

Young People Have a Lot to Say . . . With Trust, Time, and Tools: The Voices of Inuit Youth in Nunavik

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Abstract

Young people's voices are frequently overlooked in discussions about education development and policy. This article draws on an ongoing participatory action research project (2011–2014) in Nunavik on student resilience and school perseverance. It examines ethical issues that have arisen during the research process, and highlights the strengths and limitations of tools and technology used to engage students and make their voices heard.

Keywords: youth, Inuit communities, critical Indigenous methodologies, participatory action research, research ethics, resilience

Résumé

Les voix des jeunes sont souvent négligées dans les débats sur le développement et les politiques de l'éducation. Cet article s'inspire d'une recherche-action participative, planifiée sur trois ans (2011-2014) sur la résilience et la persévérance scolaire des élèves Inuit au Nunavik. Ce document examine plus spécifiquement les considérations éthiques d'un travail de recherche avec les jeunes Inuit. Il explique également les forces et les limites

des outils qui ont été développés, et de la technologie qui a été utilisée pour faire participer les jeunes et faire entendre leur voix.

Mots-clés : jeunes, communautés Inuit, méthodologies autochtones critiques, recherche-action participative, éthique de recherche, résilience

Introduction

A large body of literature has investigated the causes of high dropout rates among Inuit youth in Nunavik. Often driven by a deficit approach, many of these studies portray students as victims of their circumstances with little chance of succeeding under existing conditions. Young people's voices are seldom present in these studies, because research with youth presents very specific challenges.

This article draws from an ongoing three-year participatory research project, informed by critical Indigenous methodologies, on the resilience and school perseverance of Inuit students in Nunavik. It describes ethical issues that have thus far arisen during the research process, as well as the various tools used to engage students, increase their participation and make their voices count. This article is of significance to researchers working with youth in Indigenous and Aboriginal communities, as well as young people of other ethnic, social, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds.

After providing background information on the research project, we describe the ethical guidelines that informed our research methodology. We then look at ethical considerations of doing research with the Inuit youth. Finally, we discuss the advantages and limitations of the tools we used and adapted to ensure the inclusion of young people's voices.

Education in Nunavik: Shifting the Focus to Resilience

Created by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975, the Kativik School Board (KSB) has exclusive jurisdiction in Nunavik to develop programs and teaching materials in Inuktitut, English, and French, and to provide elementary, secondary, and adult education in the region's 14 communities. Programs must meet objectives set by the Quebec Ministry of Education, but the content and language levels may be adapted to Inuit second-language learners (Kativik School Board, 2013). Students study in Inuktitut, their mother tongue, from kindergarten to Grade 2. When their children reach Grade 3, parents must choose to place them in English or French immersion. Despite many initiatives and significant changes, there continues to be a major discrepancy between high school completion rates in Nunavik and those in the rest of Quebec. Dropout rates were

estimated to be between 80% and 93% in Nunavik, compared to 25% in the rest of the province (Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, 2009).

Many studies have examined the situation of youth in Nunavik, their educational attainment and their high dropout rates. The emphasis has typically been on the challenges students face within their communities and the education system. These include the trauma of colonialism and the scars of abusive residential schools (Ives, Sinha, Leman, Goren, Levy-Powell, & Thompson, 2012); high teacher turnover rates (Mueller, 2006); pedagogical practices that are unsuitable for second-language learners (Berger & Epp, 2007; McGregor, 2010; Tompkins, 1998; Vick-Westgate, 2002); and little involvement and engagement of parents and communities in schools (Vick-Westgate, 2002).

The uninterrupted and repeated “single story” of despair, poverty, loss, abuse, and addiction has, in a way, become the story of the Inuit of Nunavik. As Chimamanda Adichie (2009) has eloquently stated, “Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

Numerous Aboriginal and Native scholars have criticized the deficit approach of Western-centric research practices (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2010). Tuck (2009) refers to the persistent trend in research on Native communities as “damage-centered research,” which “intends to document peoples’ pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression” (p. 409). However, she warns that this type of research “reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of [Indigenous] people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless.” She recommends adopting an approach to capture not only loss and oppression, but also wisdom, hope and survivance (Vizenor, 2008).

Substantial effort, initiative, perseverance, hard work, determination, and resilience go into shaping everyday life in Nunavik communities. Despite many serious challenges and obstacles, Inuit students continue to attend school, many try to return after a period away, and some graduate and pursue higher education. This research project chose to highlight the stories of students who have succeeded or continue to persevere despite the many challenges, by examining their resilience and the strategies they deploy and identifying the pedagogical practices and approaches that they respond to most positively, in order to use these as building blocks for continued work.

Concepts of resilience, perseverance, and engagement have been used in studies about young school dropouts. We chose resilience as a primary model to frame our

research, because of its focus on positive outcomes in the face of adversity (Masten, 2001; Ungar et al., 2000). There is, however, little consensus on how to define or measure resilience (Luthar, Sawyer, & Brown, 2006; Ries, Colbert, & Hébert, 2005).

Resilience is a familiar concept in the Aboriginal context. HeavyRunner and Morris (cited in Stout & Kipling, 2003, p. 26) have identified 10 values or actions that enhance resilience: (1) spirituality; (2) the importance attached to education (formal and informal); (3) respect for age, wisdom, and tradition; (4) respect for nature; (5) generosity and sharing; (6) cooperation and group harmony; (7) autonomy and respect for others; (8) composure and patience; (9) relativity of time; and (10) non-verbal communication. Brokenleg (2012) highlights four dimensions required for resilience: belonging (feeling that someone or a group cares about you); mastery (learning and achieving); independence (sense of control over one's life); and generosity (the feeling of being useful to others). Fast and Collin-Vézina (2010) emphasize the contribution of self-determination and cultural and spiritual renewal to community resilience.

Protective factors directly diminish the effects of risk factors. They are generally grouped in three categories: individual attributes, the quality of relationships, and external support systems (Ong, Bergeman, & Broker, 2009). Individual, family, and environmental social factors are specifically distinguished (Stout & Kipling, 2003; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Individual factors include temperament, intelligence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of control over one's life, and planning for the future. Family factors include positive interactions between parents and children, parenting quality, family cohesion, parental expectations, fathers' participation in caring for children, and caring among family members. Finally, environmental social factors are identified as supportive peers, a positive relationship with an adult, participation in extracurricular activities, positive experiences at school, assumption of responsibilities, community involvement, positive teacher influence, opportunities for success, and academic achievement.

While recognizing the importance and urgency of addressing structural social issues affecting the everyday lives of Inuit youth, this research focuses on the constructive role that schools and teachers can play to sustain and enhance students' resilience. An education system can be an ideal setting to deliver resources and provide a sense of direction (Green, Rhodes, Hirsch, Suarez-Orozco, & Camic, 2008). As microenvironments, schools can create safe spaces where resilience and protective factors are enhanced through positive relationships. Suitable pedagogical practices can give students a sense

of control over their learning, and schools can be places where students can go beyond necessities and envisage possibilities (Greene, 1998; Rutter, 2006).

The goal of this three-year research project is to assess the influence of teachers' (Inuit and non-Inuit) perceptions and pedagogical practices on students' resilience and school perseverance, based on the understanding that teacher–student rapport can be an important factor in promoting student retention. Accordingly, we approached the project with the clear intention of including the voices of teachers and high school students (Grades 8, 9, 10, and 11) in both the French and English sectors, as well as those of students who have completed high school and are attending college in Montreal.

Critical Indigenous Methodologies: Participation a First Prerequisite

Indigenous peoples' experience of research has been predominantly negative, both in terms of the process and its outcomes, which may explain their scepticism and reluctance to participate (Humphery, 2001 cited in Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011). For Smith (2012), research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. Kendall et al. (2011) stress that the challenge for non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners is to “ardently adopt appropriate methods of research that can lead to acceptable, sustainable, and efficacious solutions within Indigenous communities...and to espouse new ways of seeing that respect local Indigenous ways of knowing and adopt participatory approaches whereby knowledge remains under the control of the community” (p. 1719).

The ethical guidelines that informed our research approach were based on critical Indigenous methodologies (Smith 2012; Kovach 2010), as well as specific guidelines, such as those found in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010); the guide published by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI) for undertaking research with Inuit communities (2007); and the Inuit-Specific Perspectives on Research and Research Ethics from Inuit Tuttarvingat of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) and ITK (2010). Several key principles guided our work: (1) a desire to respect, protect, and preserve knowledge, traditions, and practices; (2) continuous consultation and negotiation with all stakeholders

and participants; (3) informed consent as an ongoing process; (4) ownership and control of the research by the community; (5) collaboration and partnership with community members; (6) clear understanding and mutual agreement about the research objectives; (7) inclusive participation; (8) tangible benefits and concrete results in meeting the needs of the community; (9) clear agreement on the management, access to, and use of the project results; and (10) mechanisms to demonstrate compliance with ethical values.

Relational aspects and participation are clearly the necessary prerequisites to ensure the legitimacy and benefits of the research, as well as the protection of participants and the community (Dickert & Sugarman, 2005). Participation enables a better identification and inclusion of the population's preoccupations and expectations and a greater inclusion of local ontology and epistemology through the adoption of locally adapted tools and local interpretations of the research results (Letendre & Caine, 2004). A participatory approach is strongly recommended when undertaking research in an Indigenous community (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami & Nunavut Research Institute, 2007).

We tried, as much as possible, to create conditions for an inclusive participatory approach, highlighting a diversity of views and experiences, and focusing on agency and voice (of students and teachers). However, adopting a participatory approach does not imply equal participation of the entire community at every stage of the research process. Rather, levels of community participation should be perceived as a potential continuum, varying according to the local capacity and willingness to participate (ITK & NRI, 2007).

The collection and analysis of the data took place simultaneously throughout the project, allowing for more flexibility and sensitivity to the social context (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1997). At every stage, the data was analyzed and presented to the participants for their feedback. The discussions provided an opportunity to adjust the course of the research and maintain its relevance to participants.

Many research instruments were considered. During the preliminary field research, and throughout the research process, the appropriateness, acceptance, relevance, and user-friendliness of all the tools were continuously discussed with individual participants. Tools were frequently modified and adapted to the comfort level of research participants, and new ones were created to respond to specific needs. During the preliminary field research, we verified the use of technology to engage the students. We observed

the students' ease in using the technology, which served as a non-threatening informal activity, allowing them to express themselves, without the barriers of language and other research formats. Certain tools, such as a blog for distance communication and collaboration, had to be entirely abandoned.

The instruments developed, adapted, or retained for use with the youth were: (1) focus groups; (2) classroom observations; (3) weekly motivation self-assessment surveys; (4) interactive questionnaires; (5) "dream" timetables; (6) digital stories; (7) a collective story; and (8) individual interviews. We decided to postpone the semi-structured individual interviews until the end of the project, after we had established a relationship of trust with the students through informal and research-related activities. Given that each tool had affordances and constraints, and that different tools appealed to different participants, the combination of tools helped us elicit diverse voices (including some that were often silent) and to accommodate individual preferences and comfort levels. It was also important to diversify the tools, because each provided a different type of insight, affording a more comprehensive understanding at the end of the process. The table below provides an overview of the sample group and tools used.

Table 1: Research Tools Used with Different Groups of Inuit Students.

	Research tools used with the students	Grades 8 & 9		Grades 10 & 11		College students
		French	English	French	English	
Year 1	Focus group discussions	N=15				N= 10 N=5
	Classroom observations	✓		✓	✓	
Year 2	Weekly motivation self-assessments	N=8			N=11	
	Interactive questionnaires	N=8	N=8	N=7	N=13	
	My "dream timetable"	N=8			N=13	
	Digital stories	N=8			N=12	
	Writing a collective story	N=8				
Year 3	Individual interviews	Semi-structured individual interviews to be conducted at the end of the research project				

In the following sections, we describe the use of specific tools. We start by discussing the ethical issues we encountered while doing research with Inuit youth.

Doing Research with Inuit Youth: Ethical Considerations

The first ethical issue often raised, when it comes to research with youth, is the question of parental consent. Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) typically require the signed consent of legal guardians (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010). However, putting this requirement into practice is not simple and may not even be desirable in some circumstances. For instance, social work researchers often interact with minors who may have tenuous relationships with parents. Parental consent in this specific context may have adverse effects on youth wanting to participate in the research (Goyette, Daigneault, & Vandette, 2009).

In the context of Nunavik, many young people are already assuming adult responsibilities. They may already be parents, or may be running the household as far as practical matters are concerned. Asking them for parental consent could be seen as undermining their capacities and sense of judgment. Mondain and Arzouma (2012) cite the report of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, *Giving Voice to the Spectrum* (2004), to explain that the requirement for parental consent for youth under 18 can be inappropriate in some cases and may convey a message that the young person in question is not respected as a full person. The report argues that this does not “protect” young people. Sanci, Sawyer, Weller, Bond, and Patton (2004) as well as Halse and Honey (2005) consider that 14-year-olds have sufficient cognitive capacity to provide informed consent for a research project. Moreover, McHugh and Kowalski (2009) stipulate that, depending on how the consent process is handled, adolescents may find themselves confined in hierarchical relations with either their parents or the researcher, or both. The involvement of minors in research projects is a broad issue directly linked to the benefits they may obtain through their participation (including having their voices heard) versus the harm they may experience through their participation or non-participation.

These questions of consent are not limited to the initial phase of a research project. Indeed, consent can be perceived as *continuous*, since a participant may withdraw at

any time (Blanchet, 2006; McHugh & Kowalski, 2009; Piquemal & Nickels, 2005). *Negotiated* consent requires an extensive dialogue with the participant in order to reach an individual agreement (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007; McHugh & Kowalski, 2009). *Progressive* and *non-binary* participants may take part in the research at any time, progressively increasing (or not) their levels of participation (Butz, 2008). In the case of *iterative* consent, the terms of the agreement must be regularly renegotiated (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007).

To meet IRB requirements, we used written consent forms during our preliminary field research. We tried to make the consent forms simple and concise (no more than two pages long), and offered them in French, English, and Inuktitut. We introduced the forms after an initial ice-breaker activity. The students had just relaxed and were starting to engage. Yet we felt obliged to interrupt the organic process and introduce the consent forms. This meant shifting back from an informal to a “school-like/homework” setting. The power of talk shifted from them to us, and from issues they were interested in to abstract concepts that seemed irrelevant to them (“voluntary research,” “benefits,” “risks,” and “confidentiality”). It was a matter of minutes before the students started rolling their eyes. Some left the room; others felt overburdened by having to read the long form; some were suspicious and reluctant to initial the forms; some just threw the forms into the trash. The process used up most of the time allotted to us. It forced us to cut short our planned activity and ultimately rush the students through it. By the end, we had spent more time talking and explaining than listening to students.

We learned from that experience and tried to find alternative ways to ensure that the students’ consent would be “informed.” We further simplified the language on our consent forms and, most importantly, we linked the IRB concepts to Inuit values that the students were already familiar with: confidentiality, trust, sharing, respect, cooperation, and humour. The next time around, we conducted the process verbally and recorded it. To validate their understanding, and to ensure that their consent was “informed,” we asked some students to reformulate the consent in their own words. Throughout the activities, the students were reminded and reassured repeatedly that they were not obliged to respond to any questions and could stop at any time. Given the “voluntary” aspect of the research, an important challenge is to keep the teenagers interested and motivated. Research activities, by their nature, will have some “boring” components. So giving the option of leaving opens the door for young participants to give up as soon as they lose

interest. It is challenging to encourage and motivate students to complete an activity without forcing them in any way. This is why it is important to allow for sporadic participation, particularly in a longitudinal research project.

In our project, some students approached tasks with more caution and hesitation. If pushed too hard with very rigid rules, they would rather leave than try. These students were typically quiet bystanders. They initially refused to participate, but if allowed, they stayed nearby, observing. They often ended up participating at different moments, once they had gauged their own comfort level. Because research participants' circumstances, interests, comfort levels, and availability fluctuate over time, the participants need to be given the opportunity to take part in and withdraw from the research as they see fit. This, of course, adds to the complexity of data collection and analysis. The "research sample" number becomes fluid, and makes it impossible to follow the same individual through all the activities. However, in terms of knowledge production, the multiplicity of tools and inclusion of various voices create a broader understanding of the phenomenon under study. The multiplicity of voices also allows for a triangulation of information, taking into account contrasting opinions, perspectives, and priorities.

Gaining trust obviously remains key to working with youth. It is therefore no surprise that Aboriginal scholars stress the importance of the relational and consider it key to any kind of collaborative work in Native or Inuit communities. Citing Stewart (2009), Kovach (2010) explains that, from an Indigenous research perspective, "the relational is viewed as an aspect of methodology whereas within western constructs the relational is viewed as bias, and thus outside methodology" (Kovach, 2010, p. 42). However, building relationships requires time and a continuous presence, which is virtually impossible for academic researchers who must balance teaching obligations in the South and research in the North during the school year.

In adopting a relational approach in research, one will inevitably (particularly with adolescents) grapple with the "friendship line." Engaging in "friendship" with young research participants is an important ethical consideration. Researchers must clearly describe their roles and capacities to participants in order to ensure that the latter have appropriate expectations. For example, our team has been returning to the community regularly over the past two years, and we have established some friendships with students and teachers, which involves doing activities outside of the classroom (e.g., at community centres, arenas, and school canteens). These informal activities have allowed us to see

students in a different light, as they take on different roles with different responsibilities. It has also allowed them to see and assess “us.” However, our presence in the community is always time-limited, rarely exceeding two weeks. Although we try to practice reciprocity as much as possible, we clearly have no means to meet everyone’s individual expectations and needs. We also have the ethical responsibility to report any child protection issues, which could mean breaking the trust established with the young person. This aspect needs to be handled gently, ethically, and with care. It is important not to create false expectations followed by another cycle of disappointment and/or sense of abandonment.

Keeping participants motivated in a longitudinal study is a further significant challenge. ITK recommends financial compensation as an incentive. Although we recognize the importance of showing gratitude to individual participants and the community, we opted for non-financial compensation. Instead of giving young people money, we organized collective meals and screenings of films and documentaries of interest to them, including their own media projects.

Use of Tools: Affordances and Constraints

In this section, we describe the tools we specifically developed for our research with youth in Nunavik.

Tool 1: Self-reports, weekly motivation questionnaires (My level of control over a task)

Adolescents in general, including those in the North, are commonly perceived as lacking motivation. This concern tended to overshadow all other issues raised during our discussions with teachers. Consequently, we decided to first measure whether the concern about motivation was a real or perceived problem. We developed a very simple questionnaire based on the work of Bandura (1982), Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000), and Pintrich (2003). Two groups of students (Grades 8 and 9 French and Grades 10 and 11 English) were invited to complete the questionnaire on a weekly basis in four different subject areas (math and sciences, language class, social studies, and Inuktitut). The aim of the questionnaires was to (1) measure whether levels of motivation varied by subject; (2) evaluate students’ overall feeling about their own capacities and locus of control; and (3) introduce students to a reflexive process (i.e., encourage them to assess their level of control in specific areas and possibly introduce them to new ideas, including the idea that

even if they did not complete task successfully, they could still be proud of having tried hard and not given up).

This tool was used over two months. The activity did not elicit much enthusiasm, because it felt “formal” and like “homework” to students. The younger groups (Grades 8 and 9) found it more challenging. They often left blank the only two open-ended questions. However, despite the difficulties, the collection of questionnaires over several weeks provided an overview of individual students’ attitudes regarding different tasks and classes. The findings indicated significantly higher levels of self-esteem and motivation than were perceived and reported by the teachers.

Tool 2: Interactive questionnaire (Pedagogical practices that are helpful to me)

There are multiple and sometimes conflicting ideas about what makes a good teacher and what constitutes effective pedagogical practice. In our research with the teachers, it became clear that many wondered about the “right way” to meet the students’ needs. We compiled a list of some of the contested ideas and presented them to all the students in Grades 8 to 11, as well as a small group of high school graduates enrolled in college. An interactive voting system was used to get students’ views on various topics. Students used individual handheld devices to indicate their preferences anonymously. This system allowed for all the students to take part in the activity. It was a particularly effective way to draw out the “silent students” who could vote anonymously and immediately observe the results of their input.

The compiled votes for each question were immediately presented to the students who enjoyed the spontaneous feedback. The convergence or divergence of responses generally created a buzz in the group. It was a simple and time-efficient tool: the gadgety aspect engaged students and generated interesting discussions. The compiled results were also presented to the school administration and teachers. Some teachers were pleased to get confirmations; others were surprised by some of the students’ preferences. All the teachers were pleasantly surprised to discover that the main reason many students gave for going to school was that they thought it was important for their future.

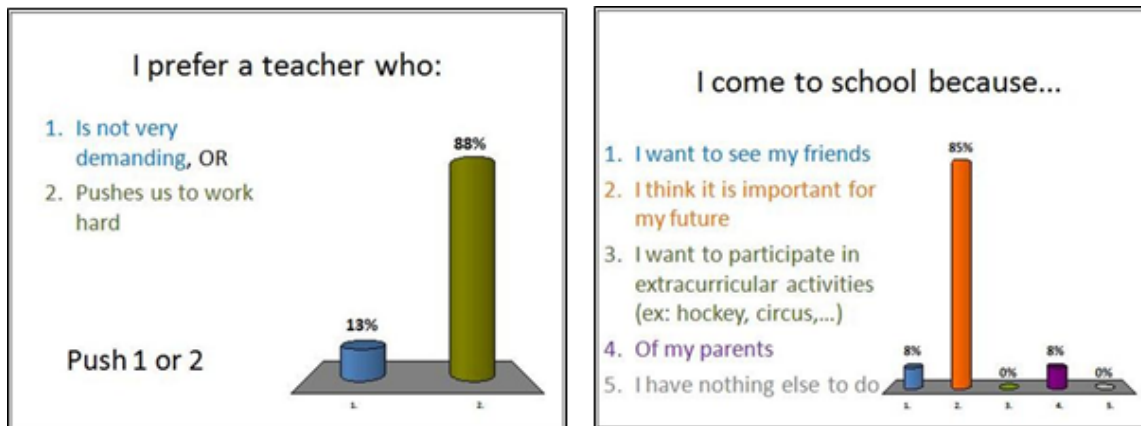


Figure 1: Example of two questions that students in Grades 10 and 11 voted on.

Tool 3: Creating timetables (*My dream timetable with subjects that matter to me*)

The purpose of school and relevance of subjects to the lives and futures of Inuit youth in Nunavik can generate a great deal of debate and discussion.

To find out about the perceived value and relevance of education to students, we asked them to build their own “dream timetable” using an empty template. They were free to choose whatever courses they wanted and to propose new ones as well. The exercise did not work well with younger students, who only filled out the template partially or put “free periods” throughout. However, the older students (Grades 10 and 11) took the time to indicate their preferred subjects, and some even proposed new ones. They chose among academic subjects associated with the South (social studies, language, math and science), classes geared toward Inuktitut language and culture, and other subjects such as physical education. As Figure 2 shows, the preference for this particular group was a balance between academic subjects and Inuktitut culture and language.

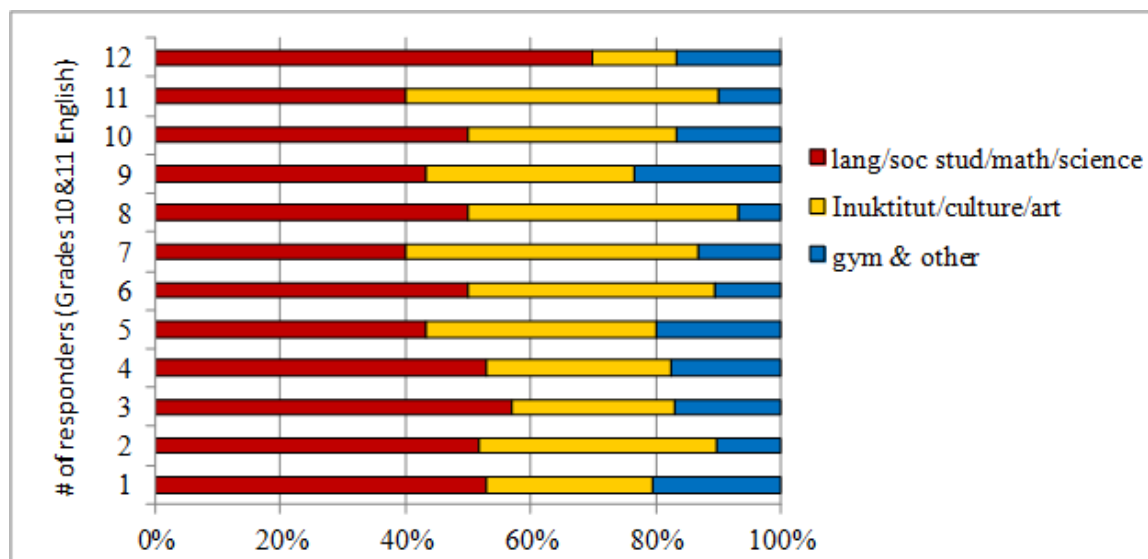


Figure 2: Perceived relevance of subjects based on Grades 10 and 11 students' personalized "dream timetable."

Tool 4: Digital stories (About me, my values, hopes, and aspirations)

Simple iPad applications were used to introduce students to stop-motion video. We made sure to use apps that kept the images private. The activity was deliberately unstructured in order to give students room for free play. When we tried to structure this free play with questions such as "What is my favourite food?" "What do I like most in life?" "Who is a person I admire?" "What is my favourite hobby?" students responded with anxiety and hesitation. They began to disengage and lose interest. However, we were able to get back lost affective ground by giving them more time and cheering them through the question process. Most completed the task and made audio recordings of their answers. The recordings were then added to the stop-motion images, creating a mosaic about the youth, their likes and dislikes.

On another occasion, we followed up on a group discussion by inviting the students to go around the community, in groups of two or three, and photograph 10 things that were meaningful and important to them as teenagers. When they returned, they explained the significance of each photograph. This activity allowed the group to create a list of what they valued in their lives, such as elders, the Inuktitut language, culture, camping, hunting, sports (hockey, volleyball, etc.), music, friendship, health, and the community. The students were photographed (stop-motion) holding a card displaying one

of the listed important things written in Inuktitut. These images were edited together with students' voice-overs to create a one-minute video that was presented at the closing of an important community meeting about the future of the region. This simple activity provided a validating moment for both the students and the community. The students saw the result of their work instantly. Community members, especially the elders, were touched by the videos and realized that they had underestimated the degree to which the youth were attached to their land, culture, language, and traditions.



Figure 3: Screen shots of the stop-motion montage about important things in students' lives.

Tool 5: Writing a collective story (The tale of the flying beluga)

We tried to repeat the digital story exercise, this time with a younger group (Grades 8 and 9), but it did not work. Some had fun playing with it, but the exercise was not sufficiently structured for their needs. We therefore shifted gears and decided to write a collective story with the group. The French language teacher allowed us to use her period, so we tried to use a research activity with pedagogical value in terms of language acquisition.

The activity began with a series of brainstorming sessions, but keeping this group focused became somewhat challenging. In order to bring some order to the chaos of ideas, we occasionally provided some options: Do you think your character would do (a) or (b)? Once the story was completed, it was written out script-style on separate pages. The next day, the story was read back to the group, and each student pulled a number out of a hat indicating the page number he or she would have to illustrate using an iPad app or paper and coloured pens or pencils. The text was read and recorded by students. The final edit contained a combination of typed text, collective drawings, and voice-overs. The results were shown to other teachers and students.

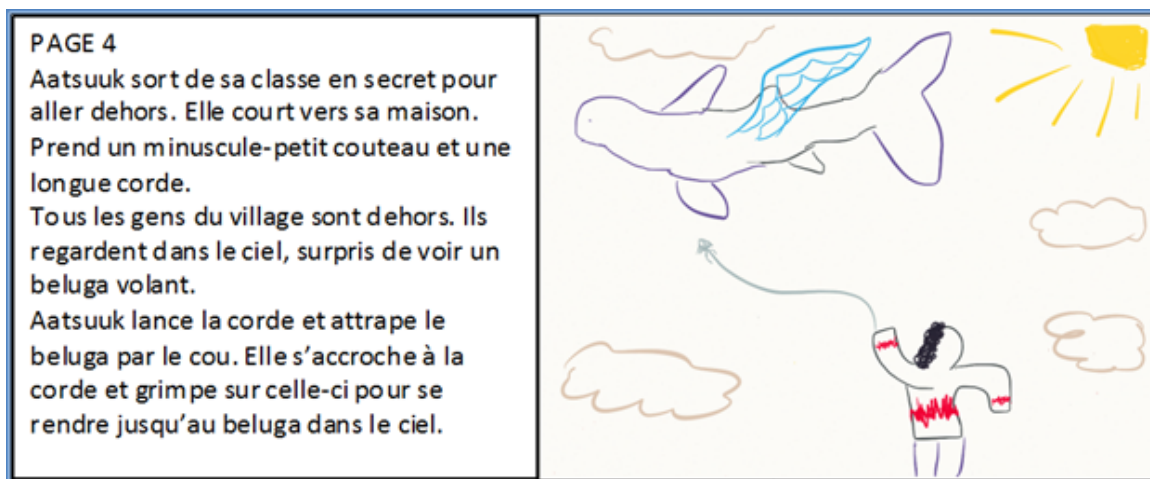


Figure 4: Example of the script written by the students and an accompanying drawing.¹

The activity sparked the interest of some Inuit teachers, who thought the same approach could be used to record the stories of elders in order to create educational material in Inuktitut for the students. In terms of our research project, this exercise showed how the group responded to the task, at what point they were tempted to give up, what captured their attention, and how they negotiated their preferences with the rest of the group.

1 The English translation of the text reads: Aatsuuk leaves the classroom secretly to go outside. She runs home. She picks up a tiny knife and a long rope. All the villagers are outside. They are staring at the sky, surprised to see a flying beluga. Aatsuuk throws the rope and catches the beluga by the neck. She clings to the rope and climbs to reach the beluga in the sky.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this article has been to draw attention to the ethical issues of doing research with Inuit youth and to promote the use of multiple tools to better facilitate active engagement and wider inclusion of participants. The need for more research on Inuit education in Canada has been clearly articulated in the National Strategy on Inuit Education (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2011). There is a growing interest in research with Inuit youth aimed at understanding their cultural identity (Dorais, 2010; Taylor & Sablonnière, 2013); their schooling experience (Presseau, Martineau, Bergevin, & Dragon, 2006); their perceptions of teaching and learning (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010); and their access to postsecondary education (Rodon & Lévesque, 2012). However, most of these studies still rely heavily on the use of interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires.

Reaching youth in any context is challenging. These challenges are accentuated by the physical, cultural, and linguistic distances between researchers from the South and the communities in the North. Without downplaying our positionality as “the other” doing research in Nunavik, we would underscore that “adults” doing research with youth always occupy spaces of otherness—hence the importance of taking the time and care to establish relationships. However, one must remain vigilant regarding ethical challenges that may arise during the process of building and maintaining “friendship” and “reciprocity.” The goal is to meet expectations as adequately as possible while complying with ethical standards and obligations.

As mentioned earlier, Indigenous peoples’ experience of research has been predominantly negative, both in terms of the process and its outcomes. Guidelines and IRB standards alone are not sufficient to ensure protection, informed consent, beneficence, justice, respect, and reciprocity. Caine, Davison, and Stewart (2009) insist on the importance of preliminary fieldwork in the early stages of research. It “allows for exploration, reflexivity, creativity, mutual exchange and interaction through the establishment of research relationships with local people often prior to the development of research protocols and ethics applications” (p. 489). More attention must be paid to ethical moments that arise in specific settings. Hence the process of the research (the “how”) should attract as much attention as the expected outcome (the “what”). The research process itself should be beneficial to participants, and should provide an opportunity to create dialogue amongst stakeholders and contribute to the empowering of a community.

By using a variety of tools in our research with youth in Nunavik, we were able to catch a glimpse of their multiple identities. We also witnessed their strengths and some of their struggles, their courage and doubts, their determination and uncertainties, their efforts to meet different expectations, and their hopes and aspirations for themselves and their community. We hope that our systematic reflections on our research methods will be helpful to other researchers and participants in similar settings.

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