

In addition, the Elders identified six guiding principles (Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., 2000a) (The Nunavut government later added an additional two). These six guiding principles form the basis of an interlocking conceptual philosophy for *IQ*, but also inherent in each is a process for developing the principle in an individual and in society. Taken together they form a plan for the continuous application of *IQ* in Inuit society. The six guiding principles are:

1. *Pijitsirniq* (or the concept of serving)
2. *Aajiiqatigiingniq* (or the concept of consensus decision-making)
3. *Pilimmaksarniq* (or the concept of skills and knowledge acquisition)
4. *Piliriqatigiingniq* (or the concept of collaborative relationships or working together for a common purpose)
5. *Avatimik Kamattiarniq* (or the concept of environmental stewardship)
6. *Qanuqtuurnarniq* (or the concept of being resourceful to solve problems)

These processes are implemented throughout socialization (*inunnguiniq*) and contribute to establishing the foundation for becoming an able human being.

Another thing about *Inuit*

Qaujimajatuqangit, wisdom is part of it and is used for the good and betterment of our society. It stems from our hearts, using our reasoning abilities based on the truths of Inuit culture and the desire to live in harmony. Living in harmony like that we can expect a better world to surround us. (Mariano Aupilaarjuq, Government of Nunavut, Department of Education, 2000a)

Inuit believe that when a person lives in obedience to these laws and principles, there is balance and harmony. This state significantly contributes to the wellbeing of an individual and to society by providing a purpose and direction in life. This notion of cultural health is considered to be a significant contributing factor to the sustainability of Inuit in the Arctic. Being grounded in *IQ* ensures cultural continuity, stability and wellbeing.

The spiritual aspect [of traditional knowledge] is integral to the cosmological and ethical beliefs of Indigenous societies...

The second feature of traditional knowledge is its practical basis: traditional explanations of the environmental phenomena are based on cumulative, collective experience, tested over centuries by people who require a sophisticated and practical knowledge of the land on which they depended for every aspect of life.

(Government of Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996)

Knowledge Continuum

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is knowledge embedded in process. In fact, it is specifically about the “transfer of an ever-evolving set of knowledge and skills that are essential for producing a contributing member of family and society” (Nunavut Tunngavik, 2002). It is thus a dynamic system that links an Inuit philosophy and action in the changing contemporary context. The philosophy cannot be abstracted from the processes. This evolution of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is reliant on the cultural expectation of *iqqaqqaukkaringniq* (deep thinking that leads to innovation). This is a dynamic process of knowing, applying, experiencing, evaluating and creating new knowledge grounded in a continuum of knowing and continually improving. To become “able” means that you are a person grounded in these principles. You are made to become “able” through the process of *inunnguiniq* – making a human being. This process is designed to stabilize an individual and also a culture/society by situating both within the continuum frameworks. It assumes a high level of proficiency in what Inuit describe as “life matters” or becoming a capable and contributing human being. For Inuit, the purpose and ultimate goal of all learning is to achieve mastery in the unique skill area that each individual will become known and respected for in his/her life. Inuit Elders believe that proficiency is the minimum goal for any learner. From their

perspective, being able to do something only some of the time—such as building an igloo—would not guarantee survival. The goal is to perfect skills so they are at the ready as required. It is also believed that through being highly skilled, a person is most suited to adapting and succeeding in difficult and unpredictable circumstances. This is the application of *iqqaqqaukkaringniq*.

Time Continuum

Though we tend to think of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* almost exclusively as “traditional” knowledge, it is more properly defined as the Inuit ways past, present and future (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2002). *IQ* encompasses the entire realm of Inuit experience in the world and the values, principles, beliefs and skills which have evolved as a result of that experience. It is the experience and resulting knowledge/wisdom that prepares us for success in the future and establishes the possible survival of Inuit. The time continuum is not viewed as entirely linear. However, Inuit Elders have used the bow and arrow analogy to explain the relevance this life view, established over centuries, has for the future of Inuit. They say that if you do not draw back the arrow in the bow, it will drop a short distance in front of you. In other words, the level of our understanding of the views and values of our past helps determine the degree of success we have with our future; the better our understanding, the greater our success. This conceptually iterative approach of past informing present and future is a critical underpinning of Inuit worldview (Pauktuutit, 2006).

Relationship Continuum

All people have mind, body and spirit. The Inuit way of being is built on the relationships between these areas of the individual’s life and the rest of the human and natural world. Relationship building is central to *IQ* and is entrenched in the developmental process of *inunnguiniq* (Tagalik & Joyce, 2005). It is a consistently



applied life building process aimed at establishing self-reliant, wise individuals who can cope successfully and actively contribute to the wellbeing of others and to the continual improvement of society. Being in relationship relies on respect for the value and place of every other living thing and our mutual interdependence with our past, present and future environments. Essentially this is the way Inuit demonstrated stewardship. The degree to which each person is respected for his/her contribution to society was reinforced through naming practices (*tuq&uraisiq*²) which ensures that the individual way of being becomes a sustainable resource for the future generation (Tagalik & Joyce, 2005). In receiving a name, a child also receives a set of specific expectations to carry on the abilities and characteristics of the namesake. In this way, the value that person contributed to the common good is extended in the youngster being named. A collective responsibility was to articulate the expectations for the child and to “notice” the positives resulting from the naming decision. *Tuq&urangniq* is also a form of knowledge transfer because it is

through the establishment of these very strong relationships that cultural norms, values, beliefs and teachings are instilled, and skills and knowledge are developed.

Cycles of life are based on belonging and in collective identity. This relies on the application of the guiding principles as the building blocks of social interactions and expectations. In all aspects of *IQ* principles, there is a process and pedagogy implicit in the holistically implied philosophical concept (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b). In order to maintain a mutually dependent society, high expectations for sharing are established. Culture is also seen as a platform upon which society collects skills, knowledge, values, beliefs and collective experiences which continually enhance the ability to be successful. This cements the mutual obligation of members of the society, and provides for a sustainable and more secure future.

Inuit Elders describe these three continuums as existing in relationship to *IQ* much like the white of an egg cushions and nourishes the yolk. Inuit worldview

From all across Nunavut, we were brought in from our traditional lands and concentrated in permanent settlements. Here we became, in effect, “wards of the state”, living in an unfamiliar, and, in many ways, an artificial environment. ... But socially and culturally, the settlement policy was soon destined to weaken our sense of independence and self-worth. ... Many of these [well-intended social programs] were at odds with our traditional forms of social organization, family life, and economy, programs not of our making and over which we had little say. ... [We view this] as the root causes of the cultural loss we are experiencing today ... expressed in the social malaise now evident in so many of our communities, including drug and alcohol addiction, suicide, and loss of identity and purpose. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 1998)

must be considered within the contexts of these three continuums.

Relevance of Indigenous Knowledge and Personal Wellness

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is the foundation upon which social/emotional, spiritual, cognitive and physical wellbeing is built. It also sets the strength-based context for the wellbeing of all future generations. Cultural health is the basis for every other kind of health because in it resides the sense of identity, the collective social supports for the individual, and the sense of belonging grounded in loving, healthy and supportive relationships. These are the requirements that nurture healthy individuals.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is designed to provide cultural grounding and a sense of purpose with responsibilities set out in principled approaches. Elders describe *IQ* as the wisdom gained from extensive

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

experience that has been passed from generation to generation (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b). It encompasses knowledge and respect for the environment based on the belief that there is a 'protector' of all things and that there are consequences for behaviours that are disrespectful or harmful to others. Conceptually, Inuit see 'living' things as anything that has a life cycle. For example, the weather, the seasons, the rocks and waterways are included in this view. This view of *IQ* embodies a well-articulated way of being respectful that is laid out in the laws and *inutsiaqpagutit* teachings. Failure to follow these teachings leads to troubles which have to be recognized, confessed and rectified. A communication process called *aajiiqatigiiniq*, or building group consensus in order to reach sound decisions, addresses the resolution of these and other kinds of conflict, and leads the group to the restoration of harmony and balance.

Colonization caused a break in the transmission of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. The plan for the assimilation of Inuit in Canada resulted in forced relocations of Inuit across the now Nunavut territory. These relocations were often abrupt. Many Inuit were suddenly torn from the way of life that has sustained them for generations and relocated into a worldview for which they had no compass. The long established cultural rules about being non-confrontational and maintaining harmony caused many to acquiesce in the face of a

demanding and dominant force in their lives (Pauktuutit, 2006). The pain of the Elders' guilt as a result of this decision, and the impact of this pain on society, are only now being understood in Nunavut. There is now recognition of the need for healing to occur (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b).

The result of relocation has been the establishment of systems and institutions that are not built around Inuit values and relationships, and consequently do not 'fit' with Inuit worldview. Elders see a need to rebuild institutions grounded in *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (Government of Nunavut, 2004) in order to address this. *Maligait* provides the big picture view of the world based on the belief that there is a protector for all things, so if you go out of balance, there will be consequences. Maintaining a constant focus on the *maligait* ensures that balance will be maintained and Inuit are grounded in their belief system. Adherence to these laws is deemed essential and in teaching these expectations, Elders and parents usually preface statements with sayings such as "in order to live a good life" or "in order to live untroubled." These cultural teachings provide the prescriptions and processes for living the good life. They lay down the foundations for successful living and for future sustainability. Ignoring or breaking any of these laws can lead to an imbalance. Those who break the laws must confess and return to the right ways of doing things.

The old Inuit ways of dealing with social issues needs to start to be used again. Inuit themselves should be able to try to deal with their fellow Inuit, to show them how they should live using their traditional knowledge through what they know, through what they have used to deal with people, to lead a good life. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, NSDC, 2000a)

There is one thing that is striking to me. Though, no doubt, these things will never be the same again, our parents laid a foundation for us. Though they did not say, 'in order to establish a firm foundation for you', evidently our foundation was already a priority in their planning. Looking back now, I can see the foundation firmly in place. (Mariano Aupilaarjuq, Government of Nunavut, Department of Education, 2007)

This frees them to come back into balance. This process is known as *aajiiqatigiiniq*.

With colonization, the *aajiiqatigiiniq* process and the roles of community members as helpers were replaced by a set of social systems and institutions designed to manage these areas of social need. Unfortunately, institutions such as schools, health centres, social service agencies, and correctional centres, which may operate relatively effectively in western societies, have not been very successful in Canada's north (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b). Gaps in services and a significant lack of service providers are the most notable challenges to these systems. Beyond this, there is the very serious issue that the systems themselves do not 'fit' with Inuit worldview and, in many instances, work contrary to the beliefs and values of that worldview. For example, a justice system based on a philosophy of punishment and correction is often at odds with the cultural view of reconciliation, forgiveness and a return to harmony (Ross, 1992; Pauktuutit, 2006). The resulting social uncertainty has created high levels of stress and dislocation in the key systems



that sustained Inuit—the Elders, the family, kinship relationships, and the underpinning beliefs.

From an *IQ* perspective, a sense of personal health and wellness is reliant on a strong sense of identity and belonging, an understanding of purpose and role in terms of a personal contribution to be made to improving the common good and serving others, and an appreciation of the specific skills and abilities one has to contribute to those ends. This presupposes that in order to be healthy there must be a fairly high degree of both self-reliance and mutual reliance. A lack of wellness in Inuit jurisdictions has come with the loss of this self/mutual reliance. Inuit society is further depicted for the world as one of substantive loss—high rates of poverty, child morbidity, youth suicide, family violence, substance abuse, child neglect, ill health and reduced life expectancy (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b; Arctic Council, 2005). Elders today predict that until a proper balance is restored in Inuit society, based on *IQ* values, they will continue to experience unhealthy social contexts.

The Impact of Using Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit as a Foundation for Health and Wellness Policy and Programs

IQ is so important because it will help to ensure that essential traditional knowledge is valued, preserved and promoted. It is through this process that western knowledge will be able to examine and integrate *IQ* to the benefit of all mankind. (Nunavut Department of Education, Qaujimatait Report, Sept. 2000a)

... the family health model may be the only realistic and “culturally appropriate” starting point for addressing these [social] problems and shoring up our native assets. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2002)

Strength-based approaches are at the heart of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. In *inunnguniq*, one is to notice the interests and aptitudes of the child and to nurture those. In *pilimmaqsarniq*, one is to notice the natural skills and abilities of an individual. In *aajiiqatigiiniq*, one is to bring people back into harmony by recognizing the strengths and supports that the collective can exert in order to foster and sustain healing and a return to following the cultural norms. Every individual is recognized for strengths he/she possesses, and each family or community group is also recognized for the contributions they make to enhancing the common good. When an area of strength in an individual is noticed, it becomes a natural building block for personal development. From the *IQ* perspective, there are also specific cultural processes that support a capacity building approach based on enhancing strengths.

The reality for many Inuit communities is that services in several areas simply do not exist. In many areas, there may be few or no mental health services, nor are social workers readily available in many areas for much of the year. At times communities may be without a Nurse-in-Charge or a stable nursing staff. Midwives are practicing in only two Nunavut communities, Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay. The RCMP is also chronically understaffed and when available, may not attend calls in many situations. The inability of the government systems to provide adequate services places enormous strains on the community to respond to trauma and crisis, let alone to the continuous demands of sustaining health and wellness. Among the Inuit there is a large child and youth population, many of which live in poverty in overcrowded and inadequate housing conditions, and have poor levels of nutrition, which can lead to high levels of compromised immunity response resulting in the spread of communicable diseases (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b; Statistics Canada, 2001). In this environment,

capacity to address wellness from within is the last line of defense. It is the principles and practices of *IQ* that have sustained Inuit culture over generations. By pulling the arrow back in the wellness bow, Inuit may be able to reclaim ways of being well that will address the health and social issues they face today. If there is some serious investigation of applying *IQ* to these issues, the impacts will include:

- providing a continuum of health services closer to home;
- rebuilding the capacity of communities for supporting wellness;
- recognizing and supporting natural helpers and caregivers in the community;
- creating service delivery systems that are integrated and holistic in nature;
- building interpersonal supports on existing kin and family relationship networks that are long term, self-sustaining and self-directed;
- establishing a system that supports healing and wellness at all levels of Inuit society, that is culturally comfortable, authentic and sustainable;
- establishing a system marked by cultural reference points in terms of regaining harmony, bringing balance back into the lives of community members, wrapping support collectively around those in need, and recognizing and training those with the observed ability as healers and helpers (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated et al., nd)

The Inuit have our own ways of dealing with problems. Elders know how to go about this. They need to start to show this to other people. Their descendents will need to use these old Inuit ways because they still work. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 1998)

Challenges and Key Issues

Elders

Elders, as the “culture bearers,” exemplify the cultural values, wisdom, skills and

strategies to apply *IQ* as a foundation to a new wellness system. The harmful impacts of colonization resulted in the repression of this knowledge and have made Elders wary about openly sharing, as they would have in the past. Another significant result of colonization is the dislocation of leadership. Inuit leadership was based on a power approach where the power was shared in face-to-face interactions through equal and interdependent relationships (based on family partnership relationships between man and woman, on recognition of those with knowledge/wisdom in specific areas, and on demonstrated expertise) (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b). Decisions were arrived at through consensus (*piliriqatiniinnngniq*) rather than hierarchical power structures, and included recognition that Elder expertise and the applicability of *IQ* as a time-relevant set of principles and processes must occur across systems for an effective application of cultural wellness approaches. Underlying these challenges is the inescapable fact that the time we have with Elders is limited and the potential loss of their knowledge, by not acting immediately to document it, is irretrievable. It is important to create an atmosphere of trust so that Elders have a willingness to share this knowledge.

Inuktitut Language

In-depth understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems depends on effective listening and reflecting, keen observation and deep thinking. Conceptually, *IQ* is less able to be expressed and transmitted in a written form. Language is also highly contextual. As Elders will continually point out, you cannot build an iglu by reading a book. Loss of language occurs rapidly with loss of context. As Inuit today have less time and access to the cultural experiences that underpin their language, there is a decrease in understanding of the concepts linked to words and the relevance of the word itself as it relates to the cultural experience (Dorais, 2006). The result is loss of conceptual understandings and the ability to use language correctly because knowing is related so symbiotically to experiencing. Language enables communication in order to build culture and relationships; to train and teach; to express and detail the living nature of our environment; to provide for collaborative effort; to share and build knowledge; to innovate and continually improve.

There are elements of language which are uniquely situated in culture and cannot be translated into another language without loss of meaning. Language is also situated in the contexts of the culture—the way of

being and believing—and is not readily accessible to others from a different culture. For Inuit, conceptual development will always be strongest in Inuktitut and, therefore, the strength and capacity of a people is best developed from the strength of their linguistic and cultural context. Consequently, the erosion of language, both in usage and understood meaning, is a significant challenge to the successful application of *IQ* in redesigning social systems in Nunavut (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2002).

A good grounding in traditional knowledge for today's [Inuit] youth is only possible with a good grounding in the Inuktitut language. Language is culture, culture is language—they cannot be separated. (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 2000b)

Cultural Integrity

Respect for cultural integrity is essential. Cultural integrity is threatened on two fronts. There are those who consider that Inuit beliefs, principles and values are similar to those articulated in other cultures. Raising a child to become a capable human being, for example, is not unique to Inuit. A form of cultural appropriation or cultural dilution is to align the beliefs, principles and values and describe them as part of a universal or contemporary culture. The challenges around both the verification of traditional knowledge and the distinctions between knowledge systems (since all societies have traditions of knowledge) often lead to barriers for applying cultural knowledge systems (Burgess, 1999). This may enable the proponents of a universal culture to maintain the status quo by indicating that they have accepted cultural beliefs and, in fact, share them within the existing way of working. This practice raises challenges to cultural authenticity and is ultimately a mechanism of assimilation.

The second form of threat comes from the idea that Inuit must enter into a new





space between two cultures. This is the “becoming bi-cultural” argument that assumes that in order to be successful in the present, one must transform one’s cultural identity and knowledge (Burgess, 1999). The Government of Nunavut, Department of Sustainable Development’s *IQ* Framework document correctly identifies that *IQ* is more than a vehicle for Inuit political empowerment; rather:

[I]t is the existential milieu of being Inuit ...It is a living, breathing, dynamic, ever-evolving way of life. It is not something you can touch and survey like a sculpture, a qajaq or any other cultural artifact—for these are merely reflections of the Inuit mind. IQ is the answer to the why we, the Inuit, see the world the way we do. (Government of Nunavut, DSD 2000)

The point is that an Inuit view of the world should be respected and preserved, not diluted or transformed. It is the uniqueness of each Indigenous perspective that has served the cultural group historically and provides the strengths which will be required for the culture to endure the challenges facing it today.

There is considerable stress in trying to be the ones to blend into foreigner’s social structure and language. Things that we trust in must continue to exist. We are not forcing anything on *Qallunaaq* [non-Inuk] and Inuk, but strive for both to reserve respect for each others’ rights for a strong balanced social structure in the Inuit homeland through mutual trust. If our way of life will continue, we, as Inuit, cannot live by other standards that do not apply to us. We cannot go with what does not “fit” with our way of life. It is important that our generation and the generations we came from keeps going. (Gideon Qitsualik, Government of Nunavut, C&SS, 2000a)

Conclusions

Inuit can provide detailed definitions and descriptions of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* beliefs, principles, practices and processes. This documentation process has been a healing process for Elders. Their work stresses a focus on cultural proficiency, reliance on cultural strengths and mutually interdependent relationships. They describe the application of *IQ* as a foundation for wellbeing in Inuit communities. As well, *IQ* provides specific cultural processes that support a capacity building approach based on enhancing strengths. Taken together, this comprises a unique and specific approach to health and wellness.

This work aligns well with the recommended health integration approach described in the *Piliriqatigiinniq – Working together for the common good* document (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated et al., nd). In recognizing the present lack of capacity in the existing health system to address dire and chronic health issues, this document recommends supporting community capacity initiatives which emphasize the roles of local healers and caregivers, addressing cultural authenticity and promoting integrated, holistic approaches to service delivery.

These are the strengths of a cultural health approach. It is promising that this document, a collaboration on the part of Nunavut Tunngavik, Health Canada and the Government of Nunavut, recognizes the need for a shift in policy to support a cultural health focus.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is grounded in strengths that have sustained Inuit through the many challenges to their cultural beliefs brought through contact, colonization and policies of forced relocation and assimilation. It is these strengths which directly contributed to the wellbeing of Inuit over thousands of years. A large body of research exists to show that personal health is directly impacted by a sense of self and place in the world. It should be expected that if *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* strengths were applied in policies and health-based practices and programs, health indicators for Inuit would significantly improve. Now that documentation about *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is available, health policies grounded in this knowledge and cultural processes should follow.

We are examining the many social and cultural problems that face us as Inuit today, determining how they affect us and what we need to do to resolve them in ways that reflect our beliefs, traditions and values. We are examining all aspects of our social-cultural environment: justice, education, health, mental health, the economy, children, young people, elders, housing, language, and cultural history. How does it, how should it, how can it all hold together for us? How can we bring about the essential paradigm shift from dependency to responsibility? (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 1998a)

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NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH
CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
3333 UNIVERSITY WAY, PRINCE GEORGE, BC V2N 4Z9

1 250 960 5250
NCCA@UNBC.CA
WWW.NCCA.CA