a serious concern in the early twentieth century. However, Inuit were discouraged from camping or staying near the established RCMP posts. Prior to the Second World War and the subsequent interest taken by the federal government in Canada's Arctic, Inuit had no treaties with the nation of Canada, essentially no legal status under Canadian law, and access

to very few government services or relief measures. Most important for the purposes of this book, few Inuit had access to formal education. The influence of the Canadian government was therefore limited. This brief introduction to the pre-1945 period is supplemented throughout the remainder of this chapter, and much greater detail with regard to Inuit culture and way of life prior to colonization is included in Chapter 2.

Aboriginal History and Education in Canada

Historians of the North rely on the broader body of Canadian Aboriginal history as a context in which to identify themes and from which to draw comparisons. The formal education of Aboriginal people in Canada has become a widely studied subject, particularly as it offers a measure of the inequality spawned by colonialism. Research into sexual and other forms of abuse of residential school pupils by clergy and religiously affiliated educators that came to light in the 1980s has received the most publicity.³⁶ The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), published in 1996, devoted a significant portion of its hearings to the experience of Aboriginal people who attended residential schools. According to the RCAP, education was a cornerstone for the assimilationist policy employed by the Canadian government: “Of all the steps taken to achieve that goal, none was more obviously a creature of Canada’s paternalism toward Aboriginal people, its civilizing strategy and its stern assimilative determination than education.”³⁷ Although Aboriginal communities across Canada were subjected to education in this spirit at different times, for different durations, and under slightly different models, the results show a depressing similarity in broad outline. Marie Battiste effectively sums up the legacy of federal responsibility for Aboriginal education:

Through ill-conceived government policies and plans, Aboriginal youths were subjected to a combination of powerful but profoundly distracting forces of cognitive imperialism and colonization. Various boarding schools, industrial schools, day schools, and Eurocentric educational practices ignored or rejected the world-views, languages, and values of Aboriginal parents in the education of their children. The outcome was the gradual loss of these world-views, languages and cultures and the creation of widespread social and psychological upheaval in Aboriginal communities.³⁸

The late introduction of federal schooling and religiously affiliated residential schools to the Northwest Territories, and particularly the Eastern Arctic region, did not prevent Inuit from also experiencing this loss and social and psychological upheaval. As Lynn Aylward argues: “Cognitive and professional imperialism

and cognitive manipulation have played a significant role in the educational policies of the northern territories of Canada. The history of the government's policy and action is replete with contradictions, racist assumptions, and superficial community consultation."³⁹

Federal jurisdiction over Aboriginal education lasted until 1969, when the federal government's "White Paper," or *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, recommended the devolution of educational responsibilities to the provinces. This policy recommendation prompted a passionate response from the National Indian Brotherhood, titled the "Red Paper Policy," which was later distilled into *Indian Control of Indian Education*.⁴⁰ This document argued that the transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal education to the provinces was unacceptable and that it should instead be rendered to the Aboriginal peoples themselves: "We must, therefore, reclaim our right to direct the education of our children. Based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: *Parental Responsibility* and *Local Control of Education*, Indian parents seek participation and partnership with the Federal Government, whose legal responsibility for Indian education is set by the treaties and the Indian Act."⁴¹ At this time, Aboriginal education was viewed primarily in terms of its capacity to protect and preserve Aboriginal culture and language.⁴² In resisting the mandate of the federal government's White Paper, Aboriginal communities secured the right to jurisdiction over their schools, and since 1972 band-operated schools have grown steadily. However, these schools continue to struggle to meet provincial standards and regulations while remaining true to Aboriginal visions of culture-based curriculum.⁴³

This struggle points to the fact that Aboriginal education is required to make a difficult compromise between two purposes: (1) the preparation of Aboriginal students for economic success in a system primarily underpinned by Euro-North American culture and (2) the revitalization of Aboriginal traditions and cultures – not as a relic of the past but as a key to the future of Aboriginal peoples. Battiste explains:

It was also important that the educational processes of Indian education should strengthen First Nations languages and cultures, build upon the strong foundations of ancestral heritage and culture, and enlist the invaluable advice and assistance of elders. The very tenets of Indian education had to change from accepting acculturation and cognitive assimilation as final ends to revitalizing and renewing language and cultural identity and dignity.⁴⁴

In other words, Aboriginal educators discovered that the growing gap between Aboriginal youth, their heritage, and their prospects for the future could not

be resolved simply through incorporating some Aboriginal content into the formal education system. Rather, it would take an ongoing negotiation to meet success in either purpose of education identified above.

The complete integration of Aboriginal people into the Canadian economic system has still not been fully realized despite Aboriginal oversight of schools. Marlene Brant Castellano and her colleagues reported in 2000 that an analysis of census data from 1981 to 1996 showed only a marginal increase in Aboriginal students pursuing post-secondary education: “The promise of an education that delivers the skills to survive in a post-industrial global economy while affirming the ethical and spiritual foundations of Aboriginal cultures is far from being fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Therefore, Aboriginal education has had to grapple with the search for an entirely new system: “While the last three decades have been marked by the resilient struggle of Aboriginal peoples to regain control of education, the 1990s have produced concentrated efforts to rethink Aboriginal education and to articulate what is ‘Aboriginal’ about Aboriginal education.”⁴⁶

What is Aboriginal education in Canada now, and what significance does it have in comparison to non-Aboriginal education? The report of the RCAP suggests that preparation and support for Aboriginal self-government should be the highest priority of Aboriginal education: “Preparing Aboriginal people to assume the complete range of responsibilities associated with self-governance must be recognized as a top priority in postsecondary education. At this historical juncture, Aboriginal people, governments, educational institutions and professional organizations all have crucial roles in building the capacity of Aboriginal nations and their communities to exercise self-government.”⁴⁷ The RCAP report is particularly poignant with reference to the creation of Nunavut Territory, where the establishment of self-government has literally been the most significant occupation of Inuit for several decades and arguably remains one of the most important functions of the education system.

Status of the Inuit

Although First Nations and Inuit peoples are often lumped together in federal departments and public consciousness in Canada, there is actually very little commonality between them in terms of their relationship to the federal government. Inuit surely count as a First Nation in a literal sense, in that they were resident in Canada long before the coming of Europeans and other immigrants to North America, but the Canadian Inuit as a people do not have any national treaties with the federal government comparable to First Nations treaties. Inuit groups have chosen to negotiate rights and privileges for themselves based not on a national racial or ethnic status but on the condition of their residency in areas defined by land claims.

Historically, there is very little Canadian legislation that refers directly to the Inuit. The Constitution Act of 1867 affords exclusive legislative jurisdiction to the Canadian Parliament over “Indians, and lands reserved for the Indians.”⁴⁸ In 1929 starvation in Northern Quebec among Inuit raised controversy between Ottawa and Quebec about which level of government was responsible for relief provisions. *Reference re. Eskimos*, 1939 of the Supreme Court of Canada finally decided that the term “Indians” in the Constitution Act of 1867 should include the Inuit, based on the historic usage of the term “Indian.”⁴⁹ The Constitution Act is important because it defines the federal legislative jurisdiction over Aboriginal peoples and affirms their existing rights. It also provides the legal basis for the Indian Act of 1876, which affords Indians basic health, education, and tax-exemption benefits as well as band assets and reserved lands. However, the *Reference re Eskimos* decision does not apply to this legislation, so the Inuit remain exempt from it.⁵⁰ Despite reluctant recognition by the federal government that the Inuit are subject to federal jurisdiction, and despite the Citizenship Act of 1947, which made them Canadian citizens, the Inuit were not permitted to vote in federal elections until 1962,⁵¹ and the first Inuk member of Parliament was not elected until 1979.⁵²

More current legislation includes the Constitution Act of 1982, which defines the Aboriginal peoples of Canada to include the Indian, Inuit, and Métis; however, no further definition of who these people are exists in the document.⁵³ As Bradford W. Morse points out, this lack of definition raises sensitive and complicated questions about what degree of ancestry makes one an Indian or an Inuk. He asks, “50 percent? 1 percent? Or should the test be a cultural one? The government resolved the problem by allowing Native organizations to determine eligibility for themselves.”⁵⁴ The updated Indian Act of 1985 dictates a complex web of status and non-status First Nations (referred to as “Indians” in the Act) with differing levels of rights and benefits.⁵⁵ However, Inuit groups remain legally excluded from the Act; they do not have their own legislation, and they did not have any other treaties with the federal government prior to modern land claims such as the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Natalia Loukacheva, who has compared the legal status of the Inuit in Canada to the Inuit in Greenland, argues that “the lack of treaties shows that colonizers did not recognize Inuit as sovereign people.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the basic health, education, tax-exemption, and title benefits available to all Indians are not automatically available to the Inuit, whose status in law remains essentially undefined.⁵⁷

Inuit Land Claims

The Inuit movement for self-determination was largely motivated by environmental consciousness and concern for the wildlife, land, and other natural

resources that had sustained them and actively influenced their culture for thousands of years. As the Arctic increasingly became an area of military and economic interest in the Cold War period, Inuit felt threatened by their lack of involvement in decision making. Yet, by the 1970s, Inuit were seeking to assert their Aboriginal rights and land claims and to negotiate at the highest level of government in Canada. Jack Hicks and Graham White, analysts of political change in Nunavut, argue that what might be called “Inuit nationalism” was a “paradoxical result of Inuit contact with – and subsequent domination by – Euro-Canadian society,” whereas all previous identification and loyalties would have occurred only at the local and family level.⁵⁸

Particularly in response to the discovery of the oil fields in Alaska and to the ensuing Mackenzie Valley Pipeline proposal, the Inuit representative organization called Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) was created in 1971.⁵⁹ Its goals were stated as follows:

- to promote public awareness of Inuit rights in Canadian society
- to provide necessary information to Inuit on their own situation, government plans, aboriginal rights and legal matters
- to help preserve Inuit culture and language and promote dignity and pride in Inuit heritage
- to assist Inuit in their right to full participation in Canadian society, that they may determine those things of a social, economic, educational and political nature which will affect them and future generations; and
- to unite all Inuit of Northwest Territories, Arctic Quebec, Labrador and Manitoba and to speak for them with regard to political support and publicity.⁶⁰

It is clear from the transcript of the inaugural meeting of ITC that Inuit were concerned about not fully understanding the federal laws and regulations that applied to them, their own rights in Canada, and how to exercise control over their lands.⁶¹ ITC’s core pursuit was the creation of a proposal for an independent territory belonging to the Inuit of the Eastern Arctic. This involved the development of in-depth land-use studies, which have identified all activities pursued by Inuit in the region, both historically and presently, so as to establish occupancy.⁶² Inuit had no physical barriers, markers, or indicators such as fences and roads to delineate their territories, and indeed their culture makes little provision for the concept of land ownership.⁶³ But concerns regarding their economic future and the threat of large natural resource-development projects left them no choice but to adapt their culture to these foreign concepts and to skillfully employ them where necessary to achieve their goals. Asserting the

right to self-government in one's own territory was the first step in this process. Loukacheva characterizes this change as follows: "There is no notion of self-government or rights in the Inuit tradition or language because the Creator endows the order of everyone and everything. However, because of the transition to modern society and strategic purposes of survival of a distinct Inuit culture, Inuit had to adapt unfamiliar concepts of human rights, Aboriginal rights, governance and autonomy."⁶⁴

By 1976 Inuit representatives had drafted and submitted a proposal for the creation of their own territory to the federal government under Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.⁶⁵ The document focused on Nunavut, as well as on a social and economic support system for Inuit involvement in all government activities. According to R. Quinn Duffy, the document reflected the unwillingness on the part of Inuit to be perceived as dependent on the federal government's "handouts," and it clearly indicated that no "special status" was being requested.⁶⁶ ITC was forced to withdraw its proposal in 1977 because of evidence that the proposal was unworkable, largely due to the low number of educated and experienced Inuit at the time but also due to the undefined issues of land claims and individual compensation.⁶⁷ Negotiations thereafter with the federal government were extremely slow-moving, and Inuit representatives were up against a number of seemingly impassable roadblocks.⁶⁸ ITC's multiple priorities involving the various other Inuit groups also further complicated talks. In 1980 ITC prepared a new proposal, of a vastly different tone and nature, entitled *Parnagujuk: "A Plan for Progress."* The negotiators had clearly learned from their first attempts and were recasting priorities in ways that would be more palatable to the federal government; according to Duffy, they "showed a commendable degree of political realism."⁶⁹ However, it appears that they also chose the path of least resistance by committing themselves to pursuing greater control over environmental, economic, and administrative decision making in their territory rather than claiming self-government based on their Aboriginal rights and status as a First Nations people.⁷⁰

Following the *Parnagujuk* proposal, the Legislative Assembly in Yellowknife began an investigation into public opinion about the division of the NWT, initiating a 1982 plebiscite that produced a record voter turnout in the Eastern Arctic and showed 56.65 percent to be in favour.⁷¹ In 1982 the NWT requested that the federal government divide the territory, but the government remained reluctant to take action until land claims had been settled for the region. Also in 1982 the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN), which later became Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), took over leading negotiating responsibilities from ITC.⁷² On behalf of the Inuit of Nunavut, TFN signed the 1990 Agreement-in-Principle with the Government of Canada and presented the

Inuit of Nunavut with the land claim, ratified by 69 percent of the eligible voters in 1992.⁷³ In 1993 the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) was signed by the TFN and the Government of Canada in Iqaluit, and in Ottawa that same year Parliament passed the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act and the Nunavut Act.

Inuit secured various rights and privileges through the NLCA, including title to 350,000 square kilometres of land; priority rights to harvest wildlife; three national parks; a public territorial government with new institutions to co-manage land, water, wildlife, and so forth; capital transfer payments; a 5 percent share of royalties from oil and gas revenues of Crown lands; Inuit employment support programs; and a \$13 million training trust fund.⁷⁴ The NLCA was conceived to apply to “beneficiaries,” who must hold Inuit status with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which maintains representative powers for the Inuit of Nunavut. This organization describes its mission and activities as follows: “NTI is responsible for the management of all Inuit-Owned Lands in Nunavut and acts as the advocate of Inuit interests in Nunavut. The organization also provides a number of programs to Inuit, including support to Inuit development corporations and community economic development organizations, an Elders pension plan, a harvester support program, and a bereavement travel program.”⁷⁵ Essentially, NTI was given responsibility for developing the enrolment list for NLCA beneficiaries, a process wherein the definition of an Inuk was left to their own discretion and was based on individuals identifying themselves.

Peter Jull has argued that the 1993 agreement was the start of a new era for the Inuit of Canada, one in which they redefined the relations of Aboriginal peoples with the national government and captured the attention of their fellow citizens:

Indeed, the Nunavut self-government and claims teams maintained high moral and intellectual ground in constitutional, cross-cultural, and environmental matters, e.g., parading the quest for a Nunavut territory as Canada’s first “made in Canada” constitutional reform process since white settlement. Inuit were no longer the forgotten people ... This amounted to a subtle psychological winning of the South, a match for the earlier Southern physical possession of the post-war North.⁷⁶

The rights and benefits, and the recognition, awarded to the 35,000 Inuit of Nunavut are undoubtedly of considerable significance. However, Hicks and White question the extent to which the terms of the agreement really represent a significant departure for the Canadian government: “The Nunavut ‘package’

– the provisions of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, and the resulting division of the NWT and the creation of the Nunavut territory and the Government of Nunavut – was designed to both accommodate Inuit self-government aspirations yet fit comfortably within established traditions of mainstream Canadian governance. It is not a radical departure.”⁷⁷

Hicks and White raise an aspect of the history of Nunavut that has received little attention: What did the federal government receive from this agreement? In settling the land claim with the federal government and establishing a public government, the Inuit were required to legally rescind the opportunity to pursue further claims based on their Aboriginal status. The section of the NLCA that pertains to this trade appears in the *Certainty* section but is also referred to as the extinguishment clause. This clause has been criticized by historians and legal specialists alike for its limitation on Aboriginal rights and status in Canada. Frank Tester argues that “the extinguishment clause is the most political clause in the agreement, and it has the most serious implications for any, not just for Inuit, but for any First Nation anywhere in the country; the extinguishment clauses are I think the most offensive, controversial and the most important aspect of any modern treaty.”⁷⁸ Loukacheva echoes Tester’s criticism of the clause: “Arguably, this clause brings some colonial legacy features to the Agreement.”⁷⁹ Inuit also felt insulted by this demand on the part of the federal government, but according to Paul Quassa, a lead negotiator, they chose not to risk losing Nunavut by disputing it: “It was very hard for us [Inuit] to do that. It is colonial legacy when you have to give up a certain thing in order to get something. This is not the Inuit way ... We had to accept it, but in turn we said: ‘give us Nunavut government,’ ‘give us Nunavut territory.’”⁸⁰ Here is evidence that the negotiation for a land claim and new territorial government in Nunavut involved more compromise than Inuit expected, and perhaps the federal government was less flexible than it has claimed. The determination on the part of Inuit to achieve their goal regardless of the terms is admirable, but it is also appears that the full implications of their pursuit have not been realized. Further discussion of the implementation of the NLCA, specifically its impact on education, follows in the Conclusion of this book.

Historically, Inuit lived and thrived in a region of geographic, economic, and cultural isolation from the rest of Canada, and the population of “newcomers,” or Qallunaat, still remains low. They have tried to chart their own course in negotiations with the federal government despite the complexity involved. They have expressed the desire to avoid some of the constraints of other First Nations policies, especially economic dependence and cultural assimilation. In an interview regarding the decision of Inuit to pursue rights based on residency rather than ethnicity, Jose Kusugak reinforces the point that Inuit have chosen to be

“Canadians” first: “What makes us real Canadians? We must have a good understanding of what it is to be Canadian. Not just to be on welfare. I think it’s better choosing to pay taxes so that we can have a voice within Canada. And stand up by ourselves like any other Canadian.”⁸¹ Others, like Frank Tester, connect the history of mistreatment of many Inuit to the modern treaty, suggesting that the government is perpetuating an unjust relationship: “They [the federal government] claim that Inuit are just regular Canadians, no special status, but there is a whole history of treating them differently from other Canadians.”⁸² With patience and determination, Inuit were able to find common ground with the federal government. The creation of Nunavut Territory has thus far been seen as a monumental achievement in fulfillment of Inuit self-determination, environmental protection, and cultural persistence.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit

The nature of the Arctic environment, the traditional Inuit lifestyle, and the social norms by which they educated their children are further discussed in Chapter 2. At this juncture it is important to note that the ways Inuit live with, and know about, the environment (the main “subject” of Inuit education) differ greatly from the approach taken by Qallunaat. This difference is commonly remarked on by contrasting the Inuit basis for understanding, termed “traditional ecological knowledge” (TEK), with the Qallunaat basis for understanding, called “science.” Traditional knowledge, traditional ecological/environmental knowledge, indigenous knowledge, or local knowledge, as it is variably called, has almost become a cliché in our society. In the past twenty years, it has gone from being a form of knowing looked at with great skepticism, and given only cursory legitimacy, to one that is nearly unquestioned based on romantic notions of Aboriginal authority.⁸³ The definition of TEK is a thorny issue. In 1993 the World Conservation Union created a Working Group on Traditional Ecological Knowledge that defined TEK and its relevance in the following way:

Traditional ecological knowledge thus involves a people’s understanding of environmental structures and processes. It is a knowledge which has an immediate relevance and application for specific societies in particular environments. On one hand, it is a unique and distinctive example of how human populations understand and relate to local ecosystems; on the other, it can represent the employment of functionally parallel solutions to similar problems in biologically diverse and geographically distant environments.⁸⁴

This definition is useful because it highlights that the most critical components of TEK exist in contrast to standard scientific approaches: it is a resource

that cannot be considered universal, standardized, or tested with controlled variables.

In Canada we have tended to place TEK alongside “science,” or Western ways of knowledge production, call them equal, and then proceed to highlight all the areas where they complement one another and ignore those where they do not. The goal has remained to fit what Aboriginal TEK tells us into Western frameworks of knowledge in order to determine what we “know.” For example, in her study of local knowledge, Julie Cruikshank points out, “In much of the resource management literature, there seems to be a growing consensus that indigenous knowledge exists as a kind of distinct epistemology that can be systematized and incorporated into Western management regimes.”⁸⁵ Shepard Krech III also problematizes the stereotypes of TEK and in doing so raises many of the limitations of using traditional knowledge to bolster scientific or ecological structures of knowing.⁸⁶ He says that he does not contest the validity and the extent of TEK but argues that it cannot be considered without conditions since it is not static or universal and is influenced by characteristics of the person who is sharing the knowledge (i.e., age, gender, family history, and so on). Moreover, it can be problematic to determine whether the knowledge is rooted in the past. He states: “Although it is assumed to be anchored in the past, ‘tradition,’ a vexed concept, is mutable, open to external influence, and at times invented anew in succeeding generations.”⁸⁷ Krech appears to come close to invalidating traditional knowledge, which is a sensitive and controversial pursuit. However, his points remind us of the true nature and function of traditional knowledge, which has recently been bent beyond recognition often for social, economic, and political reasons.

Historians and anthropologists know that TEK is not static; like oral history, it is constantly under production and flux according to the teller and the meanings that information takes on as circumstances change. Cruikshank argues that local knowledge, like oral history, is fundamentally changed the moment it is “defined and bounded as ‘systems’ of knowledge.” She says, “this sets in motion processes that fracture and fragment human experience.”⁸⁸ However, our Western knowledge frameworks privilege information that is always right or that is right for the longest time until proven wrong. Therefore, our understanding is that TEK is consistent, “old” content known by people who are aware that their ancestors have been here longer than ours. This is a simplification, but not by much. What we are missing is an understanding of and appreciation for the ways of knowing and the ways of knowledge production in Aboriginal cultures, which often present more significant differences than comparisons of the data or “known” content between TEK and Western knowledge. Krech points out that TEK is culturally situated: “Because it is cultural, it is premised on, for example, theories of animal behaviour (ethology), ideas about habitat locations

or the presence of other-than-human beings, and definitions and metaphors specific to particular cultural systems. Indigenous ecological thought, the culturally based comprehension of ecological systems, varies according to culture, and therefore ecology is at base ethnoecology.”⁸⁹ This reminder is equally applicable to the knowledge produced under scientific and Western knowledge frameworks. Derek Rasmussen analyzes the ideologies, assumptions, and foundations of Qallunaat knowledge, pointing out, for example, that “the ideology of print means that everything is seen in terms of the written word and the apotheosis of achievement; literacy is the benchmark for intelligence, illiteracy equals incompetence.”⁹⁰ More often than not, the ways that knowledge is produced and the lens through which it is viewed are forgotten in favour of simply evaluating and comparing data and content. As George W. Wenzel has argued, the appropriate employment of TEK continues to present researchers with challenges: “Immediate concern must centre on 1) the problem of possible misinterpretation of traditional ecological knowledge through its cultural decontextualization and 2) the conundrum presented to researchers by our adherence to a perceived reductionist methodology. Not surprisingly, the fact that these two matters are not easily separated makes each essential to the discussion of traditional ecological knowledge.”⁹¹

Given that local and traditional ecological knowledge is culturally situated, how does the general term “TEK” function specifically with reference to Inuit culture in the Eastern Arctic? This book actually avoids the term “TEK” in favour of *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit (IQ)*. IQ is preferable in this context because it is the term currently used by Inuit in Nunavut to represent what is traditional: “*Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit* means knowledge that has been passed on to us by our ancestors, things that we have always known, things crucial to our survival – patience and resourcefulness.”⁹² Hugh Brody suggested in his 1975 *The People’s Land* that the idea of tradition in general is closely linked in Inuit culture and Inuktitut to what is “real.” Brody explains the importance of the term *Inummariit*, or “the real Eskimos”:

Inummariit, “a genuine Eskimo” or “a real person”: *Inuk* (an Eskimo) + *marik* (genuine). The plural is *Inummariit*, “the real Eskimos.” The combination of these two examples shows the structure of a third term, *inummarittitut*: *Inuk* (an Eskimo) + *marik* (real) + *titut* (in the manner of), hence “in the manner of a real Eskimo.” Some people are said to eat, work, talk, or even to walk *inummartittut*.⁹³

Brody goes on to connect the concept of being a “real” Inuk to what is privileged as tradition: “*Inuit* conceptions of tradition lie, therefore, within the compass of the meaning of *Inummariit* or *Inummariititut*. The common use of these terms

displays a strong consciousness of tradition.”⁹⁴ In other words, it remains a great compliment to be referred to as an *Inummarik*, so being educated in *IQ* is of high importance. Furthermore, *IQ* is preferable because it reminds us that Inuit TEK is culturally situated, being steeped in the beliefs, values, and worldview of Inuit: “*Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* embraces all aspects of traditional Inuit culture, including values, world-view, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations.”⁹⁵ What are recognized today as being the main principles of *IQ* are described in the Appendix.⁹⁶ As the principles demonstrate, *IQ* is not limited to data or content but encompasses Inuit ways of knowing, being, and doing. *IQ* also privileges experiential knowledge; there is a component of it that is alive only when the teller and the audience are able to experience the knowledge in ways of living.⁹⁷ If one is not there to listen, to observe, to try, a great component of knowledge is missed. We hear this from adults who regret not spending more time on the land with their parents learning the techniques of hunting, weather prediction, igloo building, and so on. They may hear many, many stories in their lifetime about such things, which we might classify as the passing on of oral history, but without having been there, many Inuit feel inadequate and unknowing.

Education and Culture

Thus far I have referred to education in a broad sense, but the historical meaning and practice of education for Inuit differed greatly from the concept of formal education pursued by the Qallunaat. This difference grows out of the same differences between Western knowledge and *IQ*. Jeanette Armstrong argues that education in Aboriginal communities is about the practice of everyday living, focused on training future generations for a healthy existence within their social order (and within a productive environment), and that education is thus culturally defined. Education is a “natural process that was integrated into the daily lifestyle of the culture” based within the family.⁹⁸ The impact of education being delivered by the family is of great significance in distinguishing Aboriginal education from formal schooling: “It is through family-based learning that quality is ensured as the young are taught with the utmost care through natural parental instinct for continuation and survival.”⁹⁹ Armstrong further explains that the education of children thus tends to reflect closely the needs and stage of learning demonstrated by each child; it is child-centred. Lastly, she points out that Aboriginal education can be referred to as a natural process because of the way that it reflects both the natural rhythms of the day’s activities and the experiential basis of educational methodology: “Experiential learning during work activities was the medium for learning.”¹⁰⁰ Armstrong argues that much of the traditional teaching and learning among Aboriginal peoples thus

occurred according to terms that cannot be achieved within the confines of the classroom. Chapter 2 discusses the extent to which each of these general characteristics of Aboriginal education matches Inuit education specifically; here, they are intended to offer a basic summary of the Aboriginal approach.

Anthropologists and scholars have commented on the experience of learning in the Inuit way. According to both George Wenzel and Arlene Stairs, in the North Baffin dialect of Inuktitut there are words that differentiate between formal education and Inuit education.¹⁰¹ Stairs explains:

Inuit clearly recognize the radical difference between formal education and traditional learning, labelling them, respectively, *ilisayuq* and *isumaqsayuq*. *Isumaqsayuq* is the way of passing along knowledge through observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities, with integration into the immediate, shared social structure and ecology as the principal goal. The focus is on values developed through the learner's relationship to other persons and to the environment. In terms of the present speculations, *isumaqsayuq* may be understood as education leading to ecocentric identity. In contrast, *ilisayuq* is teaching that involves a high level of abstract verbal mediation in a setting removed from daily life, with the skill base for a future specialized occupation as the principle goal. *Ilisayuq* may be understood as education leading to egocentric development, to success in an egocentric contractual culture.¹⁰²

Hugh Brody also describes, in more personal terms, his experience of learning Inuktitut from an Elder in Pond Inlet as offering him much more than lessons in language:

Again and again a lesson that I had expected to be about language had also been, or become, a lesson about other things – how to hunt, how to behave when talking, how to use the telephone, how to play checkers. When I had asked Anaviapik to teach me Inuktitut, and when he had said he was eager to do so, I had thought we were talking about words and grammar, about speaking, while he had supposed we were talking about a way of being. He had embarked upon the task of teaching me how to do and be *Inuk-titut*, “in the manner of an Inuk.”¹⁰³

Therefore, in addressing the integration of aspects of Inuit education into the formal school system, the challenge lies not only with the content and with developing materials that are culturally appropriate but also with the pedagogical approach, the values that shape that approach, the understanding of relationships, and the local contingencies that surround the teacher and learner. Education is fundamentally linked to the purposes, worldviews, and cultural

foundations of the people who are being educated, and these largely differ between traditional Inuit education and formal Qallunaat education.

Even with decades of shared encounters, massive technological change, and recently the common concern for climate change, Inuit and Qallunaat continue to experience life in the Arctic differently. Through the mechanisms of government and public policy provided first by Inuit representative organizations and now also by the Government of Nunavut, Inuit have expressed the importance of maintaining many aspects of their traditional culture and relationship with the environment. The pursuit of self-determination was based largely on the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which stipulated rights and responsibilities with regard to the land, sea, wildlife, and subsurface resources. It also included a political aspect that allowed Inuit, who comprise the majority of the population in Nunavut, to make decisions about their homeland in terms of language use and cultural sustainability. It would not be unreasonable to argue that Nunavut was largely conceived of in the interest of ensuring that the relationship between humans and the environment in the Arctic is shaped by Inuit culture, not that of the Qallunaat.